

Extraordinary Dogs and their Function in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the dogs that populate Old Norse-Icelandic literature and the functions they play in specific genres of texts.

Following a review of previous scholarship on dogs and other animals, Chapter 1 introduces the multiplicity of roles that dogs play in human society as guards, hunters, trackers, herders, fighters, entertainers, companions, and products. Beginning with the hound Garmr of *Völuspá*, Chapter 2 considers a range of dogs that act as mundane and mythological guards and portents across Old Norse-Icelandic literature, focusing especially on the centrality of sound to their representation. The next two chapters deal with legendary material. Chapter 3 demonstrates how dogs contribute to storyworld immersion and structural unity of texts by bestowing a sense of familiarity on their supernatural companions. Exploring various forms of human/dog hybridity and transformation, Chapter 4 argues that the liminality of dogs (a term borrowed from Derrida) makes them ideal narrative and political devices, and tools to debate the definitions of humanity. Moving finally to Christian texts, Chapter 5 examines the ambiguous depiction of dogs in hagiographies employed to craft a holy image of local and foreign saints.

The conclusion brings together and reflects on observations made throughout the thesis, about how the nature of dogs and their close relationship with humans enables them to be used in so many different extraordinary ways. Across each of these chapters, this thesis demonstrates that dogs are deeply embedded within Old Norse-Icelandic literature, both as ordinary animals directly and closely interacting with humans and, at the same time, as extraordinary beings bearing several layers of signification. In doing so, this thesis answers two key interrelated research questions: how are representations of dogs used to construct narratives and how are these narratives used to construct the figure of *Canis familiaris*, the domestic dog?

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Cleasby-Vigfússon	Richard Cleasby, Guðbrandur Vigfússon, and William Craigie, <i>An Icelandic-English Dictionary</i> , 2nd edn (Clarendon Press, 1957)
<i>Eddk</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (eds), <i>Eddukvæði</i> , 2 vols (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2014)
<i>FornNorð</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds), <i>Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda</i> , 3 vols (Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943–44)
<i>HeilSögur</i>	Carl Rikard Unger (ed.), <i>Heilagra Manna Sögur. Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder efter gamle Haandskrifter</i> , 2 vols (Bentzen, 1877)
<i>Heimskr</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), <i>Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla</i> , 3 vols (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1941–51)
<i>LMIR</i>	Agnete Loth (ed.), <i>Late Medieval Icelandic Romances</i> , 5 vols (Munksgaard, 1962–65)
<i>OddsÓl</i>	<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar</i> , in <i>Færeyinga saga. Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar eptir Odd Munk Snorrason</i> , ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2006), pp. 123–362
<i>PostSögur</i>	Carl Rikard Unger (ed.), <i>Postola Sögur: Legendariske fortællinger om apostlernes liv, deres kamp for kristendommens udbredelse, samt deres martyrdød</i> (Bentzen, 1874)
Vulgate	Vercellone, Carolus (ed.), <i>Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis, Sixti V. et Clementis VIII. Pontt. Maxx</i> (Propaganda Fide, 1861)

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INTRODUCTION

Human-Animal Studies and Old Norse-Icelandic Literature

Attempting an overview of the burgeoning field of human-animal studies is, says the posthumanist theorist Cary Wolfe, ‘a bit like herding cats. My recourse to that analogy is mainly to suggest that “the animal,” when you think about it, is everywhere.’¹ Questions of how to define ‘human’ and ‘animal’ and the distinction between the two have been of central importance throughout the history of human thought, especially prominent in religious and philosophical discourse by thinkers from Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas to Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Donna Haraway.² These questions are, moreover, tied to further questions of animal rights and the ethical treatment of animals, taken up by thinkers like René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, and Jeremy Bentham, and in more recent notable works by Peter Singer, Mary Midgley, and Tom Regan.³

The rise of animal rights movements has inspired an increasing focus on the animal in other academic fields, particularly in archaeological and anthropological studies. The 1986 World Archaeological Congress selected ‘Cultural Attitudes to Animals’ as one of its key themes, and was followed by the publication of over 20 volumes on the subject, including four major collections.⁴ The necessary interdisciplinarity of this theme is evidenced by the first

¹ Cary Wolfe, ‘Human, All Too Human: “Animal Studies” and the Humanities’, *PMLA*, 124.2 (2009), pp. 564–75 (p. 564).

² See, for instance, Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, trans. by D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson (Clarendon Press, 1910); Thomas Aquinas, *Questions on the Soul*, ed. and trans. by James Robb (Marquette University Press, 1984); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills (Fordham University Press, 2008); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Bloomsbury, 2013); and Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

³ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd edn (Pimlico, 1995). Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter: A Journey Around the Species Barrier* (Penguin, 1983). Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (University of California Press, 1983). Midgley’s work provides a thorough overview of the positions of earlier philosophers on the subject.

⁴ *What is an Animal?*, ed. by Tim Ingold (Routledge, 1988). *The Walking Larder: Patterns of Domestication, Pastoralism, and Predation*, ed. by Juliet Clutton-Brock (Routledge, 1989). *Animals into Art*, ed. by Howard

volume by Ingold, *What is an Animal?*, in which the titular question is addressed by philosophers and anthropologists, biologists and linguists. With such a proliferation of approaches centred on the animal, it is no wonder that in 2016 Joshua Specht declared, ‘Animal history has arrived.’⁵

In the last couple of decades, the animal has come to the fore in literary studies as well, with a move to produce ‘an animal-centred literary history’ through a range of different theoretical and methodological approaches.⁶ Medieval studies has been at the forefront of this movement, with a number of important publications on animals in medieval literature by Joyce Salisbury, Dorothy Yamamoto, David Salter, Susan Crane, and Karl Steel.⁷ While most of these works focus on the literature of medieval England and Continental Europe, the animal turn has found its way into Old Norse-Icelandic studies with four particularly important works in recent years. In 2009, Lena Rohrbach authored a pioneering study on human-animal relationships in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, reevaluating historical sagas through ‘der tierische Blick’ (‘the animal gaze’).⁸ Soon after, Kristina Jennbert’s *Animals and Humans* approached these relationships in the Iron and Viking Ages through an archaeological and religious lens, integrating some literary sources into her analysis.⁹ In 2017, a doctoral thesis by Timothy

Murphy (Routledge, 1989). *Signifying Animals: Human Meaning in the Natural World*, ed. by Roy Willis (Routledge, 1994).

⁵ Joshua Specht, ‘Animal History after its Triumph: Unexpected Animals, Evolutionary Approaches, and the Animal Lens’, *History Compass*, 14.7 (2016), pp. 326–36 (p. 326).

⁶ Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller, ‘Introduction: Towards an Animal-Centred Literary History’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 1–11.

⁷ Joyce Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edn (Routledge, 2022). Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2000). David Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (Brewer, 2001). Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Ohio State University Press, 2011). Susan Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). Karl Steel, *How Not to Make a Human: Pets, Feral Children, Worms, Sky Burial, Oysters* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

⁸ Lena Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick: Mensch-Tier-Relationen in der Sagaliteratur* (Francke, 2009).

⁹ Kristina Jennbert, *Animals and Humans: Recurrent Symbiosis in Archaeology and Old Norse Religion* (Nordic Academic Press, 2011).

Bourns returned to the literary interconnections of humans and animals in the sagas, organised thematically with a more theoretical approach than Rohrbach.¹⁰ Finally, in 2022, Harriet Evans Tang sought agency in domestic animals through a multidisciplinary analysis of multispecies communities in archaeological sites and textual narratives.¹¹ In addition to these studies on animals, Old Norse-Icelandic scholarship has also seen a growing interest in human relationships with the rest of the natural world, with an early article by Carl Phelpstead on *Eyrbyggja saga*, a monograph on ecology and catastrophe by Christopher Abram, and a new anthology on ecocritical approaches to Old Norse studies.¹² Alongside these larger surveys, there have been numerous studies of varying lengths on individual species, including horses, wolves, bears, lions, cats, serpents, birds, whales, and fish, many interdisciplinary in approach.¹³

¹⁰ Timothy Bourns, 'Between Nature and Culture: Animals and Humans in Old Norse Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2017).

¹¹ Harriet Evans Tang, *Animal-Human Relationships in Medieval Iceland: From Farm-Settlement to Sagas* (Brewer, 2022).

¹² Carl Phelpstead, 'Ecocriticism and *Eyrbyggja saga*', *Leeds Studies in English*, 45 (2014), pp. 1–18. Christopher Abram, *Evergreen Ash: Ecology and Catastrophe in Old Norse Myth and Literature* (University of Virginia Press, 2019). *Ecocriticism and Old Norse Studies: Nature and the Environment in Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. by Reinhard Hennig, Emily Lethbridge, and Michael Schulte (Brepols, 2023).

¹³ See, for instance, Harriet Evans Tang and Keith Ruiter, 'Exploring Animals as Agents and Objects in Early Medieval Iceland and Scandinavia', in *Animals and Animated Objects in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Leszek Gardela and Kamil Kajkowski (Brepols, 2003), pp. 81–101; Ulla Loumand, 'The Horse and its Role in Icelandic Burial Practices, Mythology, and Society', in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, ed. by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere (Nordic Academic Press, 2006), pp. 130–34; Aleksander Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006); Minjie Su, *Werewolves in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: Between the Monster and the Man* (Brepols, 2022); Eduardo Ramos, 'The Dreams of a Bear: Animal Traditions in the Old Norse-Icelandic Context' (unpublished master's dissertation, Háskóli Íslands, 2014); Sebastian Beermann, 'Bear Phalanges and Bearskins in Graves of the First Millennium AD: Cultural Developments and Characteristics of a Unique Burial Custom in Central and Northern Europe', in *Animals and Animated Objects*, ed. by Gardela and Kajkowski, pp. 23–38; Marianne Kalinke, 'The Cowherd and the Saint: The Grateful Lion in Icelandic Folklore and Legend', *Scandinavian Studies*, 66.1 (1994), pp. 1–22; Richard Harris, 'The Lion-Knight Legend in Iceland and the Valþjófsstaðir Door', *Viator*, 1 (1971), pp. 125–45; Brenda Prehal, 'Freyja's Cats: Perspectives on Recent Viking Age Finds in Þegjandadalur North Iceland' (unpublished master's dissertation, Hunter College of the City University of New York, 2011); Anne-Sofie Gräslund, 'Wolves, Serpents, and Birds: Their Symbolic Meaning in Old Norse Belief', in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives*, ed. by Andrén, Jennbert, and Raudvere, pp. 124–29; Eric Ania Haley-Halinski, 'Birds and Humans in the Old Norse World, c. 600-1500 AD' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2021); Klaudia Karpińska, 'Between Life and Death: Waterfowl in Viking Age Funerary Practices', in *Animals and Animated Objects*, ed. by Gardela and Kajkowski, pp. 57–80; Vicki Szabo, *Monstrous Fishes and the Mead-Dark Sea: Whaling in the Medieval North Atlantic* (Brill, 2008); and Gísli Pálsson, 'The Idea of Fish: Land and Sea in the Icelandic World-View', in *Signifying Animals*, ed. by Willis, pp. 114–27.

All four studies by Rohrbach, Jennbert, Bourns, and Evans Tang mention dogs among other animals in their analyses through the different methodological approaches described above. There have been a few further articles on the species, focusing either on individual literary dogs or on the metaphorical use of the animal in insults.¹⁴ Another strand of research particularly prominent in Indo-European and religious studies compares mythological dogs across cultures and their symbolic role in warrior cults and societies.¹⁵ Wietske Prummel, Rúnar Leifsson, and Anne-Sofie Gräslund have also compiled surveys of dogs in the archaeological record, the latter including brief treatments of literary sources as well.¹⁶ Although there is thus a growing engagement with dogs in the literary corpus, there remains a lingering belief in scholarship that, as expressed by Jennbert two decades ago, dogs ‘have a low profile in the texts’.¹⁷ As a result, there are still numerous important facets of the animal that have been left unexplored. This thesis thus builds on the aforementioned work to present the first comprehensive study of dogs in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

¹⁴ On Sámur in *Njáls saga*, see, for instance, Harriet Evans Tang, ‘Reading Animal-Human Relations: Sámur and Gunnarr in *Njáls saga*’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 95.1 (2023), pp. 35–55; and William Sayers, ‘Gunnarr, his Irish Wolfhound Sámur, and the Passing of the Old Heroic Order in *Njáls saga*’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 112 (1997), pp. 43–66. On Vígi in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, see Tommy Kuusela, “‘Ta hjorten, Vigel!’ Nordbornas hundar”, in *Hunden i kult och religion: På gränsen mellan heligt och profant*, ed. by Jenny Berglund and Ingvar Svanberg (Daidalos, 2009), pp. 93–111. On metaphorical usages, see James McMahon, ‘Atli the Dog in *Atlakviða*’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 63.2 (1991), pp. 187–98; and François-Xavier Dillmann, ‘Des païens et des chiens. À propos du composé norrois hund-heidinn’, in *Kontinuitäten und Brüche in der Religionsgeschichte. Festschrift für Anders Hultgård zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 23.12.2001*, ed. by Michael Stausberg (De Gruyter, 2001), pp. 113–35.

¹⁵ This theme is covered in a few essays in *Hunden i kult och religion*, ed. by Berglund and Svanberg. See also Kim McCone, ‘Hund, Wolf und Krieger bei den Indogermanen’, in *Studien zum Indogermanischen Wortschatz*, ed. by Wolfgang Meid (Universität Innsbruck, 1987), pp. 101–54; Bruce Lincoln, ‘The Hellhound’, *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 7 (1979), pp. 273–86; and Manfred Lurker, ‘Der Hund als Symboltier für den Übergang vom Diesseits in das Jenseits’, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 35.2 (1983), pp. 132–44.

¹⁶ Wietske Prummel, ‘Early Medieval Dog Burials Among the Germanic Tribes’, *Helinium*, 32 (1992), pp. 132–94. Rúnar Leifsson, ‘Ritual Animal Killing and Burial Customs in Viking Age Iceland’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Iceland, 2018). Anne-Sofie Gräslund, ‘Dogs in Graves – A Question of Symbolism?’, in *PECUS. Man and Animal in Antiquity*, ed. by Barbro Santillo Frizell (The Swedish Institute, 2004), pp. 167–76, and ‘Garm – den bäste bland hundar. Om hundar under forntiden i Skandinavien’, in *Hunden i kult och religion*, ed. by Berglund and Svanberg, pp. 29–47.

¹⁷ Kristina Jennbert, ‘The Heroized Dead. People, Animals, and Materiality in Scandinavian Death Rituals, AD 200–1000’, in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives*, ed. by Andrén, Jennbert, and Raudvere, pp. 135–40 (p. 138).

Theoretical Foundations

Drawing on the decades of scholarship discussed above, this thesis situates itself within human-animal studies, described by Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh as a field where ‘the research and intellectual focus is on how animals figure and are configured in human worlds, but these worlds are formed through the relationships that humans share with animals.’¹⁸ Unlike animal studies in the natural sciences, human-animal studies distinguishes itself by ‘thinking about animals in relation to human lives’ and ‘thinking about animals as inseparable from human lives’.¹⁹ As Rohrbach writes, ‘die menschliche Gesellschaft maßgeblich durch deren Positionierung zu und Interaktionen mit der Tierwelt konstruiert wird’ (‘human society is largely constructed through its positioning and interactions with the animal world’).²⁰ This is true of all animals but is especially true of the domestic dog, a species, as will be seen, that has been shaped and defined by its proximity to humans and is deeply embedded in human society as represented in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

As Marvin and McHugh explain, human-animal studies ‘requires paying close attention to the lived experiences as well as the imagined nature of’ human-animal relationships.²¹ This combination of imagined and lived experience is perhaps best sought in literature, and McHugh thus advocates for a methodology that she terms a ‘narrative ethology’, which she describes as

ongoing and systematic analysis of how forms of species remain embedded in storytelling processes. [...] Neither simply a new or better means for articulating an emergent sense of nonhuman social agency, narrative ethology suggests an irreducibly relational ethics, a way of valuing social and aesthetic forms together as sustaining conditions of and value for mixed communities.²²

¹⁸ Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh, ‘In It Together: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies’, in *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies*, ed. by Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh (Routledge, 2014), pp. 1–9 (p. 1).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Margo DeMello outlines the differences between human-animal studies and other related fields in *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* (Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 4–6.

²⁰ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 1.

²¹ Marvin and McHugh, ‘In It Together’, p. 2.

²² Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 5.

Narrative ethology is therefore a useful framework for approaching human-animal relationships while allowing for the question of nonhuman agency, the recovery of which is often touted as a central aim of critical animal studies in order to ‘think about animals as actors in the past.’²³ Along these lines, John Simons writes that it is vital ‘to stress the ways in which animals appear in texts, are represented and figured, in and for themselves and not as displaced metaphors for the human’, and that not to do so would be ‘to reproduce in yet another form the exploitation of the non-human by the human.’²⁴ It is undeniable, however, that the displacement of animals as metaphors for humanity is a common feature of literature, as is discussed throughout this thesis and particularly in chapter 4. To ignore this aspect would therefore ‘be to oversimplify, and to miss the special value of animals as literary presences.’²⁵ As McHugh, McKay, and Miller explain, ‘there is great value in both of these interpretive positions, the metaphorical and the material, in navigating between them, and attempting both at the same time.’²⁶ By following a narrative ethology and paying attention

to the ways that human and animal lives interact—attending to the tension, the complex relation, between animals’ lived experience and their literary representation, between their lives and what their lives are made to signify—we can come, through literature, to encounter standpoints and to understand animals’ experiences per se.²⁷

It is this tension between the lives of dogs and what their lives are made to signify that this thesis will attempt to navigate. While remaining grounded in the lived experience of the animal, this thesis ultimately focuses on its literary representations. It explores how poets and authors drew on their knowledge of and experiences with dogs to construct their texts in meaningful ways. Although many of the dogs of Old Norse-Icelandic literature appear to lack agency

²³ Erica Fudge, ‘Rumination 2.0: The History of Animals in the Present Moment’, *Humanimalia*, 13.1 (2022), pp. 254–64 (p. 255). Fudge here outlines the development of the agency model of human-animal studies. The usefulness of this model has been challenged by Joshua Specht (‘Animal History after Its Triumph’, pp. 331–32).

²⁴ John Simons, *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (Palgrave, 2002), p. 6.

²⁵ McHugh, McKay, and Miller, ‘Towards an Animal-Centred Literary History’, p. 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

within their own narratives, nonhuman agency might nevertheless be sought in the way that animals shape the storytelling process. By foregrounding animals in textual analysis, one might, as Rohrbach explains, undertake ‘eine neue Lesart der bekannten Erzählungen [...], die neue Bezugssysteme und Diskurse in diesen Texten aufdeckt und damit zu einem tieferen Verständnis ihrer Bedeutungskonstituierung führt’ (‘a new reading of the well-known stories, that uncovers new reference systems and discourses in these texts and thus leads to a deeper understanding of how their meaning is constituted’).²⁸ Along similar lines, McHugh comments on the insistence of the primatologist Frans de Waal that

narrative has been an integral part of the structures and methods through which ethologists gain credit for breaking up the human monopoly on culture by the end of the twentieth century; in other words, that story becomes a means of negotiating alternatives to nature/culture, animal/human, and related hierarchic dualisms in thought itself.²⁹

A focus on animals reveals that the negotiating power of story did not originate in the twentieth century but is a feature of most literature. This is certainly the case with Old Norse-Icelandic literature where animals in general and dogs in particular are used to challenge dualisms of human and animal, nature and culture, natural and supernatural, Christian and heathen, life and death. As the animals with the closest relationships to humans, dogs are inherently liminal beings, straddling each of the above borders and challenging them in the process. As James Serpell writes, ‘the domestic dog exists precariously in the no-man’s-land between the human and non-human worlds. It is an interstitial creature—neither person nor beast—forever oscillating uncomfortably’.³⁰ This interstitiality of dogs will be a constant strand observed throughout this thesis.

²⁸ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 3.

²⁹ McHugh, *Animal Stories*, p. 214.

³⁰ James Serpell, ‘From Paragon to Pariah: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Attitudes to Dogs’, in *The Domestic Dog: Its Evolution, Behaviour and Interactions with People*, ed. by James Serpell, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 300–15 (p. 312). See also Sebastian Cöllen, ‘Djuret på tröskeln: Hunden i germansk religion’, in *Hunden i kult och religion*, ed. by Berglund and Svanberg, pp. 69–87.

A study of dogs, then, is a study of what the French philosopher Jacques Derrida has termed ‘limitrophy’. This concept is described in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, a posthumously published series of essays based on Derrida’s reflections on the ontology of animals and questions of animal ethics. Derrida writes,

Limitrophy is therefore my subject. Not just because it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Everything I’ll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply.³¹

Derrida’s aim is to (re-)interrogate the boundaries between the *so-called* human and the *so-called* animal, presenting a useful framework with which to investigate the multiplicity of ways in which dogs might challenge the human-animal and other binaries. Ultimately, as geographers Philo and Wilbert have conceded, ‘it seems sensible to allow the ‘what is an animal?’ question to remain partially open.’³² Indeed, one might take inspiration from Donna Haraway’s construction of a hybrid cyborg ‘for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction.’³³ Crucially, however, while Derrida seeks to multiply and complicate these limits, he does not seek to efface them. As Keith Moser explains, he ‘does not fall into the trap of reducing difference to sameness from a scientific perspective’, and this makes his framing of limitrophy all the more useful.³⁴ While Old Norse-Icelandic texts use dogs to repeatedly challenge the human-animal divide, it would be oversimplistic to suggest that a such divide did not exist to them at all, even though such a suggestion might be desirable from a modern critical animal studies perspective.

³¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 29.

³² *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations*, ed. by Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert (Routledge, 2000), p. 8.

³³ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991), p. 150.

³⁴ Keith Moser, ‘Morin’s Ecology of Ideas and Derrida’s Limitrophy: (Re-)Envisioning a Post-Human Ethics’, *Symplokē*, 28 (2020), pp. 297–312 (pp. 299–300).

Derrida is considered especially foundational to the field of human-animal studies for his insistence that although humans are in some ways distinct from other animals, the use of the term ‘animal’ is itself misleading as it in no way constitutes a single homogenous category:

There is no Animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single, invisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of “living creatures,” whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity. [...] I repeat that it is rather a matter of taking into account a multiplicity of heterogenous structures and limits: among nonhumans and separate from nonhumans, there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and wilful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general.³⁵

Derrida’s solution to this problem is an ecolinguistic one, coining the neologism ‘l’animot’ as a punning reference to the French plural ‘animaux’, thus a single category that contains multiplicities within. This thesis will not be adopting Derrida’s neologism and will continue to use the term ‘animal’ to refer to non-human animals but with an acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of species and individuals encapsulated within the term. Evidenced by the multitude of studies on different animals listed earlier, Old Norse-Icelandic literature does treat each species differently and each species has a unique narrative function.

One way to develop a canine-centric narrative ethology is by employing the concept of ‘the refrain’ (‘ritournelle’), as developed by the French scholars Deleuze and Guattari. The refrain is described as ‘any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes’.³⁶ While these matters of expression may be auditory (or ‘sonorous’ as Deleuze and Guattari describe them), they could also take optical, gestural, motor, or other forms. Kirsten Hastrup was reminded of the refrain in her observations about Inughuit communities in Northwest Greenland:

When walking around in Qaanaaq or one of the three small settlements in the region, the voices of dogs are often heard well above the voice of humans. Dogs barking or howling do not simply signpost their own presence but also that of their human companions; dogs are present only as

³⁵ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, pp. 47–48.

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 323.

part of a larger social community. Once, in the field, it struck me how the sounds of dogs invariably revealed human presence and activity also well outside of your vision, and I was reminded of the notion of *the refrain*, suggested by Deleuze and Guattari [...]. Through their concerts, the dogs *make* the territory in that sense.³⁷

Dogs may not be the most prominent animals in medieval Iceland or Scandinavia or the most important characters in saga narratives, but they do consistently form an integral part of the background of texts and territories. Conceptualising them as part of a refrain that shapes the boundaries of human society is thus an effective way of foregrounding the animal in a way that might reveal something of the inner mechanisms of how these texts and territories are made and how they function.

Methodology and Outline

The above theoretical foundations are brought together through a central framing of “extraordinary” dogs in this thesis. This framing is not a statement of biological fact or personal opinion implying that dogs are better or more special than other animals. Rather, it is a critical strategy that allows for an analysis in which dogs are foregrounded in textual narratives and traditions. Due to their familiarity to audiences past and present, dogs very easily fade into the background of texts. To counter this, this thesis employs an approach that pays attention to their extraordinarily close relationships with humans and the unique ways in which they are used to construct the texts they are a part of. In doing so, this approach also allows an acknowledgement of significant distinctions between dogs and other animal species, thus undermining the existence of a simple homogenous ‘animal’ category as Derrida does.

In addition to emphasising the extraordinariness of dogs as a species, this thesis also highlights the extraordinariness of individual dogs within the species. In negotiating the

³⁷ Kirsten Hastrup, ‘Dogs Among Others: Inughuit Companions in Northwest Greenland’, in *Dogs in the North: Stories of Cooperation and Co-Domestication*, ed. by Robert Losey, Robert Wishart, and Jan Peter Laurens Loovers (Routledge, 2018), pp. 212–32 (pp. 214–15).

balance between lived experiences and literary representations of the animal, it illustrates how Old Norse-Icelandic texts very often enhance or deviate from “ordinary” characteristics of dogs for them to serve particular narrative functions. This approach enables a focus on specific dogs and their relationships with specific humans. Recognising the extraordinariness of dogs is therefore the first step towards foregrounding them in literary analyses and towards developing a canine narrative ethology for Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

This thesis broadly organises its analysis by literary genre, which is viewed here, as suggested by Massimiliano Bampi, ‘as means of a communication strategy employing a varying combination of rhetorical and literary instruments to address a certain public.’³⁸ A genre-based approach allows for a systematic examination of the ways in which dogs not only contribute to individual stories but also help construct and support overarching narrative structures. Through this approach, one can like Rohrbach thus examine mentions of animals in literature ‘einerseits auf ihre literarische Ausarbeitung und strukturierende Funktion für den Handlungsverlauf und andererseits auf ihre Bedeutung für die in diesen Erzählungen konstruierten Gesellschaftsbilder’ (‘on the one hand, for the literary elaboration and structuring function for the course of the plot and, on the other hand, for their significance towards the social images constructed in these stories’).³⁹ This flexible organisation by genre also allows more focused insight into how the representations and functions of dogs were shaped by the socio-cultural contexts of the texts they are found in. That being said, it is important to acknowledge the fact that generic categorisations were only imposed on the medieval corpus by post-medieval critics and the boundaries between genres are oftentimes fluid and

³⁸ Massimiliano Bampi, ‘Genre’, in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. by Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (Brewer, 2020), pp. 15–30 (p. 18).

³⁹ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 1.

uncertain.⁴⁰ Carl Phelpstead writes that ‘the sole meaningful criterion for the adoption or retention of a generic label is its usefulness: does the term help us understand the text (or Old Norse literature as a whole) better?’⁴¹ While it is therefore pragmatic to use genre as an organising starting point, this thesis will only adhere to strict generic boundaries insofar as they are useful to understanding specific dog motifs and structures, and each chapter includes comparisons and connections with a range of texts across genres and disciplines. Ultimately, all of the depictions and significations discussed throughout this thesis come together to create the complex figure of the dog in the medieval Icelandic and Scandinavian imagination.

Unlike Rohrbach and Evans Tang who focus their analyses on more ‘historical’ textual genres, this thesis more closely follows Bourns in its choice of mythological, legendary, and miraculous narratives about dogs, for such texts are emblematic of the great potential of dogs to be used cleverly and creatively for different purposes.⁴² Nevertheless, this thesis aims to never lose sight of the real animal behind such creativity. Although its focus is on literary representations of extraordinary dogs, this thesis remains grounded in an interdisciplinary approach, including comparisons to historical, legal, medical, archaeological, and artistic material where relevant. Reference is also made to modern canine evolutionary, biological, behavioural, and cognitive science to understand what medieval Icelanders and Scandinavians knew about real dogs and how they used this knowledge to construct fictional ones. In the end, though, it is the dogs that keep themselves grounded in reality. Rohrbach chose to exclude saga

⁴⁰ These issues are discussed throughout *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, especially in the Introduction (Massimiliano Bampi and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir) and first chapter (Massimiliano Bampi).

⁴¹ Judy Quinn, Marianne Kalinke, Margaret Clunies Ross, Carl Phelpstead, Torfi Tulinius, Gottskálk Jensson, Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, Stephen Mitchell, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, Ralph O'Connor, and Matthew Driscoll, ‘Interrogating Genre in the *Fornaldarsögur*: Round-Table Discussion’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 2 (2006), pp. 275–96 (p. 278). See Bourns, ‘Between Nature and Culture’, pp. 12–14.

⁴² Rohrbach’s *Der tierische Blick* focuses on *konungasögur*, *Íslendingasögur*, *Íslendinga þættir*, *biskupasögur*, and *Sturlunga saga*, and Evans Tang’s *Animal-Human Relationships* on the *Grágás* law-codes, *Landnámabók*, and *Íslendingasögur*.

genres that ‘bieten aufgrund ihrer teilweise stark folkloristischen Prägung und ihrer häufigen Adaption literarischer Muster aus der kontinentaleuropäischen Literatur im Vergleich zur historischen Sagaliteratur nur sehr begrenzt Anknüpfungspunkte an eine historische Wirklichkeit und geben daher nur eingeschränkt Einsichten in die literarische Konstruktion von Vergangenheit und Gegenwart’ (‘due to their sometimes strong folkloric character and their frequent adaptation of literary patterns from continental European literature, compared to historical saga literature, only offer very limited points of contact with historical reality and therefore only provide limited insights into the literary construction of the past and present’).⁴³ It will be seen, however, that most of the dogs in this corpus remain familiar and retain distinct canine characteristics both in their individual portrayals and in their relationships with human (or humanoid) companions, no matter how fantastical the narratives they are part of might be. In demonstrating how dogs are used to construct narratives in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, this thesis also presents an opportunity to reconstruct the historical position of the animal in Iceland and Scandinavia.

Chapter 1 of this thesis begins in precisely this ‘historical’ mode, providing a brief introduction to the ubiquity of dogs in Old Norse-Icelandic literature and the multiplicity of roles that the animals play in human society. It explores how dogs are represented as guards, hunters, trackers, herders, fighters, entertainers, companions, and sources of products in literary, legal, and archaeological sources, roles that are adapted and amplified in the literary corpus in ways explored across the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2 begins with the best-known yet most mysterious of all Norse dogs, the mythological hound Garmr of the poem *Völuspá*. It evaluates the evidence concerning Garmr’s identity as a dog or a wolf, making the case that caninity is central to his role in the poem. This

⁴³ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, pp. 4–5.

is done by comparison first with other guard dogs across Old Norse-Icelandic literature, especially dogs between worlds (in *Gesta Danorum*, *Fjölsvinnsmál*, *Skírnismál*, and *Baldrs draumar*), and next with the numerous dogs that act as portents of some kind. These comparisons, along with a study of the term ‘geyja’ and the centrality of sound to the representation of dogs, are finally used to evaluate the function of Garmr in *Völuspá* and its apocalypse.

Chapter 3 explores dogs who are companions to giants in five texts that deal with legendary material: *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, *Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu*, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, and *Gesta Danorum*. Drawing on theory about storyworlds and *fornaldarsaga* generic techniques, it is demonstrated how all of these dogs, despite their extraordinary capabilities, bestow a sense of familiarity on their supernatural companions and thus allow audiences to better immerse themselves into the saga storyworlds. Moreover, in their ability to navigate between the natural and supernatural worlds, these dogs contribute to the structural unity and cohesion of their texts.

Chapter 4 continues with the *fornaldarsögur*, exploring various forms of human/dog hybridity and transformation in this genre. From the figures of the dog-king and cynocephali to dogs being used as substitutes for humans in various ways, dogs frequently cross and complicate the border between human and animal in a wide range of legendary sagas. This chapter thus demonstrates how the liminality of dogs makes them ideal narrative and political devices, as well as tools to debate the definitions of humanity.

Moving to Christian texts, Chapter 5 begins with an introduction to the ambiguous depiction of dogs in Christian Scripture before considering numerous cases of holy men and women in translated hagiographies demonstrating their sanctity and authority by expelling dangerous dogs and saving innocent wild animals and humans. Many of these tropes are then

picked up in original hagiographies composed in Iceland in the context of struggles between secular and ecclesiastical authorities and attempts to have local saints canonised. It is demonstrated how lives of King Óláfr Haraldsson, King Óláfr Tryggvason, and Bishop Guðmundr Arason all blend foreign hagiographic and local saga generic techniques to craft a holy image, an image that is either helped or hindered by interactions with dogs.

The conclusion brings together and reflects on the observations made throughout the thesis, about how the limnophilic nature of dogs and their close relationship with humans enables them to be used in so many different extraordinary ways. Across each of these chapters, this thesis demonstrates that dogs are deeply embedded within Old Norse-Icelandic literature, both as ordinary animals directly and closely interacting with humans and, at the same time, as extraordinary beings bearing several layers of signification. In doing so, this thesis thus answers two key interrelated research questions: how are representations of dogs used to construct narratives and how are these narratives used to construct the figure of *Canis familiaris*, the domestic dog?

CHAPTER 1. DOGS IN HUMAN SOCIETY

We would say that the refrain is properly musical content, the block of content proper to music. A child comforts itself in the dark or claps its hands or invents a way of walking, adapting it to the cracks in the sidewalk, or chants “Fort-Da” [...]. Tra la la. A woman sings to herself, “I heard her softly singing a tune to herself under her breath.” A bird launches into its refrain. All of music is pervaded by bird songs, in a thousand different ways, from Jannequin to Messiaen. Frr, Frr.¹

Introduction

Throughout most of human history, no animal has had as close a relationship with human beings as *Canis familiaris*, the domestic dog. It is believed that the domestic dog first evolved tens of thousands of years ago when wild wolves began to scavenge close to human settlements and slowly became ‘enfolded into human societies’.² The resulting consensus is that the relationship between dog and human has never been merely one-sided. Juliet Clutton-Brock argues that wolves ‘were thereby habituated and tamed from their own volition’ and Stephen Budiansky states that ‘domesticated animals chose us as much as we chose them’.³ Donna Haraway summarises two important questions at stake in understanding this process of domestication and the human-dog relationship: ‘1) the relation between what counts as nature and what counts as culture in Western discourse and its cousins, and 2) the correlated issue of who and what counts as an actor.’⁴ There is thus an enduring interest in studying dogs from an

¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 299–300.

² Juliet Clutton-Brock, ‘Origins of the Dog: The Archaeological Evidence’, in *The Domestic Dog*, ed. by Serpell, pp. 7–21 (p. 9).

³ Ibid. Stephen Budiansky, *The Covenant of the Wild: Why Animals Chose Domestication* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1992), p. 24. Somewhat more provocatively, Budiansky follows this logic in a later book to describe dogs as ‘social parasites’ (*The Truth About Dogs: An Inquiry into the Ancestry, Social Conventions, Mental Habits, and Moral Fibre of Canis familiaris* (Viking, 2000), p. 7). Interestingly, there is a very similar Sámi belief about the wolf being voluntarily domesticated; see Rolf Kristoffersson, ‘Dräng eller fiende. Samiska föreställningar om hund och varg’, in *Hunden i kult och religion*, ed. by Berglund and Svanberg, pp. 79–91 (pp. 80–82).

⁴ Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, p. 27.

evolutionary and biological perspective, but also equally in the humanities and social sciences.⁵

‘The problem facing everyone who writes about dogs,’ says Susan McHugh, is therefore

that there are thousands, if not millions, of people who have already done so. [...] The difficulty of representing dogs – let alone accounting for how they have been a central part of the human experience – reflects the ongoing struggle of defining what a dog is.’⁶

In Scandinavia, dogs have been part of the human story for several millennia, the oldest known evidence of a dog grave coming from the 9000-year-old Hornborgasjön site in southern Sweden.⁷ Dog remains have since been found in the archaeological record across Viking Age and medieval Iceland and Scandinavia, both deposited on their own and buried alongside humans.⁸ Dogs also appear frequently in iconography such as picture stones, manuscript illustrations, and church paintings, as well as in legal, medical, and other historical texts from this period.

The Old Norse-Icelandic literary corpus is similarly full of dogs living, travelling, fighting, hunting, guarding, eating, and even sleeping alongside human companions. There are at least 134 episodes across Old Norse-Icelandic literature that involve dogs with active roles in the plot, from those that appear only fleetingly like hounds released on a hunt to specific named dogs playing integral roles throughout the course of sagas (Appendix A).⁹ In addition, there are at least 48 indirect references to dogs, which includes dogs mentioned by characters in the past or future, dogs mentioned in other parts of the world, and dogs appearing in dreams

⁵ Some useful starting-points for overviews of this research include Susan McHugh’s *Dog* (Reaktion Books, 2004); Haraway’s *Companion Species Manifesto*; and edited collections by James Serpell (*The Domestic Dog*), and Douglas Brewer, Terence Clark, and Adrian Phillips (*Dogs in Antiquity: Anubis to Cerberus, The Origins of the Domestic Dog* (Aris & Phillips, 2001)).

⁶ McHugh, *Dog*, p. 7.

⁷ A. Arnesson-Westerdahl, ‘Djuren vid Hornborgasjön för 9000 år sedan’, *Sveriges natur*, 76.3 (1985), pp. 40–43. For a full review of dogs in prehistory, see Suvi Viranta and Kristiina Mannermaa, ‘Prehistory of Dogs in Fennoscandia: A Review’, in *Dogs in the North*, ed. by Losey, Wishart, and Loovers, pp. 233–50.

⁸ Prummel, ‘Early Medieval Dog Burials’; Rúnar Leifsson, ‘Ritual Animal Killing’.

⁹ This and subsequent figures exclude *rimur* (except in the case of kennings), Latin texts like the *Historia Norwegiae* and *Gesta Danorum*, legal texts, medical texts, and documents, all of which contain many more dogs in interesting ways but are more difficult to quantitatively analyse. The figures additionally exclude repetitions of the same dog stories or references across different texts.

and prophecies (Appendix B). At least 16 episodes include canine hybrids, transformations between dogs and other beings, or demons in the form of dogs (Appendix C). Finally, there are at least 206 instances of dogs used in similes, metaphors, or insults, plus a further 33 uses of dogs in kennings (Appendices D and E).

The most common lexeme used to refer to a dog across both prose and poetry is ‘hundr’, followed by ‘rakki’, both terms often used to describe the same animal.¹⁰ ‘Garmr’, as will be discussed in the next chapter, is used mostly poetically both to describe a specific mythological canine and dogs in general.¹¹ The term ‘hvelpr’ is quite commonly used to describe dogs, usually young ones, but also the young of other species including humans.¹² In addition to these, the terms ‘bikkja’, ‘grey’, and ‘tík’ are used for females of the species, sometimes in conjunction with male terms (for instance ‘hundtík’ or ‘bikkjuhundr’) and with no clear semantic distinctions between them.¹³

A wider range of compound words also exists, some words like ‘smáhundr’ (literally ‘small-dog’) and ‘mjóhundr’ (literally ‘slender-dog’) possibly being references to the appearance of the animal.¹⁴ This raises the question of dog breeds: were distinctions made at the time between different ‘breeds’ in the modern sense of the word? It is certainly the case that different types of dogs did exist at the time, as archaeological evidence often shows great

¹⁰ See entries ‘hundr’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o37907>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; and ‘rakki’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o63432>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

¹¹ See entry ‘garmr’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o26089>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

¹² See entry ‘hvelpr’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o38466>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

¹³ See entries ‘bikkja’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o8302>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; ‘grey’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o28691>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; and ‘tík’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o79583>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

¹⁴ See entries ‘smá·hundr’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o72982>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; and ‘mjó·hundr’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o54870>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

variation in size, stature, and other morphological features. Some modern dog breeds might be traced back to antiquity. Kristina Jennbert lists the following examples:

In Scandinavia the Mesolithic dogs resemble Norwegian elkhounds but with stronger jaws. In the Neolithic there were also smaller sizes. As long ago as the Early Roman Iron Age, in the second century, there were greyhounds in Scandinavia. [...] During the late Iron Age there were also larger dogs of sheepdog type and occasional greyhounds, known from finds in graves.¹⁵

Christopher Nichols, however, warns that it is ‘not appropriate in an archaeological context to discuss ‘breeds’, as most familiar breeds did not exist until the modern era’.¹⁶ While Nichols identifies four ‘morphotypes’ that have existed in different forms since antiquity (spitzes, sight hounds, molossers/mastiffs, and lap dogs), even these may not be distinguished with any certainty in the archaeological record.¹⁷

The thirteenth-century Norwegian law-code, *Frostaþingslög*, acknowledges not just a distinction, but also a hierarchy, among different kinds of dogs in the following list of compensations to be paid if one is killed:

Ef maðr drepr cofanracka fyrir manni. gialldi .xij. aura. en þat er cofan ef maðr tecr hendi finni um hálsinn frá at saman taci fingrinn. En .vj. aurar fyrir mióhund. En fyrir veiðihund hálf a mörc. oc frá fyrir nautahund ef hann er inn bundinn at hinu öflta nauti oc út lenstr at hinu fyrsta nauti. oc frá fcal at grindum hit fömu. En fyrir húsvörd eyri ef drepinn verdr.¹⁸

If a man kills [another] man’s *kofanrakki*, [he shall] pay twelve aurar. And it is a *kofan[rakki]* if a man puts his hand around the neck such that the fingers touch. And six aurar for a *mjóhundr*. And for a hunting-dog half a mark. And so for a cattle-dog if it is bound inside with the last cattle and let outside with the first cattle, and so shall it be the same at sheepfolds. And for a house-guard one aura if it is killed.

A very similar list exists in the early-thirteenth-century Danish law of Scania.¹⁹ Although ‘kofanrakki’ is explicitly defined by its size, and it and ‘mjóhundr’ could possibly refer to specific breeds (both examined more below), the rest of the list suggests that the more

¹⁵ Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, p. 65.

¹⁶ Christopher Nichols, ‘Domestic Dog Skeletons at Valsgårde Cemetery, Uppland, Sweden: Quantification and Morphological Reconstruction’, *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, 36 (2021), pp. 1–9 (p. 3).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Norges Gamle Love indtil 1387*, ed. by R. Keyser and P. A. Munch, 3 vols (Grøndahl, 1846), I, pp. 234–35. It has been suggested that ‘grindum’ could instead be ‘greyjum’.

¹⁹ *Danmarks Gamle Love paa Nutidsdansk*, ed. by Erik Kroman and Stig Iuul, 3 vols (Gads, 1945–48), I, p. 66.

significant distinction between different dogs was according to their function. Like ‘veiðihundr’ (‘hunting-dog’), there are numerous other Old Norse-Icelandic compounds that stress function, such as ‘varðhundr’ (‘guard-dog’), ‘hjarðhundr’ (‘herding-dog’), and ‘sporhundr’ (‘tracking-dog’).²⁰ When considering dogs in the Old Norse-Icelandic literary corpus, then, it is important to understand the range of functions they may have performed in human society. This chapter provides an overview of the most common and important roles played by dogs, as can be observed in the literary corpus and supported by archaeological and legal sources: guarding, hunting, tracking, herding, fighting, torture, entertainment, companionship, and providing products. The list presented in this chapter may not include every possible use of dogs by humans, but represents an introduction to the most foundational canine roles that form the basis of the more extraordinary narratives observed across the rest of this thesis.

Guarding

Dogs have likely been used by humans for protection and guarding purposes since they were first domesticated. Randall Lockwood describes the possibility ‘that one of the earliest uses of tamed or domesticated wolves was to alert humans to the presence of human or animal intruders and to repel or attack such threats.’²¹ Archaeological evidence from as early as 10,000 BC suggests dogs potentially guarding human settlements in Russia, while animal figures on rock carvings from 2000–1000 BC have been interpreted as dogs guarding homes.²² In fact, it is

²⁰ See entries ‘varð·hundr’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o84413>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; ‘hjarð·hundr’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o34738>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; and ‘spor·hundr’, *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, n.d. <<https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o74577>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

²¹ Randall Lockwood, ‘Ethology, Ecology and Epidemiology of Canine Aggression’, in *The Domestic Dog*, ed. by Serpell, pp. 160–81 (p. 164).

²² Ádam Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 103 and 106.

often suggested that the dog's protective potential might have been one original impetus for domestication itself and has been amplified over the centuries. Domestication has been described as 'a two-stage process involving, first, genetic adaptations to living in the domestic environment and, second, socialization of individuals in each generation.'²³ In order to produce more effective guard and other working dogs, humans have selectively bred their dogs, selecting for more aggressive traits and developing these traits within the socialisation process. This has caused certain breeds of dogs, most notably today the German Shepherd, to be especially aggressive towards strangers and therefore particularly good guards.²⁴

While the *Frostapingslög* briefly lists guarding as a potential dog function in Norway, this function is much more prominent in *Grágás*, the 'Grey Goose' collection of laws from the Icelandic Commonwealth. *Grágás* includes a comprehensive section 'um hundz bit' ('on a dog's bite'), which specifies the responsibilities of dog owners and the penalties they face if their animals cause harm to others, mentioning dogs tied up 'firir bvre manz eða búð eða stío. til varðar' ('in front of a man's pantry or booth or pen, as guards').²⁵ The extraordinary detail of this section (discussed more in the next chapter) implies that guard dogs must have been quite common in medieval Iceland, common enough that the law-codes needed to cover all possible eventualities regarding them. This section also helpfully describes what a dog might have been used to guard. 'Búr' ('pantry or storehouse') refers to the guarding of food, suggesting perhaps that food was one of the most valuable possessions in a house and most liable to theft, and a dog's guarding role here might thus be metonymically extended to the rest of the house. 'Búð' could generally mean a dwelling-place of some kind, but in this context might more specifically

²³ Kathryn Lord, Richard Schneider, and Raymond Coppinger, 'Evolution of Working Dogs', in *The Domestic Dog*, ed. by Serpell, pp. 42–66 (p. 55).

²⁴ For a summary of studies on stranger-directed aggression, see Hannah Flint, 'Understanding Fear and Stranger-Directed Aggression in Companion Dogs' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Guelph, 2017), p. 67.

²⁵ *Grágás: Islændernes Lovbog i Fristatens Tid, udgivet efter det kongelige Bibliotheks Haandskrift*, ed. by Vilhjálmur Finsen, 2 vols (Brødrene Berlings Bogtrykkeri, 1852), II, p. 187.

refer to the temporary dwellings at the Icelandic parliament (þing). As opposed to guarding a storehouse where the focus is food, the focus here is thus guarding an individual. ‘Stía’, finally, refers to a pen of some kind and thus to the guarding of livestock, one of the most common roles for domesticated dogs throughout history, especially in pastoral societies.²⁶

All three functions of guarding houses, people, and livestock are in evidence throughout Old Norse-Icelandic literature, including three occurrences of the specific compound ‘varðhundr’, ‘guard dog’. The *varðhundar* in question are the Greek/Roman hellhound Cerberus in *Trójumanna saga*, dogs belonging to King Óláfr Tryggvason who are killed by a mysterious undead king in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, and the companion of a man named Hafr mentioned in both *Sturlunga saga* and *Guðmundar saga biskups*.²⁷ Although it doesn’t use the term ‘varðhundr’, the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Ljósvetninga saga* does describe a dog actively raising an alarm. An ambush on Þorkell at his home in the middle of the night is marked by ‘hundgá’ (‘the barking of a dog’) and the sound of men riding to the farm.²⁸ A similar alarm is raised by a dog named Flóki in the early-fourteenth-century legendary *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, allowing his royal companion to take precautions and escape a nocturnal attack.²⁹

The consequences of dogs not raising an alarm might meanwhile be seen in the poem *Atlakviða*, where the protagonist Guðrún kills her husband Atli and sets fire to his hall but first wakes the servants and ‘hvelpa leysti’ (‘looses the dogs’).³⁰ Guðrún’s reasons for waking the servants and loosing the dogs are unclear. Ursula Dronke reads them as ‘brief statements of

²⁶ Lord, Schneider, and Coppinger, ‘Evolution of Working Dogs’, pp. 43–46.

²⁷ *Trójumanna saga*, ed. by Jonna Louis-Jensen (Munksgaard, 1963), p. 2. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, in *Harðar saga*, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1991), pp. 99–172 (p. 161). *Sturlunga saga eða Íslendinga sagan mikla*, ed. by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 3 vols (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2021), II, p. 137. *Biskupa sögur. Gefnar út af hinu Íslenska Bókmentafélagi*, ed. by Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, 2 vols (Møller, 1858–78), I, p. 523.

²⁸ *Ljósvetninga saga*, in *Ljósvetninga saga með þáttum. Reykdæla saga ok Víga-Skútu. Hreiðars þáttur*, ed. by Björn Sigfússon (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1940), pp. 3–106 (p. 51).

²⁹ *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, in *FornNorð*, II, pp. 159–82 (p. 166).

³⁰ *Atlakviða* 43 (*Eddk*, II, p. 381).

Guðrún's mercies interwoven with her acts of murder.'³¹ Finnur Magnússon, on the other hand, suggests a more cynical reading, that Guðrún must free the dogs 'ne suo latratu indicium rei' ('lest their barking give a signal of the matter').³² The argument here is that Guðrún is ensuring that the dogs would not alert the people of the hall to the fire until it is too late for them to have any hope of escape, a reasonable reading given the wider context of dogs alerting their households to attacks.

Two of the best examples of guard dogs are in the thirteenth-century *Íslendingasaga*, *Njáls saga*, in which a dog is first said to guard the storage shed of a man named Otkell. As part of the saga's escalating cycle of violence and vengeance, Hallgerðr wishes to steal butter and cheese from Otkell's store. She threatens the thrall Melkólfr into carrying out the theft and burning down the storehouse, which he is able to do since '[h]undrinn gó eigi at honum ok kenndi hann og hljóp í móti honum og lét vel við hann' ('the dog did not bark at him and recognised him and ran up to him and treated him well').³³ This narrative reveals two significant facts about dogs in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: that they were indeed used to guard storehouses as *Grágás* suggested, and that the reason for their use was an understanding that they would be able to differentiate between familiar faces and strangers.

The latter fact is emphasised in the story of the second, more prominent dog of *Njáls saga*: Sámr. Sámr is companion to Gunnarr, one of the saga's principal characters, and is so protective of his human that Gunnarr's enemies dare not assail him at home 'því at þat má sér engi ætla, meðan hundrinn lifir' (because nobody would dare to do so while the dog lives').³⁴ When devising a plan to kill Gunnarr, then, his enemies must threaten Gunnarr's neighbour

³¹ *The Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. by Ursula Dronke, 3 vols (Oxford University Press, 1969–2011), I, p. 72.

³² *Edda Sæmundar hinns fróða. Edda rhythmica sei antiquior, vulgo Sæmundina dicta*, ed. by Finnur Magnússon, 3 vols (Legati Arna-Magnæni et Librariæ Gyldendaliansæ, 1787–1828), II, p. 407.

³³ *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1954), p. 123.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

Þorkell into helping them distract the dog, knowing that Sámr will recognise Þorkell as a familiar face. Their plan appears to work as Þorkell is able to lure Sámr away from Gunnarr's house, until 'sér hundrinn, at þar eru menn fyrir, og hleypr á hann Þorkell upp ok grípr í nárann' ('the dog sees that there are men ahead, and he leaps up at Þorkell and tears him in the belly').³⁵ Once again, the plan is contingent on the fact that the dog would not suspect a familiar face, but goes awry when Sámr notices and recognises the hostile strangers. Modern canine cognitive and behavioural sciences have indeed proven dogs to be very perceptive animals, able to recognise their owners and discriminate between humans by their scent, voices, faces, and even photographs.³⁶

Sámr's sudden aggression is not simply a response to recognising strangers, however. There is also a sense of him discerning their ill intentions. This advanced intuition goes back to when Sámr was first gifted to Gunnarr by the chieftain Óláfr pái, who said of the dog:

[H]ann hefir manns vit; hann mun ok geyja at hverjum manni, þeim er hann veit, at óvinr þinn er, en aldri at vinum þínum; sér hann ok á hverjum manni, hvárt honum er til þín vel eða illa; hann mun ok lífit á leggja at vera þér trúr.³⁷

He has the intelligence of a man; he shall also bark at any man, whom he knows is your enemy, but never at your friends; he also perceives in every man, whether he wishes you well or ill; he shall also lay down his life to be true to you.

This description of Sámr is somewhat reminiscent of the dog Karlsnautr of *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* (discussed in chapter 3), who is said to know how to avoid the dwellings of evil-

³⁵ Ibid., p. 186.

³⁶ On discriminating odours, see Bonnie Beaver, *Canine Behavior: Insights and Answers* (Elsevier, 2009), pp. 54–56; Peter Hopper, 'The Discrimination of Human Odour by the Dog', *Perception*, 17.4 (1988), pp. 549–54; and G. A. A. Schoon, 'Scent Identification Lineups by Dogs (*Canis familiaris*): Experimental Design and Forensic Application', *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 49 (1996), pp. 257–67. On voices, see Ikuma Adachi, Hiroko Kuwahata, and Kazuo Fujita, 'Dogs Recall their Owner's Face upon Hearing the Owner's Voice', *Animal Cognition*, 10 (2007), pp. 17–21. On faces, see Paolo Mongillo, Anna Scandurra, Robin Kramer, and Lieta Marinelli, 'Recognition of Human Faces by Dogs (*Canis familiaris*) Requires Visibility of Head Contour', *Animal Cognition*, 20 (2017), pp. 881–90; and Ludwig Huber, Anaïs Racca, Billy Scaf, Zsófia Virányi, and Friederike Range, 'Discrimination of Familiar Human Faces in Dogs (*Canis familiaris*)', *Learning and Motivation*, 44 (2013), pp. 258–69. On photographs, see Carla Jade Eatherington, Paolo Mongillo, Miina Lõoke, and Lieta Marinelli, 'Dogs (*Canis familiaris*) Recognise our Faces in Photographs: Implications for Existing and Future Research', *Animal Cognition*, 23 (2020), pp. 711–19.

³⁷ *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 173.

doers.³⁸ While real dogs may not have quite the same mind-reading capabilities as Óláfr pái describes, their long experience of socialisation with humans means that dogs are extremely skilled at reading human gestures and social cues and even on some levels sensing human emotions.³⁹ Moreover, their extraordinary sensory abilities, especially olfactory and auditory, mean that dogs are able to perceive certain phenomena that humans are unable to, to the extent that there are people even today who believe in some kind of canine telepathy or ‘canine extrasensory perception’.⁴⁰ Whatever the reason, remarkable intuitive abilities become a feature of many of the dogs of Old Norse-Icelandic literature. From mythological hounds guarding giant houses in chapter 2 to cynocephali watching over thresholds in chapter 4, this is thus a function that will be observed at play in different forms throughout this thesis.

Hunting

Alongside their guarding potential, another likely incentive for the domestication of dogs may have been their use in procuring food through hunting. Pierotti and Fogg suggest that not only did collaboration with canines make early humans more effective hunters, but the animals may have ‘directly taught or showed humans how to hunt, creating reciprocal relationships in which each species provided food for the other or shared food.’⁴¹ Hunting with dogs is thought to

³⁸ *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, in *FornNorrð*, III, pp. 285–319 (p. 306).

³⁹ On dogs reading and understanding human gestures, see Friederike Range and Zsófia Virányi, ‘Social Cognition and Emotions Underlying Dog Behaviour’, in *The Domestic Dog*, ed. by Serpell, pp. 182–209 (pp. 190–96); and Krisztina Soproni, Ádám Miklósi, József Topál, and Vilmos Csányi, ‘Comprehension of Human Communicative Signs in Pet Dogs (*Canis familiaris*)’, *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 115.2 (2001), pp. 122–26. On dogs recognising human emotions, see Natalia Albuquerque, Kun Guo, Anna Wilkinson, Carine Savalli, Emma Otta, and Daniel Mills, ‘Dogs Recognize Dog and Human Emotions’, *Biology Letters*, 12.1 (2016), pp. 1–5; Ayako Morisaki, Akiko Takaoka, and Kazuo Fujita, ‘Are Dogs Sensitive to the Emotional State of Humans?’, *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 4.2 (2009), p. 49; and Corsin Müller, Kira Schmitt, Anjuli Barber, and Ludwig Huber, ‘Dogs Can Discriminate Emotional Expressions of Human Faces’, *Current Biology*, 25.5 (2015), pp. 601–05.

⁴⁰ See Stanley Coren, *How Dogs Think: Understanding the Canine Mind* (Free Press, 2004), pp. 112–25; and Deborah Erickson, ‘A Mixed Methods Exploratory Study of Alleged Telepathic Interspecies Communication with Domestic Dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*)’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Saybrook University, 2014).

⁴¹ Raymond Pierotti and Brandy Fogg, *The First Domestication: How Wolves and Humans Coevolved* (Yale University Press, 2017), p. 21. See also Sophia Menache, ‘Hunting and Attachment to Dogs in the Pre-Modern

have been well-established in northern Europe as early as 1000 BC.⁴² While hunting does still exist as a means of subsistence among many groups of people today, medieval Europe saw a gradual shift to its perception as a form of sport or entertainment for the upper classes. Dogs thus appear most frequently in the literature of medieval Europe in the hunting parties of kings and other members of the nobility to the extent that they may be read, in the words of Joel Savishinsky as ‘a kind of living heraldry, an animated, almost totemic symbol of class and group identity.’⁴³ This is a prime example of dogs being important both for a real practical function and an imagined symbolic one, each influencing the other. This link between hunting and nobility is very much evident in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, particularly in the Eddic poem *Rígsþula* where hunting is described as the pastime of the highest of three social classes. Jarl, the representative child of that class, thus learns to ‘hundum verpa’ (‘loose hounds’) as part of his aristocratic education.⁴⁴

Given the prominence of hunting in aristocratic circles of medieval Europe, it is not surprising that the largest number of and most detailed references to hunting dogs are in the corpus of *riddarasögur* translated from Continental texts. *Piðreks saga af Bern* in particular describes six aristocratic individuals or groups who hunt with dogs, not counting those in *Írons þáttur jarls*, an episode where the conflict between an earl and a duke is centred around a hunting dispute. The two noblemen hunt all kinds of animals, including harts, fawns, and bison, the latter being the quarry in an extraordinarily long and detailed hunting scene.⁴⁵ Another scene

Period’, in *Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the Relationships between People and Pets*, ed. by Anthony Podberscek, Elizabeth Paul, and James Serpell (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 42–60.

⁴² Ulrich Schmölche, ‘The Evidence for Hunting Dogs from Mesolithic Times up to the Viking Age from a Zoological Point of View – A survey’, in *Hunting in Northern Europe until 1500AD: Old Traditions and Regional Developments, Continental Sources and Continental Influences*, ed. by Oliver Grimm and Ulrich Schmölche (Wachholtz Verlag, 2013), pp. 175–84 (p. 180).

⁴³ Joel Savishinsky, ‘Pet Ideas: The Domestication of Animals, Human Behavior, and Human Emotions’, in *New Perspectives on Our Lives with Companion Animals*, ed. by Aaron Katcher and Alan Beck (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), pp. 112–31 (p. 118).

⁴⁴ *Rígsþula* 33 (*Eddk*, I, p. 455). ‘loose hounds’. *Eddk* alternatively suggests ‘etja hundum’ (‘feed hounds’).

⁴⁵ *Piðreks saga af Bern*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1951), pp. 352–56.

with nearly the same level of detail is a failed attempt by a king and his hounds to capture a large stag in *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*.⁴⁶ *Tristrams saga* contains six hunting scenes with dogs, including one where the protagonist Tristram gains a king's favour by teaching his men how to properly butcher a stag and reward hunting dogs with its entrails.⁴⁷ The level of detail in these texts is evidence of the significance of hunting as an aristocratic practice in medieval Europe, and provides useful insight into what this practice may have looked like in the North.

Interestingly, hunting hounds are much less common in original *riddarasögur* composed in Iceland, with only two passing mentions in *Sigurðar saga þögla* and *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*.⁴⁸ There are a few hunting scenes in other indigenous romances, including a long scene with harts, bears, red-deer, and bison in *Adonias saga*, but without any hounds.⁴⁹ It is possible that medieval Icelandic authors understood the narrative importance of hunting scenes in the *riddarasaga* genre, but may not have been fully confident describing the minutiae of the practice since Iceland itself had no large prey to hunt (and indeed no royalty on the island). That being said, there are a few mentions of hunting dogs in the *fornaldarsaga* genre. Both *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* and *Völsunga saga* briefly mention their noble protagonists going out hunting with hawks and hounds.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, *Egils saga einhenda*, *Gautreks saga*, and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* all contain slightly longer narratives about using dogs to hunt prey, a hare in the first and stags in the other two.⁵¹ Curiously, all three attempts to catch the animals are unsuccessful and, in the first two texts, end with the protagonists lost and alone. These

⁴⁶ *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, ed. and trans. by Peter Jorgensen, in *Norse Romance*, vol. I, *The Tristan Legend*, ed. by Marianne Kalinke (Brewer, 1999), pp. 23–226 (pp. 160–62).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ *Sigurðar saga þögla*, in *LMIR*, II, pp. 95–259 (p. 113). *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, in *LMIR*, IV, pp. 4–136 (p. 5).

⁴⁹ *Adonias saga*, in *LMIR*, III, pp. 67–230 (pp. 145–48).

⁵⁰ *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, in *FornNorð*, I, pp. 191–242 (p. 212). *Völsunga saga*, in *FornNorð*, I, pp. 3–91 (p. 48).

⁵¹ *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, in *FornNorð*, III, pp. 155–89 (p. 163). *Gautreks saga*, in *FornNorð*, III, pp. 1–41 (p. 4). *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, in *FornNorð*, II, pp. 357–461 (p. 388).

fornaldarsögur, then, appear to use the hunt as a somewhat formulaic narrative device to lead characters into danger or wherever the plot needs them to be. It is unclear, though, whether this is borrowed from other genres of texts like Continental romances or a reflection of real hunting practices in Scandinavia.

Either interpretation seems possible from *Konungs Skuggsjá*, a Norwegian didactic text from around 1250, where a son asks his father whether a king should spend the night thinking about the needs of his kingdom so that

hann mæghe frialsligri liva þa um daginn æpter mæð þeiri siðvæniú sæm ec spyr at konongar hafa nu íflæstum staðum. annat hvart at riða mæð haucum eða fara avæiðar mæð hunndum eða æina hværia þa skemtan er ec spyr at íflæstum staðum er nu tið um kononga at hæfi. eða synizt yðr at hann ætti aðra skyldar syslo. æf hann gerðe æpter því sæm skyllde. oc taki þeir þæssa skemtan meirr firi gamans sakar hælldr en þat hœfði nafni þæirra.⁵²

he might more freely spend the next day according to that custom that I hear kings have now in most places, either riding with hawks or going hunting with dogs or other forms of entertainment that I hear is now common for kings to have in most places, or do you think that another occupation would be more dutiful, if he did as he should, and that they seek this entertainment more for amusement's sake than because it raises their name?

This passage demonstrates an acknowledgement of the prevalence of hunting as a pastime for kings, but it is once again unclear whether the phrase ‘most places’ includes other parts of Norway. The father responds that while the primary responsibility of a king is the needs of his people, hunting is a way to ensure that ‘hann mæge hallda heilsu sinni eða letleik til vapna oc allra hærfara’ (‘he might preserve his health or agility with weapons and all warfare’).⁵³ This response may be read as a justification for royal hunting practices in Norway, practices that are briefly mentioned in *Hrafns þáttur Guðrúnarsonar* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.⁵⁴ The most detailed *konungasaga* hunting scene, meanwhile, is in several manuscript redactions of *Óláfs saga helga* where the Swedish King Óláfr’s hawks kill partridges in the sky that are

⁵² *Konungs Skuggsjá*, ed. by Ludvig Holm-Olsen (Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institut, 1983), p. 97.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Hrafns þáttur Guðrúnarsonar*, in *Vatnsdæla saga. Hallfreðar saga. Kormáks saga. Hrómundar þáttur halta. Hrafns þáttur Guðrúnarsonar*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Hið Íslensk Fornritafélag, 1939), pp. 317–33 (p. 327). *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson, Sverrir Jakobsson, and Tor Ulset, 2 vols (Hið Íslensk Fornritafélag, 2013), II, p. 182.

collected by dogs on the ground, again providing useful insight into the symbiotic mechanics of hunting practice.⁵⁵

While most of these examples do equate hunting with the higher classes, this is not always the case. *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* suggests that a dog helped its thieving hut-dweller companion catch a bear and fowl, the skaldic poem *Skaufhala bálkr* by a man named Svartr describes a fox being chased by a shepherd and his dog, and the Latin *Historia Norwegiae* relates how Sámi hunters use hounds to chase beavers.⁵⁶ The use of hunting dogs is furthermore embedded in the Old Norse-Icelandic language, with numerous metaphors including dogs related to this particular function (see Appendix D). Hunting dogs may also be found in the archaeological record of Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia, with finds including spiked collars at Vendel (c. 750AD) and Valsgarde (10th/11th century) that were likely used to protect dog necks from the bites of wild animals.⁵⁷ In any case, it will be seen at numerous points throughout this thesis how the opposition between dogs and wild animals established by the hunt is adapted by texts in more extraordinary narratives.

Tracking

The usefulness of dogs in hunting comes not just from their agility in chasing animals or their ferocity in fighting them, but also importantly from their ability to track the animals in the first place, a result of their heightened sense of smell (discussed in greater detail in the next chapter).

Færeyinga saga thus describes a man sniffing ‘sem hann rekði spor sem hundar’ (‘as if he were

⁵⁵ Óláfs saga helga, in *Heimskr*, II, pp. 1–451 (p. 131).

⁵⁶ *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, in *FornNorð*, II, pp. 185–246 (p. 218). *Svartr á Hofstöðum, Skaufhala bálkr*, ed. by Kari Ellen Gade, in *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 8 (Brepols, 2017), pp. 951–85 (pp. 969–73). *Historia Norwegie*, ed. by Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, trans. by Peter Fischer (Museum Tusculanum Press, 2003), p. 60.

⁵⁷ Gräslund, ‘Dogs in Graves’, p. 172. Il Öhman, ‘The Merovingian Dogs from the Boat-Graves at Vendel’, in *Vendel Period: Transactions of the Boat-Grave Symposium in Stockholm*, ed. by Jan Peder Lamm and Hans-Åke Nordström (Statens Historiska Museum, 1983), pp. 167–82 (pp. 173–74).

tracing tracks like dogs’) and *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* mentions two Sámi men who can ‘rekja spor sem hundar’ (‘trace tracks like dogs’).⁵⁸ The lay of *Guiamar* in the chivalric *Strengleikar* collection mentions a hunt with ‘sporrakka dyra ok villi svina’ (‘tracking-dogs for animals and wild boars’), and *Tristrams saga* relates a hunting scene where a stag is followed by ‘mikill hunda flokk, sporrakka ok mjóhunda’ (‘a large pack of dogs, tracking-dogs and mjóhundar’).⁵⁹ Although it has admittedly been translated from another language, *Tristrams saga* is significant here in making a distinction between two types of hounds, *sporrakkar* that will likely track the scent of an animal and *mjóhundar* (literally ‘slender-dogs’, often translated as greyhounds) that will likely chase after it. The aforementioned dog chasing a fox in *Skaufhala bálkr* is similarly interesting, as the fox describes it in the following manner:

Rietti hann trýni, rak upp sjónir,
og kendi þegar, hvar eg keifaða.⁶⁰

He stretched out his snout, turned up his eyes,
and immediately knew where I was struggling along.

This is a very realistic account of a scent hound picking up the trail of an animal or, potentially, of a pointer dog directing his human companion, with the order of snout, eyes, and discovery. In *konungasögur*, the scenting abilities of *sporhundar* are very often used to track not only animals but also fleeing humans, and this is the case to varying degrees of success in *Magnúss saga*, *Óláfs saga helga*, and *Magnússona saga*, as well as in the post-medieval tale of the Icelandic bishop Jón Arason.⁶¹ In *Tristrams saga*, the protagonist’s marvellous dog is also said

⁵⁸ *Færeyinga saga*, in *Færeyinga saga. Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar eptir Odd Munk Snorrason*, ed. by Ólafr Halldórsson (Hið Íslenszka Fornritafélag, 2006), pp. 1–121 (p. 83). *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, in *Heimskr*, I, pp. 94–149 (p. 135).

⁵⁹ *Strengleikar: An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-one Old French Lais, Edited from the Manuscript Uppsala De la Gardie 4-7 – AM 666 b, 4^o*, ed. and trans. by Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane (Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1979), p. 14. ‘Dyr’ may refer more specifically to deer here. *Tristrams saga*, p. 58.

⁶⁰ *Skaufhala bálkr*, p. 970.

⁶¹ *Magnúss saga skemmri*, in *Orkneyinga saga. Legenda de Sancto Magno. Magnúss saga skemmri. Magnúss saga lengri. Helga þátr ok Úlfs*, ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson (Hið Íslenszka Fornritafélag, 1965), pp. 309–32 (p. 314). *Óláfs saga helga*, pp. 257–58. *Magnússona saga*, in *Heimskr*, III, pp. 238–77 (pp. 273–75). *Biskupa sögur*, II, p. 355. On the phases of dogs tracking humans, see Beaver, *Canine Behavior*, p. 56.

to be ‘svá sporvís, at hann spurði upp allar þjóðgötur ok farvega’ (‘so clever at tracking, that he tracked down all high roads and paths’), a function encountered in other texts discussed in chapter 3.⁶²

Herding

In the Icelandic *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu*, the abilities of *sporhundar* are put to use to track not humans or prey, but stolen oxen.⁶³ Likewise, the dog and his human companion in *Skaufhala bálkr* do not simply chase the fox for sport; they do so because the fox has killed one of their sheep.⁶⁴ These episodes point to the canine function of herding and protecting livestock, as noted in both *Grágás* and the *Frostaping* laws above, as well as in the Danish law of Scania that rules on a situation where a man leads his herd into another man’s fields ‘med Hund og med Hyrde’ (‘with a dog and with a herder’).⁶⁵ As Miklósi notes, certain dog breeds are ideal for livestock guarding and herding as they ‘display enhanced sensitivity towards intruders in their living area, and may respond with elevated aggression toward other dogs, humans, and some other animals, including wolves.’⁶⁶ A metaphor about ‘hundr á stöðli’ (‘a dog in the cattle-pen’) in the legendary *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is indicative of this function, as is a battle in the translated *Alexanders saga* described using a lengthy metaphor about a hungry wolf, sheep, a shepherd, and his dog.⁶⁷

⁶² *Tristrams saga*, p. 160.

⁶³ *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu*, in *Ljósvefninga saga með þáttum*, ed. by Björn Sigfússon, pp. 151–243 (p. 180).

⁶⁴ Unlike in the law code of Scania (*Danmarks Gamle Love*, I, p. 70), where the mention of a man chasing a fox into its hole with dogs is likely more to do with sport.

⁶⁵ *Danmarks Gamle Love*, I, p. 58.

⁶⁶ Ádám Miklósi, *The Dog: A Natural History* (Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 81.

⁶⁷ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, in *FornNorð*, III, pp. 43–151 (p. 73). *Alexanders saga: Norsk bearbeidelse fra trettende aarhundrede af Philip Gautiers Latinske digt Alexandreis*, ed. by Carl Rikard Unger (Feilberg & Landmarks Forlag, 1848), p. 31.

There is nevertheless a curious lack of herding dogs in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus, with only a handful of mentions primarily in *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur*. It is possible that we are meant to assume that many dogs in the corpus are used for this purpose, even if not explicitly mentioned in the plot and, indeed, dogs that we do see herd livestock are described using a variety of terms. A clever dog that herds sheep and cows in *Guðmundar saga biskups* is simply called a ‘rakki’ and a ‘hundr’.⁶⁸ In *Eyrbyggja saga*, the slave Egill is accompanied by a large ‘dýrhundur’ as he herds sheep along the fjords.⁶⁹ In *Egils saga*, a group of men have large ‘hjarðtikr’ to protect their sheep from a dangerous bear, and in the *Heimskringla* version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, an Irish farmer’s dog is similarly introduced as a ‘hjarðhundr’.⁷⁰ This Irish sheepdog is Vígi, who is gifted to King Óláfr Tryggvason and accompanies him until the end of the king’s life. Vígi accomplishes a number of extraordinary feats over the course of the saga, but it is his remarkable herding abilities that first capture the attention of Óláfr. While raiding in Ireland, the king captures many livestock from the area, including those of this farmer who asks for them back. Óláfr agrees on the condition that the farmer is able to quickly identify only his own animals from among the larger flock. And so the farmer calls upon his dog Vígi:

Síðan hljóp hundrinn fram í ótalligan fjöldða fjárins ok rannsakaði. Ok eigi á hálfri stundu dags var í einum stað allt fē búandans. Þetta undraðisk Óláfr ok hans menn, ok spurðu búanda margs af natúru hundsins, ok hann sagði mart af speki hundsins. Ok er hann vissi at hann var líkari spökum mönnum en skynlausum hundum, bað hann hann gefa sér hundinn, ok þat gerði hann ok þegar í stað.⁷¹

Then the dog leapt forward into the vast herd of livestock and searched. And in not half a day’s time, all the farmer’s livestock stood in one place. Óláfr and his men were astonished by this, and asked the farmer much about the nature of the dog, and he spoke much about the dog’s wisdom. And when Óláfr realised that he was more like wise men than irrational dogs, he asked the farmer to give him the dog, and he did that immediately.

⁶⁸ *Biskupa sögur*, II, p. 138.

⁶⁹ *Eyrbyggja saga*, in *Eyrbyggja saga. Brands þáttur orva. Eiríks saga rauða. Grænlendinga saga. Grænlendinga þáttur*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1935), pp. 1–186 (p. 115).

⁷⁰ *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1933), p. 167. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, in *Heimskr*, I, pp. 225–372 (p. 269).

⁷¹ *OddsÓl*, pp. 176–77.

Once gifted to Óláfr, Vígi is never explicitly seen in the role of a herding animal again. It is nevertheless significant that this was the role that Óláfr and his men originally valued and saw as evidence of the dog's wisdom and skill, qualities that will recur in other episodes in the saga (discussed in chapter 5). Herding potential might thus be subtly built into the characterisations of many of the dogs of this thesis, including perhaps in their frequent opposition to predators like wolves.

Fighting and Torture

Part of Vígi's role in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* is accompanying the king on the battlefield. In classical and medieval texts, this is a role that is usually spoken of in legends, often in reference to other parts of the world. Medieval bestiaries like the Aberdeen Bestiary, for example, relate that when the King of the Garamantes was captured, two hundred loyal dogs fought their way through enemy lines to rescue him.⁷² *Stjórn*, the fourteenth-century collection of Old Norse translations of Old Testament historical material, mentions an Indian practice of breeding dogs with tigers to create fiercer animals as well as large Albanian hounds that are powerful enough to kill bulls and lions.⁷³ Besides Vígi, dogs are mostly depicted fighting on battlefields in legendary texts, as will be seen in chapters 3 and 4, though it is often other animals they end up fighting. The potential of fighting dogs is also acknowledged in a contemporary Icelandic text, *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, in which the skald Guðmundr says in a verse that he will 'at gunni [...] ganga framm sem Rósta' ('go forward in battle like Rósta').⁷⁴ Rósta is Guðmundr's dog, and it is notable that both his name and Vígi's are references to battle or

⁷² Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Library, Univ Lib. MS 24, fol. 18^v, with an illumination of the event on the same page.

⁷³ *Stjórn: Gamelnorsk Bibelhistorie. Fra Verdens Skabelse til det Babyloniske Fangenskab*, ed. by Carl Rikard Unger (Feilberg & Landmarks, 1862), pp. 71–72 and 81.

⁷⁴ *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ed. by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 35.

fighting. Dogs can also be seen in battle (or potentially on the hunt) on a number of picture stones, such as the fifth/sixth-century Möjbro Runestone from Uppland (Figure 1) and possibly the ninth/tenth-century Klinte Hunninge I picture-stone from Gotland (Figure 2).⁷⁵

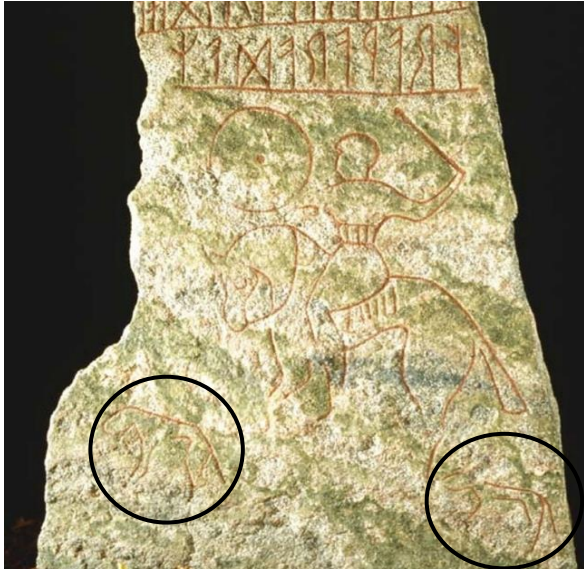


Figure 1: Section of the Möjbro Runestone from Uppland (image from Statens Historiska Museer, CC BY 4.0), with the two dogs circled in black



Figure 2: Top of the Hunninge I picture-stone from Klinte, Gotland (image by Harald Faith-Ell, via the Swedish National Heritage Board), with the dog circled in white

The Norwegian *Frostaping* law-code contains a passage regarding the proper legal steps following a deadly confrontation between two groups of people, including the following curious statement: ‘Nu skal lýfa vígi til þess þeir ero átta saman oc hundr hinn níundi’ (‘Now the battle/killing shall be reported if there were not more than eight together, a dog being the ninth’).⁷⁶ Perhaps ‘hundr’ is being used pejoratively here for one of the men involved in the fight, but the term does not carry this semantic sense anywhere else in this or other legal texts. This clause might thus acknowledge the possibility of a dog being actively involved in a fight with men. While this may be a brawl rather than a formal battle, it is certainly an acknowledgement of the potential danger of fierce dogs, a danger also acknowledged by the

⁷⁵ The latter could also be interpreted as warriors being welcomed into Valhöll. On the difficulties of identifying and interpreting such iconography, see Sigmund Oehrl, ‘Documenting and Interpreting the Picture Stones of Gotland: Old Problems and New Approaches’, *Current Swedish Archaeology*, 25 (2017), pp. 87–122.

⁷⁶ *Norges Gamle Love*, I, p. 165.

Icelandic *Grágás* and *Jónsbók* legal codes, as well as by the Danish law of Erik of Zealand, which all rule on men intentionally setting dogs and other animals on humans.⁷⁷ In *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the king uses Vígi and other dogs in this way explicitly as a means of viciously killing his enemies, and dogs become a means of torture on earth and in hell in several Christian texts, as will be discussed in chapter 5.⁷⁸

Entertainment

In the corner of fol. 63^v of the 16th-century Heynesbók manuscript (AM 147 4to) is an illumination of two dogs fighting, seemingly incited by a man on one side (Figure 3). The man and a comparison with a very similar horse-fight on fol. 51^v of the same manuscript suggest that an organised dog-fight is being depicted here. As opposed to the horse-fight which is located under a *Jónsbók* legal section on horses, Rohrbach notes that the dog-fight has no corresponding text in the manuscript and states that ‘auch in den Sagatexten gibt es keine entsprechende Schilderung’ (‘there is no corresponding description in the saga-texts either’).⁷⁹ There is, however, an episode in one redaction of *Guðmundar saga biskups*, in which two men ‘settu rekkavíg uppi í garðinum’ (‘set up a dogfight in the yard’).⁸⁰ This episode is analysed in greater detail in chapter 5, where it is noted that the fight (which includes one of the men, a priest, putting a dislodged dog’s tooth in his own mouth) is meant to have an aspect of absurdity, so one must be cautious about drawing conclusions about the reality of dogfights from this text alone. A similar difficulty is posed by the other saga mention of organised dogfights in the legendary *Qrvar-Odds saga*, which describes a contest to select the king of the giants, he ‘er

⁷⁷ *Grágás*, I, p. 156. *Jónsbók: The Laws of Later Iceland. The Icelandic Text According to MS AM 351 fol. Skálholtsbók eldri*, ed. and trans. by Jana Schulman (AQ-Verlag, 2010), p. 52. *Danmarks Gamle Love*, II, p. 69.

⁷⁸ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, p. 333.

⁷⁹ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 54. On horse-fights, see Bourns, ‘Between Nature and Culture’, pp. 35–38.

⁸⁰ *Biskupa sögur*, II, p. 148.

mest þrekvirki hefir unnit ok ólmastan hund á' ('who has performed the most daring deed and has the most savage dog').⁸¹ While it is true that this is a contest among giants and the 'dogs' in question include wolves and bears, referring to the contest as a dogfight may nonetheless be significant. There is one more possible piece of evidence in *Sverris saga Sigurðarsonar*, in which a battle between two men is compared to 'greyja ágangr' ('a (female) dogfight'), but this is the only known use of the concept in metaphorical language in the corpus.⁸²

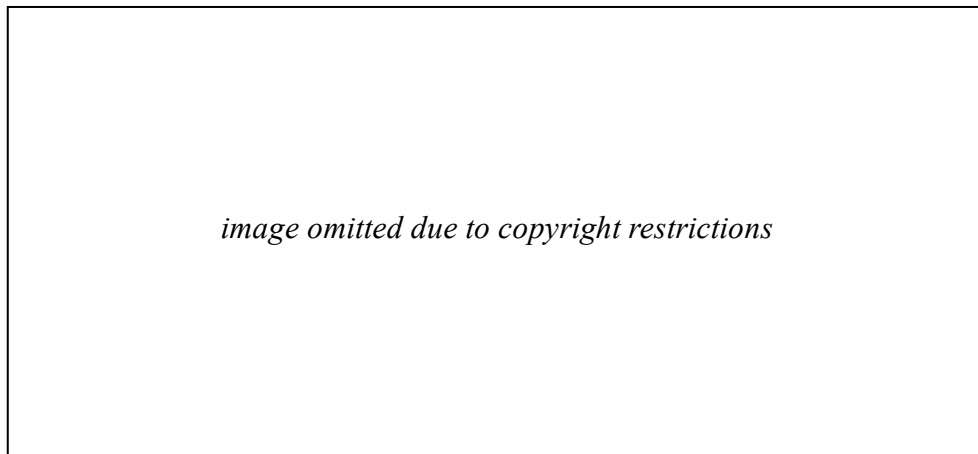


Figure 3: Dog-fight in AM 147 4to 63v (image from the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, via handrit.is)

Similarly scant evidence exists for bearbaiting, a practice of pitting dogs against a bear, which became popular in Britain and parts of continental Europe in the Middle Ages, usually 'specifically connected to royal courts'.⁸³ The only explicit mention in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus of bearbaiting as entertainment is in *Piðreks saga*, which is highly detailed but of course translated from German sources.⁸⁴ It is possible that the handful of episodes of dogs fighting bears either on the hunt or on the battlefield in Old Norse-Icelandic sources took on elements

⁸¹ *Örvar-Odds saga*, in *FornNorð*, I, pp. 281–399 (p. 339).

⁸² *Sverris saga*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2007), p. 197.

⁸³ Lisa Kiser, 'Animals in Medieval Sports, Entertainment, and Menageries', in *A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age*, ed. by Brigitte Resl (Berg, 2007), pp. 103–26 (p. 117).

⁸⁴ *Piðreks saga*, pp. 208–09.

of bearbaiting, but there is no clear evidence of this being an existing practice in the region as a form of public spectacle.

There is, on the other hand, more evidence of dogs being trained for less violent forms of entertainment. A passage in *Fagrskinna* on King Haraldr hárfagri mentions a jester at the king's court, about whom the following verse was composed:

At hundi ælskar Anndaðr
oc hœimsku drygir
œymalausum
oc iofur lægir.⁸⁵

Andaðr fondles an earless dog and plays the fool and makes the king laugh.

While this earless dog plays a more passive role in the jester's performance, *Sverris saga* includes more active dogs in the court of King Magnús:

En leikarar tveir váru í stofunni er hlaupa létu smárakka yfir hávar stengr fyrir tígnum mǫnnum,
ok því hæra sem menn váru tígnari.⁸⁶

And two jesters were in the sitting-room who made small dogs jump over a raised stick in front of noble men, and they [jumped] higher when the men were of nobler rank.

A skald Máni then proceeds to compose a verse about this performance. These two sources are a glimpse into the industry of performing animals that appears to have flourished throughout the courts of medieval Europe, dancing dogs being particularly popular.⁸⁷ Although we have just two examples in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus, there are other stories where humans find humour in their relationships with their animals. Vígi and King Óláfr once again exemplify this aspect, with a rather endearing scene captured in the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript. Vígi is on a ship with Óláfr and his men, and Óláfr asks Þórarinn to take a turn at steering. Þórarinn replies that he is not fit for the job, instead volunteering Vígi to take his place at the helm. Óláfr thus 'tok þa fætr rakkans ok lagde at styrinu en hellt þo sealfir a styrinu iafnnfram' ('took the dog's feet

⁸⁵ *Fagrskinna. Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (Møller, 1902–08), p. 12.

⁸⁶ *Sverris saga*, p. 130.

⁸⁷ See Kiser, 'Animals in Medieval Sports', pp. 120–23.

and lay them on the helm and held the helm himself at the same time’) and Þórarinn composes a verse about the spectacle.⁸⁸ Watching this play out, ‘toku men miog at glediazst’ (‘the men became very joyful’).⁸⁹ This is a unique moment of playfulness to an extent that is rare in the saga corpus, but elements of which might be sought in other close human-dog relationships. Chapter 5 will discuss how certain other Vígi episodes are used to critique aspects of the king’s behaviour, but this scene is undeniably wholesome, and Óláfr’s relationship with Vígi thus adds to the complexity of his character.

Companionship

The close relationship between Óláfr and Vígi evident in the ship scene goes beyond any mere functional uses of the dog into the territory of what we might refer to as companionship. Writing about royal tomb effigies in Saint-Denis, Donna Sadler has argued that the ‘advent of the dog as beloved domestic pet occurred gradually over the medieval period, but was an established fact of noble life by the fourteenth century’, attributing this advent to the rise of hunting as a sport for the nobility.⁹⁰ In many of the texts discussed in this thesis, dogs are intimately attached to their human or humanoid companions, some dogs like Vígi accompanying their companions throughout the course of their lives and even into death. This is not to call Vígi a “pet” in the modern sense of the word, defined by Joyce Salisbury as animals ‘that did no work and that were pampered in their idleness’.⁹¹ It is true that most of the dogs in this corpus do play various functional roles, be it guarding, hunting, tracking, herding, fighting, or entertainment, but it is

⁸⁸ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Carl Rikard Unger, 3 vols (Malling, 1860–68), I, p. 405.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Donna Sadler, ‘The Canine Domain: At the Feet of Royal Tomb Effigies in Saint-Denis’, in *Our Dogs, Our Selves: Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature, and Society*, ed. by Laura D. Gelfand (Brill, 2016), pp. 261–78 (pp. 267–68).

⁹¹ Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, p. 140.

also possible in many cases to discern aspects of care and companionship in addition to these roles.

King Óláfr's concern for his dog is most evident when Vígi is injured during a battle with one of Óláfr's enemies. The king carefully 'vafði dúki at hundinum, ok var hann til skips borinn' ('wrapped a blanket around the dog and he [Vígi] was carried to the ship'), and then goes to great lengths to have him healed.⁹² Óláfr's concern for Vígi is mirrored in the early archaeological record as well, with osteological records of several dogs interred in human graves showing signs of healing and even long-term healthcare.⁹³ Even more striking in this text, however, is the way in which Óláfr's care is explicitly reciprocated by Vígi. When Óláfr dies and Vígi is given the news, the saga treats us to one of the most moving displays of grief in all Old Norse-Icelandic literature:

Ok er hundrinn heyrði þetta, þá hljóp hann upp frá konungs sætinu ok kvað við hátt um sinn ok gekk út ok nam eigi staðar fyrr en á einum haugi ok lagðisk þar niðr ok þá hvárki mat né drykk, ok fór svá marga daga at hann sveltisk ok þá eigi fæzlu. Ok þó at hann vildi eigi eta þat er at honum var borit, þá bannaði hann þó öðrum hundum ok fuglum ok dýrum at bera frá sér. En tárin flutu fram um trýnit ór augunum, svá at allir máttu þat skilja at hann grét ákafliga sinn lánardröttinn, ok aldrigi fór hann ór þeim stað er hann nam staðar, heldr var hann þar allt til þess er hann dó.⁹⁴

And when the dog heard this, he jumped up from the king's seat and cried out loudly once and went out and did not stop before he reached a mound and lay down there and then had neither food nor drink, and so many days passed that he starved and had no food. And even though he did not wish to eat the [food] that was brought to him, he still prevented other dogs and birds and animals from taking it from him. And tears flowed down the front of his snout from his eyes, so that everyone could understand that he terribly bewailed his master, and he never left the place where he had stopped, but rather stayed there always until he died.

Although this account of grief may seem exaggerated, the tears in particular, much of it does align with observable canine behaviour. The extent to which animals love and grieve was once a question of great debate for philosophers but there is growing consensus today that dogs are

⁹² *OddsÓl*, p. 258.

⁹³ Christopher Nichols, 'Hounds of Hel: An Osteological Investigation of Dog Skeletons in Vendel Period–Viking Age Inhumations at Valsgärde Cemetery, Sweden' (unpublished master's thesis, Uppsala University, 2018), pp. 49–53.

⁹⁴ *OddsÓl*, p. 356.

very capable of such emotions. Studies have recognised that a majority of household dogs exhibit behaviours such as ‘[l]oss of appetite, lethargy, and anxiety behaviours such as pacing’ after losing another dog from their household.⁹⁵ Psychologist John Bowlby furthermore noted that a common response of dogs ‘who have experienced loss through separation’ is ‘a refusal to accept comfort or food from another person.’⁹⁶ Vígi’s howling and refusal to accept food (and gnashing in the *Flateyjarbók* version) are thus classic, if prolonged, reactions of a dog to the loss of his human companion.⁹⁷

A dog shedding tears of sorrow, meanwhile, may not be a biologically realistic external expression of emotionality, but it is a significant framing of the narrative. The tears give Vígi an aspect of humanity in contrast to the other dogs, birds, and animals that he guards the food from, and in comparison with Óláfr’s wife who is also said to die of grief, though in much less detail.⁹⁸ The same is true of the phrase ‘kvað við hátt’ (‘cried out loudly’), the text choosing a usually human vocalisation instead of one of many typically canine ones (explicated in chapter 2). Bourns thus describes the tears as a form of anthropomorphism in which ‘the sorrow of Óláfr’s followers is projected onto the dog through pathetic fallacy.’⁹⁹ Bourns’ notion that Vígi is meant to represent Óláfr’s followers is supported by the phrasing used by the king’s man who breaks the news to Vígi: ‘nú erum vit dróttinlausir’ (‘now the two of us are without a lord’). As an animal, yes, but also as a subject and dear companion, Vígi is able to perform the full spectrum of outward grief in a wordless eulogy that could be said to eclipse even the greatest of skaldic verses in praise of the king.

⁹⁵ Barbara King, *How Animals Grieve* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 27.

⁹⁶ John Bowlby, ‘Processes of Mourning’, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 42 (1961), pp. 317–40 (p. 328). Similar observations of anorexia nervosa in dogs after the deaths of their owners have been made in Michael Fox, *Abnormal Behavior in Animals* (Saunders, 1968), pp. 368–71.

⁹⁷ *Flateyjarbók*, I, p. 520.

⁹⁸ *OddsÓl*, pp. 353–54.

⁹⁹ Bourns, ‘Between Nature and Culture’, p. 57.

This scene is a testament to the value of McHugh, McKay, and Miller's recommendation to pay attention to both the lived experience of dogs and their literary representation, 'between their lives and what their lives are made to signify'.¹⁰⁰ It may be the case both that Vígi's grief stands in for human grief in this scene as Bourns suggests, and also that it represents a belief that dogs (and perhaps, by extension, other animals) could have rich interior lives and the belief or the wishful thinking that human affection or care for dogs may be reciprocated in equal measure.¹⁰¹ Both interpretive positions must be valued equally in a narrative ethological approach. It is true that no other dog in the sagas (and, indeed, few other animals or humans) come close to Vígi in terms of the extraordinary strength of his relationship with his human companion. However, accepting the possibility of such a relationship makes it easier to discern elements of it in other human-canine stories.

We can observe care in feeding practices too, most strikingly in the Icelandic *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa* when the protagonist Björn is staying at Þórðr's house with two horses and his dog 'V'.¹⁰² Björn's care for his dog angers Þórðr, as he 'setr hund sinn jafnauðgan [þá] under borði' ('puts his dog on an equal footing with them under the table').¹⁰³ Björn thus treats his canine companion as his equal and soon even higher than other people. Þórðr devises a plan to ration portions, but the result is that 'gaf Björn hundi eigi síðr en áðr, en þeir Þórðr ok Björn hofðu mat at minna' ('Björn gave the dog no less than before, and Þórðr and Björn had less food'), and the system must return to the way it was before.¹⁰⁴ It is certainly striking that Björn

¹⁰⁰ McHugh, McKay, and Miller, 'Towards an Animal-Centred Literary History', p. 6.

¹⁰¹ See also Timothy Bourns, 'Animal Emotionality and Selfhood in Old Norse Textual Culture', *Emotions: History, Culture, Society*, 8 (2024), pp. 97–115 (pp. 103–05).

¹⁰² *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa*, in *Borgafirðinga sögur*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (Hið Íslenska Fornritfélag, 1938), pp. 109–211 (p. 136). The rest of the name is, unfortunately, illegible, but Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson suggest 'Vīgi' after Óláfr's dog.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 146. 'Jafnauðgan' literally means 'just as wealthy' but is translated as 'on an equal footing' as done by John Le Couteur Simon in 'A Critical Edition of *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa*', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 1966), II, p. 153.

¹⁰⁴ *Bjarnar saga*, p. 146.

considers it his obligation to properly feed his dog, even if it means that he and other humans must eat less. All we are told of this dog is that it was a gift from Björn's foster-father, along with two horses, 'því at honum hafði þótt hann góðr fyrr' ('because he had earlier thought him good'); the dog is not mentioned again.¹⁰⁵ As Rohrbach writes, 'steht hingegen nicht die Begründung oder Verstärkung reziproker Obligationen im Vordergrund, sondern die emotionale Verbindung Björns zu diesen Tieren, die er gleichsam als Willkommensgeschenk von seinen Verwandten erhält' ('the focus is not on establishing or strengthening reciprocal obligations, but on Björn's emotional connection to these animals, which he receives as a welcoming gift from his relatives').¹⁰⁶ It is possible that the dog once had a bigger role in the saga that is lost to us, but all we are left with here is a scene that demonstrates a man's great concern for a dog that appears to have no other specific function. It should be noted that the next scene in the saga shows Björn demonstrate a similar level of concern for the appetites of his two horses, which indicates that similar relationships could exist with other animals.

The table scene is also noteworthy in the fact that V, in contrast to the horses, actually eats with Björn and eats the same food as him, making the animal *jafnauðigr* as the humans. Feasting could be an important social ritual in medieval societies, 'a communal bonding rite' that strengthens the cohesion of a group as well as recreates existing hierarchies through seating arrangements.¹⁰⁷ V sitting under the table right next to Björn strengthens their bond even further. A similar observation might be made of the dog Snati of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (explored more in chapters 3 and 5) who attends a wedding feast with his companion Gestr, sitting at his feet among his 'bekkjunautar' ('bench-fellows') and eating with him.¹⁰⁸ Even

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁰⁶ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy, and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Four Courts, 1996), p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Bárðar saga*, p. 152.

more intimate than spaces of food are spaces of sleep, and dogs alone of all animals share both with humans. The dog Gramr in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, it will be seen in chapter 3, has his own special bed, and it is said that Hafr's guard-dog in *Guðmundar saga biskups* lay 'jafnan fyrir hvílu hans' ('just in front of his bed').¹⁰⁹ In *Bárðar saga*, it is furthermore said that when Gestr sleeps in a tent, '[h]undr hans var hjá honum, en ekki manna' ('his dog was next to him, but no men').¹¹⁰ Whatever their functional roles, these dogs are all inseparable from their humans.

Of all types of dogs, the *Frostaping* law code prioritises the 'kofanrakki', which it defines according to the small size of its neck. Most scholars translate it as 'lapdog', a modern term that usually refers to a small dog that is kept for the sole purpose of companionship and often therefore acts as a marker of status. 'Kofan' in this compound might be related to 'kofi' meaning a room or a cell in a house, which would suit the dog's indoor status.¹¹¹ The *kofanrakki*'s position as a high-status animal could explain why it is valued the highest, but it is not possible to argue with certainty that this was a non-working animal simply because of its size and status, particularly as the term is not encountered anywhere else in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

A possibly comparable term that is found elsewhere is 'smarakki' (or 'smáhundr' in one source), 'smá' likely being a reference again to the small size of the animal. Dogs with this title appear in a variety of contexts. In courtly settings, they are the performing jumping dogs of *Sverris saga* and in the entourage of a duke in *Karlamagnús saga*.¹¹² In October 1338, Bishop Hákon sends a letter to Bishop Salomon of Oslo, thanking him for the gift of a horse and

¹⁰⁹ *Þorsteins saga*, p. 218. *Biskupa sögur*, I, p. 523.

¹¹⁰ *Bárðar saga*, p. 158.

¹¹¹ For other etymological suggestions, see Cöllén, 'Djuret på tröskeln', p. 60.

¹¹² *Sverris saga*, p. 130. *Karlamagnus saga ok kappá hans*, ed. by Carl Rikard Unger (Jensen, 1860), p. 10.

promising to send him two *smárákkar* in return.¹¹³ In *Thomas saga erkibyskups*, it is said that a man's cow followed him wherever he went like a *smárákki*.¹¹⁴ In both *Karlamagnús saga* and *Flóvents saga*, they are mentioned with boars in hunting metaphors, but in both cases the metaphors appear to imply that the boar would be in no danger from them and therefore perhaps that these are not dogs best suited for hunting.¹¹⁵ In *Mariu saga*, the mother of Bernard of Clairvaux dreams of her unborn child as a barking white *smárákki*, while in *Dunstanus saga*, the devil takes the form of this dog inside a man's stomach.¹¹⁶ It is once again for its size that this dog was probably chosen, small enough to fit inside a human belly. It is unclear from these occurrences whether 'smárákki' is a term for a specific breed of dog or simply any small dog, but in either case nothing about its usage in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus precludes it from being considered a non-functional lapdog.

A third term that is often translated as 'lapdog' is 'skikkjurakki', with just three occurrences in the corpus: in *Orkneyinga saga*, *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, and *Ála flekks saga*.¹¹⁷ In the first text, the dog accompanies Jarl Rognvaldr as he flees from his enemies but gives away the Jarl's location by the sound of its barking.¹¹⁸ While this dog could conceivably be described as a lapdog, having no other mention in the saga, the two others play more active

¹¹³ *Diplomatarium Norvegicum: oldbreve til Kundskab om Norges indre og ydre Forholde, Sprog, Slaegter, Saeder, Lovgivning og Rettergang i Middelalderen. Ottende Samling*, ed. by Carl Rikard Unger and Henrik Jørgen Huitfeldt (Malling, 1871), p. 130.

¹¹⁴ *Thomas saga erkibyskups. Fortælling om Thomas Becket erkebiskop af Canterbury. To bearbejdelser samt fragmenter af en tredje*, ed. by Carl Rikard Unger (Bentzen, 1869), p. 473.

¹¹⁵ *Karlamagnus saga*, pp. 81–82. *Flovents saga I*, in *Fornsögur Suðrlanda: Magus saga jarls, Konraðs saga, Bærings saga*, ed. by Gustaf Cederschiöld (Brockhaus, 1884), pp. 124–69 (p. 148).

¹¹⁶ *Mariu saga: Legender om jomfru Maria og hendes jertegn, efter gamle haandskrifter*, ed. by Carl Rikard Unger (Brøgger & Christie, 1871), p. 489. *Dunstanus saga*, in *Icelandic Sagas and Other Historical Documents Relating to the Settlements and Descents of the Northmen of the British Isles*, vol. II, *Hákonar Saga, and a Fragment of Magnus Saga, with Appendices*, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 385–408 (pp. 406–07).

¹¹⁷ 'Skikkjurakki' is translated as 'skødehund' ('lap-dog') in Sigfús Blöndal, *Íslensk-Dönsk Orðabók* (Verslun Þórarins B. Þorlákssonar, 1920–24), p. 722; Geir Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (Dover, 2004), p. 373; and Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 545. It is translated as 'stjødøhund' (a service dog of some kind) in Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 3 vols (Den Norske Forleggerforening, 1886), III, p. 318.

¹¹⁸ *Orkneyinga saga*, in *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. by Finnboji Guðmundsson, pp. 1–300 (p. 74).

roles. The *skikkjurakki* in *Ála flekks saga* helps save the protagonist from a troll-woman's cave and the one in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* (discussed in greater detail in chapter 3) is involved in fighting numerous enemies, neither role befitting lapdogs.¹¹⁹ Jonathan Hui and co-authors therefore suggest alternative interpretations of the term, including 'a dog who follows by its master's cloak or, perhaps more metaphorically, a dog who watches its master's back closely' and 'a type of dog with a saddle coloured differently to the rest of its body'.¹²⁰

When discussing close human-dog relationships in the sagas, it would be amiss not to mention *Sámr* of *Njáls saga*. The dog is described simply as a *hundr* or *rakki*, right up until the moment of his death, when he emits a loud cry and Gunnarr calls him 'Sámr fóstri' ('[my] fosterling Sámr').¹²¹ The term 'fóstri' is used of only one other animal in the sagas, a horse in *Hrafnkels saga*, and is the clearest indicator of an intimate, even familial relationship between human and animal. Bourns thus suggests that this term 'may be the closest equivalent to an Old Norse word for a pet – used for an animal with whom a person develops a relationship and who is consequently assimilated into a kin-relationship.'¹²² Although 'fóstri' is only used for a single dog in the corpus, it along with the other terms and depictions discussed in this section is strong evidence that the relationship between dogs and humans could be more than just a functional one.

Dog Products

Despite their close companionship with humans, there are cases where dogs may have been used as material products in a few different ways. Surveying a range of mostly pre-medieval

¹¹⁹ Jonathan Hui, Caitlin Ellis, James McIntosh, Katherine Olley, William Norman, and Kimberly Anderson, 'Ála flekks saga: An Introduction, Text and Translation', *Leeds Studies in English*, 49 (2018), pp. 1–43 (pp. 22–24).

¹²⁰ Ibid., 'Ála flekks saga', p. 22. *Hálfðanar saga*, pp. 306–11.

¹²¹ *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 186.

¹²² Bourns, 'Between Nature and Culture', p. 28.

archaeological sites, Jennbert concludes that it is ‘obvious that dog meat was sometimes human food in pre-Christian times’.¹²³ This practice does not appear to have been common in medieval Iceland or Scandinavia, and is indeed forbidden in a religious section of the Icelandic *Grágás* (along with eating horses, foxes, cats, beasts with claws, and carrion birds) with the penalty of lesser outlawry.¹²⁴ A clause in the Norwegian *Gulaping* law-code does address the possibility of a person eating dog meat during Lent if no other provisions are available, ‘af því at helldr fcal hann hund eta. helldr en hundr ete hann’ (‘because it is preferable that he shall eat a dog than a dog eat him’).¹²⁵ This clause suggests that eating dog meat may have been frowned upon but permissible in extreme circumstances. Archaeological evidence indicating the butchering of dogs for meat in Norse settlements in Greenland has similarly been interpreted as ‘indications of a terminal provisional crisis closely associated with abandonment’.¹²⁶ It is extremely rare to find dogs being eaten by humans in the literary corpus, the only Old Norse-Icelandic instance being in the original Icelandic romance *Drauma-Jóns saga* when a dog is killed and its heart eaten in place of the protagonist Jón.¹²⁷ Saxo Grammaticus’ Latin *Gesta Danorum* (introduced in more detail in the next chapter) does mention two further examples of dogs being eaten, once by soldiers ‘per summam necessitates indigentiam’ (‘through the most dire necessity’) at a time of war-driven famine and once by the animated corpse of a man the

¹²³ Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, p. 147.

¹²⁴ *Grágás*, I, pp. 34–35.

¹²⁵ *Norges Gamle Love*, I, p. 12.

¹²⁶ Ramona Harrison, Howell M. Roberts, and W. Paul Adderley, ‘Gásir in Eyjafjörður: International Exchange and Local Economy in Medieval Iceland’, *Journal of the North Atlantic*, 1 (2008), pp. 99–119 (p. 110). See also Thomas McGovern, P. C. Buckland, Diana Savory, Gudrun Sveinbjarnardottir, Claus Andreason, and P. Skidmore, ‘A Study of the Faunal and Floral Remains from Two Norse Farms in the Western Settlement, Greenland’, *Arctic Anthropology*, 20.2 (1983), pp. 93–120 (p. 108).

¹²⁷ *Drauma-Jóns saga*, in *Riddarasögur*, ed. by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 6 vols (Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949–51), VI, pp. 147–70 (p. 160).

dog was buried with.¹²⁸ The legendary *Egils saga einhenda* similarly mentions a dog being eaten by the undead occupant of a grave.¹²⁹

Besides being used for food, a late-fifteenth-century medical miscellany suggests using the hair of a dog among other remedies to treat a dog bite.¹³⁰ *Haraldssona saga* of *Heimskringla* further mentions ‘hundssöð’ being used to deconsecrate a miraculous spring.¹³¹ Zoëga and Fritzner both interpret ‘hundssöð’ as a broth made from the flesh of a dog, but it could alternatively refer to a broth used to feed dogs.¹³² Unfortunately, this word does not appear elsewhere outside this context and neither of these uses is mentioned in any other sources, so it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions. What is clear is that dogs were not used for food or other physical resources nearly as much as other domesticated animals like cows or sheep but were valued instead for the more active roles they could play.

Conclusion

This chapter has thus demonstrated that dogs are everywhere in the Old Norse-Icelandic landscape, playing a range of different roles in human society. Literary texts of all genres and legal texts from both Iceland and Scandinavia highlight the importance of dogs guarding people, property, and livestock. Dogs are used to hunt a wide variety of wild animals, but mostly among the higher classes of Scandinavia and other parts of Continental Europe. Canine powers of scent and speed are put to use in tracking prey on the hunt, but also in finding lost or stolen cattle and human fugitives. Some dogs are used to herd livestock, and other fiercer

¹²⁸ *Saxo Grammaticus, Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, ed. by Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans. by Peter Fisher, 2 vols (Oxford University Press, 2015), I, pp. 59 and 339.

¹²⁹ *Egils saga einhenda*, p. 166.

¹³⁰ *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany. MS Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43, with Supplement from MS Trinity College (Dublin) L-2-27*, ed. by Henning Larsen (Hos Jacob Dybwad, 1931), p. 126.

¹³¹ *Haraldssona saga*, in *Heimskr*, III, pp. 303–46 (p. 345).

¹³² Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary*, p. 215. Fritzner, *Ordbog*, II, p. 95.

ones protect livestock from predators and fight animal and human foes on the battlefield. There are hints of dogs being used for other forms of entertainment, mostly in royal settings, but more generally providing companionship to all manner of humans and humanoids. Finally, dogs may in extreme circumstances have been eaten or used as sources of other products.

The rest of this thesis explores how these ordinary roles are adopted and adapted by different genres of Old Norse-Icelandic literature in significant ways. In chapter 3, for instance, dogs go from protecting humans to protecting giants; in chapters 2 and 5, they go from guarding human homes to standing watch at the borders between worlds and between life and death. Hunting and fighting hounds face a range of supernatural animals and other enemies in chapters 3, 4, and 5, and the depth of their companionship is frequently used to test the borders between nature and culture, human and animal.

In this chapter and throughout this thesis, what is perhaps most extraordinary is just how deeply engrained dogs are in human society, to the extent that human society begins to become defined by the presence of dogs. It has been and will be seen in numerous sources how humans are identified by their canine companions and the shift from wilderness to human settlement is marked by the sound of barking dogs, just like in the Inughuit communities observed by Hastrup earlier. From the hundreds of dog episodes identifiable in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus, it is possible to imaginatively reconstruct very similar textual landscapes, where human society is held together by a refrain of dogs barking on the hunt or growling at strangers, running, playing, and sleeping alongside their companions. Having conceptualised dogs as part of the regular refrain that holds texts and textual communities together, this thesis will now move to exploring how authors use and adapt this refrain to creatively construct and shape their texts in different ways.

CHAPTER 2. MYTHOLOGICAL DOGS

I. A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter; or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment. There is already sonority in Ariadne's thread. Or the song of Orpheus.¹

Introduction

As the apocalyptic Ragnarøk approaches, the mythological poem *Völuspá* in the *Konungsbók* manuscript delivers the following dramatic stanza:

Geyr Garmr mjök
fyr Gnipahelli,
festr mun slitna
en freki renna.
Fjölð veit hon fræða,
fram sé ek lengra
um ragna røk
róm sigtíva.²

Geyr Garmr mjök fyr Gnipahelli, the fetter shall break and the *freki* run. She knows much wisdom, I see further ahead to the powerful destruction of the gods, the gods of victory.

As the events of the apocalypse unfold further, the stanza becomes a refrain and is repeated twice more, with the significant addition of 'nú' ('now'):

Geyr nú Garmr mjök
fyr Gnipahelli,
festr mun slitna
en freki renna.³

In the *Hauksbók* manuscript version of *Völuspá*, this refrain is even more prominent, repeated a total of five times over the course of the poem. For all its prominence, however, these remain some of the most obscure lines of the poem, leaving numerous questions unanswered. Who is Garmr? Is he a dog or a wolf? What is his role in the poem and in the events of Ragnarøk?

¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 311.

² *Völuspá (K)* 43 (*Eddk*, I, p. 302).

³ *Völuspá (K)* 47 and 56 (*Eddk*, I, pp. 303 and 306).

What, precisely, is meant by ‘geyr’ and why is Garmr making this sound? Is Garmr synonymous with the ‘freki’ of the following lines, and could he therefore be synonymous with the wolf Fenrir? Or is he perhaps synonymous with the whelp of *Baldrs draumar*? What and where actually is Gnipahellir? And what is the significance of these refrains within the poems in the two manuscripts?

This chapter addresses each of these questions within the wider context of dogs in Old Norse-Icelandic literature. It begins by evaluating the long scholarly discussion of whether Garmr is a dog or a wolf, arguing that even if it cannot be definitively proven that there isn’t a wolf side to Garmr, it is his dog side that is key to understanding his role in the poem. In doing so, this chapter takes previous scholarship a step further in considering not just Garmr’s dog-ness in its own right, but the implications of this dog-ness for Garmr, for *Völuspá*, and for other dogs in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus. This is done first by establishing an understanding of the importance and range of dog vocalisations and discussing possible meanings and implications of the verb ‘geyja’. Once ‘geyja’ is revealed to be a potential barking sound often used by guard dogs, Garmr is then compared to other guard dogs across Old Norse-Icelandic literature, with particular attention drawn to dogs in *Gesta Danorum* and in three Eddic poems. These comparisons demonstrate the use of dogs not just as guards on earth but also to guard the borders between worlds, a function which is then considered as applying to Garmr as well. Whether or not Garmr served as some kind of guard before Ragnarøk, his function at the onset of Ragnarøk is that of a portent and so this chapter finally turns to looking at other texts in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus that utilise dogs as warnings or omens of different kinds. Many of these are indeed guard dogs alerting their humans to threats, but connections are also drawn to canine dream visions, danger of rabies, and dogs used as prognoses in medical texts. All these sources are combined to produce a complex picture of an animal with the function of protecting humanity but one that has by that very function come to be associated with danger and even

apocalypse. Through this comparative focus on Garmr, this chapter thus presents a case study in canine narrative ethology, demonstrating that looking at dogs more closely can reveal much not just about their functions inside and outside texts, but also how the texts themselves are constructed and where they fit into wider textual networks.

Garmr: Dog or Wolf?

Perhaps the most central question regarding the identity of Garmr is whether the beast is a dog or a wolf. Before answering this question, one must first consider the more fundamental question of whether medieval Icelanders would have seen a meaningful distinction between wolf and dog in the first place. Axel Olrik seems to think not. Speaking about the identity of Garmr and the ‘freki’ of the next line, he writes that any attempt to draw a clear line between the two is ‘eine zoologische Pedanterie, welche der Dichtersprache der alten Zeiten ganz fremd ist. [...] Sowohl unser weltzerstörender Hund als unser weltzerstörender Wolf haben ihren natürlichen Platz als Varianten innerhalb der großen Gruppe ähnlicher Wesen, die wir jetzt kennen gelernt haben’ (‘a zoological pedantry that is quite alien to the poetic language of ancient times. [...] Both our world-destroying dog and wolf have their natural place as variants within the large group of similar creatures we have now come to know’).⁴

Since it is true that wolves are not native to Iceland and many medieval Icelanders may never have encountered a real wolf in the wild, it is possible that the image of the wolf in the medieval Icelandic imagination could have been modelled on their knowledge of dogs. It is sometimes difficult as well for modern researchers to distinguish between dogs and wolves when they appear in archaeological sites and in iconography, leading to a further conflation of

⁴ Axel Olrik, *Ragnarök: die sagen vom weltuntergang* (De Gruyter, 1922), pp. 312–13.

the two species, although there are means of discerning some distinctions in both fields.⁵ That being said, it would be a mistake to view Iceland as a truly isolated country and its strong links with Scandinavia and the rest of medieval Europe make it almost certain that Icelanders would have imported some knowledge of wolves from elsewhere. This may not be clear in art and archaeology, but it is very evident in literature where strong linguistic and conceptual differences can be traced between dogs and wolves. On a basic level, there is a clear distinction in the Old Norse language between the lexical range used for dogs (such as ‘hundr’, ‘rakki’, and ‘bikkja’) and for wolves (such as ‘vargr’ and ‘úlfr’), with very little crossover. There is some further distinction between the lexemes used for the vocalisations of the two animals, as will be discussed below. Even more significantly, evidence from across Old Norse-Icelandic literature shows a clear delineation between dogs playing important social roles within human society and wolves occupying the wild spaces outside, the latter thus frequently used as a symbol for outlawry.⁶ As closely as they might resemble dogs, the fact that wolves exist on the outside inhibits them from developing any of the same social bonds discussed throughout this thesis that separate dogs from most other non-human animals. Dogs and wolves are hence frequently depicted as natural opposites, the former protectors of men and livestock and the latter their predators. There is, for instance, a line in *Stjórn* (in a commentary on Genesis from Comestor’s *Historia scholastica*) that compares the ‘hatr ok uuinatta’ (‘hatred and enmity’) between mankind and serpents to that which exists between dogs and wolves.⁷

⁵ On distinctions in archaeology, see John Paul Scott and John L. Fuller, *Genetics and the Social Behavior of the Dog* (Chicago University Press, 2012), pp. 36–38. On art and iconography, see Marjolein Stern, ‘Heroic Images on Runestones in the Context of Commemoration and Communication’, in *Bilddenkmäler zur germanischen Götter- und Heldensage*, ed. by Wilhelm Heizmann and Sigmund Oehrl (De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 375–95 (pp. 383–84).

⁶ See Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness*, pp. 185–90.

⁷ *Stjórn*, p. 37.

Returning to Garmr specifically, the animal is mentioned as a character in just two other sources outside of *Völuspá*, and in both he is decidedly dog-like. In the mythological Eddic poem *Grímnismál*, Óðinn, disguised as Grímnir, shares the following knowledge:

Askr Yggdrasils,
hann er æztr við
en Skíðblaðnir skipa,
Óðinn ása
en jóa Sleipnir,
Bilrøst brúa
en Bragi skálda,
Hábrók hauka
en hunda Garmr.⁸

The ash of Yggdrasill is the greatest of trees, and Skíðblaðnir of ships, Óðinn of the Æsir and Sleipnir of horses, Bilrøst of bridges and Bragi of skalds, Hábrók of hawks and Garmr of hounds.

From numerous other sources, we know that Skíðblaðnir is undoubtedly a ship, as is Óðinn an Áss, Sleipnir a horse, Bilrøst a bridge, and Bragi a skald.⁹ In fact, this stanza presents each as the ideal of their category, and so clearly affirms Garmr's identity as a dog. The stanza is repeated in the *Gylfaginning* text of the thirteenth-century scholar Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, used here as a poetic precedent for Óðinn's might.¹⁰ *Gylfaginning* contains a second mention of Garmr, this time inserting him into the final great battle between the forces of the gods and the giants at Ragnarøk. It is said that

er ok lauss orðinn hundrinn Garmr er bundinn er fyrir Gnipahelli. Hann er it mesta forað. Hann á víg móti Týr ok verðr hvárr qðrum at bana.¹¹

the dog Garmr, who is bound before Gnipahellir, also becomes freed. He is the greatest danger/monster. He has a battle against Týr and each will cause the death of the other.

The fact that this combat between Garmr and Týr is absent from the narrative of *Völuspá* has led some scholars to dismiss it as an invention by Snorri. Sigurður Nordal, for instance,

⁸ *Grímnismál* 44 (*Eddak*, I, pp. 376–77).

⁹ Hábrók is more obscure, this being the only reference to the bird (see Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, and Katja Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, vol. I (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019), pp. 1421–22), but there is no reason to doubt that it is anything other than a hawk.

¹⁰ Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

suggests that the fight ‘was probably only his conjecture: he felt that something was lacking in *Völuspá*, but in fact was no wiser about Garmr than we are.’¹² Matthias Teichert has elaborated further on this, relating Týr’s battle with Garmr to his loss of a hand to Fenrir in other myths, arguing that Garmr is merely ‘a kind of secondary spin-off, or hypostasis’ of Fenrir, or

a substitute/proxy for Fenrir [...], since Týr seems to have been associated with Fenrir as his nemesis, before Óðinn emerged as the central deity. In this reading, the Óðinn-Fenrir deathmatch in *Gylfaginning*’s Ragnarök vision is the result of a later shift entailing the necessity to provide Týr with a substitute counterpart after Fenrir had been withdrawn from this position.¹³

These arguments are founded on a belief in Snorri’s inventiveness in relation to the source material (that he may or may not have had direct access to), but such inventiveness could nevertheless be instructive in what later medieval Icelanders considered plausible and consistent with their understanding of the mythology. It must have made sense to Snorri and, by extension, to some of his contemporaries, that Garmr would have been a dog, based on their own understanding of dogs and of the older mythological frameworks. The argument that Garmr must be a ‘secondary spin-off’ of Fenrir is also based on an assumption that Fenrir is a uniquely significant figure in Old Norse-Icelandic mythology, an assumption that this chapter will put aside for the moment in order to consider Garmr as a significant figure in his own right.

Outside of the three above sources, ‘garmr’ appears to become a generic term used as a synonym for dog. The term is mostly found in kennings, with at least 18 examples observed across Old Norse-Icelandic poetry (Appendix E).¹⁴ Of these, the referent is fire in eight cases, a sword or another weapon in four, and twice a storm/wind, a warrior, and a ship respectively.

¹² *Völuspá*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, trans. by B. S. Benedikz and John McKinnell (Durham and St. Andrews Medieval Texts, 1978), p. 86.

¹³ Matthias Teichert, ‘Týr, Fenrir and the Brísingamen. Tales of Law, Crime and Violence in Eddic Mythology and their Indo-European Subcontexts’, in *Narrating Law and Laws of Narration in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. by Roland Scheel (De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 275–88 (p. 279)

¹⁴ This is about as frequent as, if not more frequent than, Fenrir appears in kennings, casting further doubt on the notion of Garmr as a less important spin-off of the wolf. It is true, however, that ‘fenrir’ was just one of a larger corpus of wolf *heitir* that poets would have had access to, which could explain the low frequency of this specific term.

It is notable that most of these kennings involve an aspect of ferocity or violence. In the fire kennings, for instance, ‘garmr’ is employed as the base-word to enact destruction upon wood or forests. It might be argued that this violent side of *garmar* is more suited to wolves than dogs, but it is certainly the case that dogs in Old Norse-Icelandic literature are depicted as having a violent and dangerous side to them, as can be observed throughout this thesis. Moreover, some of these kennings themselves make a distinction between dogs and wolves, a distinction that is central to their meaning. Óttarr svarti’s *Höfuðlausn* employs the kenning ‘garms Gauta glaðnistanda’ (‘glad feeder of the wolf (dog of Gauti (Óðinn))’) and one version of Þórðr Kolbeinsson’s *Eiríksdrápa* uses ‘huggendr sárgarms’ (‘comforters of the wolf (wound-dog)’), both referring to warriors.¹⁵ Þjóðólfr ór Hvini’s *Haustlög* employs a similar kenning, ‘hundr hrynsævar hræva’ (‘the hound of blood (the roaring sea of corpses)’), to refer to a wolf.¹⁶ Turning to Eddic poetry, *Helgakviða Hundingsabana I* refers to wolves as ‘Viðris grey’ (‘Óðinn’s bitches’) and *Hamðismál* as ‘grey norna’ (‘bitches of the Norns’).¹⁷ These kennings all demonstrate a clear distinction between dogs and wolves, for the base-word and referent in a kenning are always two comparable but distinct concepts. The kennings no more imply that hound means wolf than the kenning ‘jór svôru’ (‘the horse of the troll woman’) implies that horse means wolf.¹⁸ Consequently, it is more logical to the structure of kennings to read ‘garmr’ in each of these cases as dog and not wolf.

¹⁵ Óttarr svarti, *Höfuðlausn*, ed. by Matthew Townend, in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, ed. by Diana Whaley, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1 (Brepols, 2012), pp. 739–67 (p. 741). Þórðr Kolbeinsson, *Eiríksdrápa*, ed. by Jayne Carroll, in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1*, ed. by Whaley, pp. 487–513 (p. 493). ‘Sárgarms’ is used in the Bergsbók manuscript (Stockholm, Royal Library of Stockholm, Holm perg 1 fol.) and is elsewhere ‘sárgamms’ (wound-vulture, i.e. an eagle or raven).

¹⁶ Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, *Haustlög*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, in *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, ed. by Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3 (Brepols, 2017), pp. 431–61 (p. 447).

¹⁷ *Helgakviða Hundingsabana I* 13 (*Eddk*, I, p. 249). *Hamðismál* 29 (*Eddk*, II, p. 413).

¹⁸ *Björn kreppendi, Magnússdrápa*, ed. by Kari Ellen Gade, in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 2: From c. 1035 to c. 1300*, ed. by Kari Ellen Gade, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2 (Brepols, 2009), pp. 395–405 (p. 399).

Aside from in kennings, ‘garmr’ is used as a generic term for dogs in a single source, the poem *Fjölsvinnsmál*. This poem, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, describes the quest of a man named Svipdagr to the house of his beloved Menglǫð, who is guarded by two animals Gífr and Geri. The animals are referred to both as ‘garmar’ and ‘hundar’ and play the role of typical guard dogs, another indication that ‘garmr’ was used to refer to this specific animal.¹⁹ It is worth mentioning, however, that the animals are referred to as ‘garmar’ when being described as fierce, dangerous beasts keeping perpetual watch, but as ‘hundar’ at the end of the poem when they realise Svipdagr is not a threat and are said to ‘fagna’ (‘rejoice’, used of dogs in the sense of fawning).²⁰ Perhaps ‘garmr’ is a term that reflects the more fearsome or savage side of a ‘hundr’, as in the violent kennings above, but they are nevertheless here used for the same species. A second example of the two terms being used interchangeably is in *Laxdæla saga*, where a man named Auðunn is, within a single sentence, referred to using both the epithets ‘festarhundr’ and ‘festargarmr’.²¹

Old Norse dictionaries and etymologies do appear to be united in favouring the interpretation of Garmr as a dog, as do at least three glossaries to the Poetic Edda.²² On the other hand, editions and translations of *Völuspá* itself are more divided in their notes on the

¹⁹ *Fjölsvinnsmál* 13 and 44 (*Eddk*, II, pp. 444 and 449).

²⁰ *Ibid.* 44 (*Eddk*, II, p. 449).

²¹ *Laxdæla saga*, in *Laxdæla saga. Halldórs þættir Snorrasonar. Stífs þátr*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1934), pp. 1–248 (p. 159).

²² These include Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 192; Fritzner, *Ordbog*, I, p. 563; Leiv Heggstad, *Gamalnorsk Ordbok med Nynorsk tyding* (Det Norsk Samlaget, 1930), p. 202; Ferdinand Holthausen, *Vergleichendes und etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altnordischen. Altnorwegisch-isländischen einschließlich der Lehn- und Fremdwörter sowie der Eigennamen* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948), p. 80; Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum, Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis. Ordbog over et Norsk-Islandske skjaldesprog* (Møller, 1931), p. 173; and *Ordbog til de af samfund til udg. af Gml. Nord. Litteratur udgivne rimur samt til de af Dr. O. Jiriczek udgivne Bósarimur* (Jørgensen, 1926–28), p. 124; Theodor Möbius, *Altnordisches Glossar Wörterbuch, zu einer auswahl alt-Isländischer und altnorwegischer prosatexte* (Teubner, 1866), p. 133; Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Brill, 1961), p. 156; and Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary*, p. 161; as well as Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda. Based on Hans Kuhn's Kurzes Wörterbuch* (Universitätsverlag Winter, 1992), p. 81; Hermann Lüning, *Die Edda: eine Sammlung altnordischer Götter- und Heldenlieder* (Meyer & Zeller, 1859), p. 562; and Gustav Neckel, *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten denkmälern, II. Kommentierendes Glossar* (Universitätsverlag Winter, 1927), p. 57.

text. Olive Bray refers to Garmr as ‘the Hel hound’, Ursula Dronke as ‘the Hell Hound’, Patricia Terry as ‘the hound of Hel’, and Lee Hollander as ‘the Cerberus of Hel’.²³ Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason similarly refer to Garmr as ‘varðhundi Heljar’ (‘the guard-dog of Hel’) and argue that the suggestion that he should be equated with Fenrir ‘verður að teljast vafasöm’ (‘must be considered doubtful’).²⁴ Carolyn Larrington, though describing Garmr as seemingly ‘a hound of hell’, does however acknowledge that ‘[o]riginally he may have been identical with Fenrir the wolf’.²⁵ Somewhat more confidently, Ólafur Briem states that ‘líklegt þykir, að upphaflega sé Garmur aðeins annað nafn á Fenrisúlfi.’ (‘it seems likely that Garmr was originally just another name for Fenrisúlfr.’)²⁶

The debates over Garmr’s identity are taken further in other critical secondary scholarship. The argument that Garmr is a wolf is usually made by considering the half-stanza as a whole and comparing Garmr with the *freki* who subsequently breaks its bonds and runs free. There are typically three ways this half-stanza might be interpreted: firstly, by reading both Garmr and the *freki* as names for the same dog; secondly, by reading the two beings as names for the same wolf; and thirdly, by reading them as two separate beings, the former a dog and the latter a wolf.

The first interpretation does not find much favour in scholarship. Although often translated more cautiously as, for instance, ‘the ravener’ (see Larrington and Dronke), ‘freki’ is frequently used as a synonym for wolf and is included as such in the list of *heitir* for ‘vargr’

²³ *The Elder or Poetic Edda, Commonly Known as Sæmund’s Edda. Part I. The Mythological Poems*, ed. and trans. by Olive Bray (Viking Club, 1908), p. 291. Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, II, p. 144. *Poems of the Elder Edda*, ed. and trans. by Patricia Terry, 2nd edn (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 259. *The Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. by Lee Hollander, 2nd edn (University of Texas Press, 2004), p. 9.

²⁴ *Eddk*, I, p. 302.

²⁵ *The Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. by Carolyn Larrington (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 265.

²⁶ *Eddukvæði*, ed. by Ólafur Briem (Skálholt, 1968), pp. 85–86.

in Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál*.²⁷ Nevertheless, noting that the canid guards in *Fjölsvinnsmál* are termed 'garmar' and 'hundar' and named Gífr and Geri, and that Geri is the name of one of Óðinn's wolves, R. C. Boer states, 'Wenn ein hund *Geri* heissen kann, so sehe ich nicht ein, warum es verboten sein sollte, ihn *Freki* zu nennen.' ('If a dog can be named *Geri*, I do not see why it should be forbidden to call one *Freki*.')²⁸ Hollander also collapses any separation between the two lines, translating the half-stanza as 'Garm bays loudly before Gnipa cave, breaks his fetters and freely runs', and refers to Garmr as 'the Cerberus of Hel'.²⁹ This is perhaps Snorri's interpretation as well, *Gylfaginning* having both Fenrir and Garmr free themselves from chains. It is nevertheless an interpretation that remains rare among scholars, given the ubiquity of 'freki' referring to wolves.

The second interpretation, that both Garmr and the *freki* are two names for the same wolf, is much more popular. As is explained in the *Edda Kommentar*:

Sieht man davon ab, daß *garmr* mit einer Ausnahme einen Hund und *freki* immer einen Wolf bezeichnet, liegt es nahe, Garmr mit dem anschließend erwähnten *freki* (Wolf) gleichzusetzen: erst bellt das Tier, dann reißt es sich los [...]. Faßt man die Halbstrophe als zwei Angaben über Fenrir auf, müßte jedoch das Wort *garmr* als weiterer Name für diesen Wolf oder als Appellativum interpretiert werden ("Lärmer, Heuler"?).³⁰

If one disregards the fact that *garmr* with one exception denotes a dog and *freki* always a wolf, it makes sense to equate Garmr with the subsequently mentioned *freki* (wolf): first the animal barks, then it tears itself free [...]. If one interprets the half-stanza as two statements about Fenrir, the word *garmr* must be interpreted as another name for this wolf or as an appellative ("noise, howler"?).

Of course, the ubiquity of 'garmr' denoting a dog is not a fact easily disregarded. The exception spoken of here is the figure Mánagarmr ('Moon-garmr'), a wolf who is said in *Gylfaginning* to swallow the moon at Ragnarök.³¹ If one considers the name Mánagarmr as one does a kenning,

²⁷ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, p. 10. Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, II, p. 18. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Skáldskaparmál. I: Introduction, Text and Notes*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 87.

²⁸ R. C. Boer, 'Kritik von Völuspá', *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 36 (1904), pp. 289–370 (p. 329).

²⁹ Hollander, *The Poetic Edda*, p. 9.

³⁰ von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar*, I, p. 339.

³¹ Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, p. 14. See also Boer, 'Kritik von Völuspá', p. 329.

however, it would make perfect sense to simultaneously interpret ‘garmr’ as a base-word meaning dog and Mánagarmr, the moon-dog, as the referent wolf.

Arguments that interpret Garmr and the *freki* as a single wolf are chiefly based on the structure of the stanza. Sigurður Nordal is particularly in favour of this approach, declaring,

I find it unacceptable to break up the stanza by first talking about some barking dog, and then about Fenrir breaking loose – but even worse that *freki* should be the dog [...]. The refrain only does itself justice if it is understood in this way. The wolf grows excited and tugs at his bonds.³²

Olrik is similarly ardent that ‘das würde eine furchtbare Verringerung des dichterischen Werts der Strophe sein, wenn dieser Refrain nicht ein geschlossenes Bild enthielte, sondern das konkurrierende Auftreten zweier gleichartiger Raubtiere’ (‘it would be a terrible diminution in the poetic value of the stanza if this refrain contained not a closed image, but the competing appearance of two like-minded predators’).³³ Rejecting the separation of Garmr and the *freki* on the grounds of poetic value, though, is rather subjective. In the juxtaposition of *garmr* and *freki*, for instance, the *Edda Kommentar* observes a verbal parallel between this half-stanza and one in Gunnlaugr Leifsson’s *Merlínússpá* that begins:

Grenja gránir	garmar slíðra
bítr fránn freki	ferð halsgerðar. ³⁴

The swords (grey dogs of scabbards) ring; the sword (piercing wolf of the neck-strap) bites the army.

Besides the juxtaposition of both dog and wolf kennings in the stanza, the *Kommentar* also notes a similar pattern in the use of imagery, in that ‘die erste Langzeile eine ‘Lautäußerung’ und die zweite eine Bewegung beschreibt’ (‘the first long line describes a phonic utterance and the second a movement’).³⁵ Indeed, Philip Lavender has noted a number of stylistic and verbal parallels between the two poems that suggest that Gunnlaugr was consciously drawing on the

³² Nordal, *Völuspá*, p. 86.

³³ Olrik, *Ragnarök*, p. 312.

³⁴ *Merlínússpá II*, ed. by Russell Poole, in *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, ed. by Clunies Ross, pp. 134–89 (p. 165).

³⁵ von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar*, I, p. 337.

Old Norse-Icelandic prophetic tradition exemplified by *Völuspá*.³⁶ Moreover, there is comparable evidence in *Völuspá* itself of multiple subjects being included in a single half-stanza. This is typical of descriptions of war in the poem, emphasised early in *Konungsbók* stanza 24, for example, with the first war in the world:

Fleygði Óðinn
ok í folk um skaut,
þat var enn fólkvíg
fyrst í heimi;
brotinn var borðveggr
borgar ása,
knáttu vanir vígspá
völlu sporna.³⁷

Óðinn threw a spear, hurled it into the host, that was the first war in the world yet; the wooden rampart of the fortification of the Æsir was broken, the Vánir vigorously trampled the field with war-spell.

While all four lines are, of course, part of the same narrative, each can be read as a complete and independent grammatical clause. Such a structure is particularly prominent throughout the events of *Ragnarøk*, including in many of the stanzas surrounding the Garmr refrains. As Christopher Abram notes, the ‘pacing changes’ and ‘the narrative voice provides us with a series of vignettes of different locations in the cosmos, all of which have, or have now taken on, a sinister import’.³⁸ Stanza 45, two stanzas following the first Garmr refrain and preceding the second in *Konungsbók*, begins with two unified lines, but then begins to break down into independent clauses as Heimdallr blows his horn and Óðinn consults the head of Mímir.³⁹ As war intensifies, the moral and physical order of the universe collapses, as does the structural order and internal unity of the stanzas. Following the third refrain, stanza 48 describes Hrymr arriving from the east, the serpent Jormungandr thrashing in the water, an eagle growing excited, and the loosing of the ship Naglfar.⁴⁰ Beginning with an enquiry about the state of the

³⁶ Philip Lavender, ‘Merlin and the *Völva*’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 2 (2006), pp. 111–39.

³⁷ *Völuspá (K)* 24 (*Eddk*, I, p. 297).

³⁸ Abram, *Evergreen Ash*, p. 148.

³⁹ *Völuspá (K)* 45 (*Eddk*, I, pp. 302–03).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 48 (p. 303).

Æsir and the elves, stanza 50 rapidly shifts between multiple geographies, from the world of the giants to the council of the Æsir to the rocky doors of the dwarves.⁴¹ And just before the gods and the giants finally meet, the lines disintegrate even further, enjambment becoming even rarer as each half-line becomes an independent clause to juxtapose the apocalyptic landscape with its inhabitants, rocky cliffs with troll-women, men on the Hel-road with the sky splitting apart just as the stanza does.⁴² These structural choices intensify the pace of the poem, reflecting the chaos of war and the destruction wrought by Ragnarøk (referred to by Abram as the ‘Great Acceleration’), acting out multiple actions at the same time.⁴³ It would make sense, then, that the same pattern plays out with the Garmr refrain that gets repeated in the middle of all this chaos and describes not just one being but two.

The most prominent argument in support of Garmr being a dog is the use of the verb ‘geyja’, most scholars on either side of the debate acknowledging that this is a term primarily used of dogs and not wolves.⁴⁴ This chapter will return to the question of the exact meaning of the verb and the function it serves in the poem later, but for now it is sufficient to note that of 47 unique uses of the verb ‘geyja’ with its various spellings and conjugations observed across the corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic texts, 35 refer to sounds made by dogs, 3 by dog-headed men (cynocephali), 6 by men (used to mean insulting, cursing, or blaspheming), 1 by demons, and 2 by the wind (referred to using canine kennings) (Appendix F).⁴⁵ Of all non-human animals, then, this sound is made exclusively by dogs. There is a case to be made that ‘geyja’ is nonetheless a necessary choice to meet the formal requirements of the poem, alliterating with

⁴¹ Ibid., 50 (p. 304).

⁴² Ibid., 51.

⁴³ Abram, *Evergreen Ash*, p. 152.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar*, I, p. 337; Boer, ‘Kritik von Völuspá’, p. 329; Anders Hultgård, *The End of the World in Scandinavian Mythology: A Comparative Perspective on Ragnarök* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 58.

⁴⁵ ‘Unique’ uses mean that repetitions of the same passages or verses across different texts are counted as a single entry.

‘Garmr’ and ‘Gnipahelli’, and Nordal argues that it is a reasonable compromise since ‘the sounds of wolves and dogs are similar as the species are related’.⁴⁶ This is a logical argument, but somewhat undermined by the fact that the wide lexicon of canid vocalisations includes numerous other verbs that would fit the alliterative scheme just as well, including ‘gala’, ‘gnísta’, ‘gnǫllra’, and ‘grenja’, all four terms having a similarly ambiguous semantic sense as ‘geyja’. ‘Grenja’ in particular, potentially translatable as ‘howl’, has the perfect syllabic structure to suit the metre of the line and is used at least thirteen times in reference to berserkers (figures who are often compared to wolves) and in at least two sources to describe the sound of wolves themselves. The chivalric *Hektors saga* mentions men who ‘greniudu sem vargar’ (‘howled like wolves’) and Snorri’s *Gylfaginning* uses the verb to describe the howling of the wolf Fenrir himself when he is being bound.⁴⁷

Moreover, if we are to understand Garmr as merely another name for a wolf, it could have been replaced with one of several other names. *Skáldskaparmál*, for instance, lists ‘úlfr’ and ‘ylgr’ among its synonymous *heitir* for wolves. Both terms would alliterate with forms of ‘emja’, probably a howling sound made by wolves in a verse in *Vǫlsunga saga* and *Atlamál in Grænlensku*, and ‘ýla’, a similar sound found related to wolves in at least seven sources.⁴⁸ The ‘emja’ verse is a particularly interesting case, part of a narrative where Glaumvǫr dreams of a spear around which ‘emjuðu úlfar | á endum báðum’ (‘wolves howled at both ends’).⁴⁹ When Glaumvǫr wakes up, her husband Gunnarr interprets the dream as follows:

Rakkar þar renna,
ráðask mjök geyja,
opt verðr glaumr hunda
fyr geira flaugun.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Nordal, *Vǫluspá*, p. 86. See also Hultgård, *The End of the World*, p. 58.

⁴⁷ *Hektors saga*, in *LMIR*, I, pp. 79–186 (p. 135). Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ *Vǫlsunga saga*, p. 78. *Atlamál in Grænlensku* 24 (*Eddk*, II, p. 387).

⁴⁹ *Atlamál in Grænlensku* 24 (*Eddk*, II, p. 387).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Dogs run there, begin to *geyja* greatly; often the din of dogs comes before the flight of spears. This is a good example where a single text assigns the sound ‘emja’ to wolves and ‘geyja’ to dogs. At first glance, this exchange does seem to be making the case that dogs and wolves, or at least the sounds they make, were considered similar enough to be confused for each other by medieval Icelanders. While this may be the case on a textual level, sub-textually the audience of the poem is meant to understand that Gunnarr is wrong, knowing that wolfish treachery awaits him, and the poem thus cleverly uses the two different verbs to achieve this. Dogs and wolves make similar enough sounds for one to be mistaken for the other, but different enough that the audience can recognise the fallacy of Gunnarr’s interpretation.

Returning to the alliterative potential of ‘úlfr’, ‘ylgr’, ‘emja’, and ‘ýla’, the complication here would of course be ‘Gnipahellir’ but, as will be discussed in greater detail below, this location is only attested in this *Völuspá* stanza and in Snorri’s adaptation of it in *Gylfaginning*, so the composer of *Völuspá* could have chosen to omit it too. In any case, the fact that *both* Garmr and ‘geyja’ are words elsewhere used almost exclusively for dogs does suggest that attention is deliberately being drawn to this particular species, rather than the terms merely being used for alliterative convenience. Even if Garmr was meant to be a wolf, the use of the verb ‘geyja’ would suggest a deliberate depiction of a dog side to his identity, one that is key to understanding his role in the poem, as this chapter will argue. Nordal comments that ‘the very picture of Fenrir bound before the entrance of the cave has called forth a picture of a watchdog in the poet’s mind and governed the use of the name *Garmr* and the verb *geyja*’.⁵¹ Whatever the exact species identity of Garmr, then, it is useful to consider what exactly his dog side contributes to his depiction and his role in the poem. This chapter will therefore turn to exploring the comparable roles played by other dogs in Old Norse-Icelandic literature. First,

⁵¹ Nordal, *Völuspá*, p. 86.

however, it is useful to look more closely at the verb ‘geyja’ and to establish an understanding of the range of vocalisations that are central to these roles.

Garmr and Dog Sounds

A few disparate attempts have been made to determine the etymology of Garmr’s name. Andrew Orchard relates the hound to the alternative meaning of ‘garmr’ as ‘rag’, as listed by Cleasby-Vigfússon and Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, although the latter traces this usage to the seventeenth century.⁵² There has been no consensus, however, about why the hound might be named after rags. Bruce Lincoln, on the other hand, relates Garmr’s name to the sound he makes, arguing that the name is derived from the Proto-Indo-European **gher-*, ‘an onomatopoeic [*sic*] formation typically used for rough, hoarse sounds (including animal noises), represented in Germanic, *inter alia*, by Old English *gierman*, “to roar, howl,” and *grimetan*, “to rage, roar”’.⁵³ ‘The Indo-European hellhound’, Lincoln thus concludes, ‘had a name which was drawn from the sound of his snarl or growl’.⁵⁴ While Lincoln’s article has received some criticism, particularly in attempting to etymologically relate Garmr to the Greek Kerberos (discussed below), connecting the name to the noise has generally found favour among scholars. Ferdinand Holthausen and Jan de Vries both relate ‘garmr’ to the Norwegian/Swedish ‘garma’ and ‘gorma’, meaning ‘brüllen’, ‘schreien’, or ‘lärmén’, all terms

⁵² Andrew Orchard, *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (Cassell, 1998), p. 52. Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 192. Ásgeir Magnússon, *Íslensk Orðsifjabók* (Orðabók Háskólans, 1989), p. 231.

⁵³ Lincoln, ‘The Hellhound’, p. 277.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

denoting noises like screaming or roaring.⁵⁵ Ursula Dronke similarly concludes that Garmr was ‘named probably for the sound of his deep howling bark’.⁵⁶

Even if the sound Garmr makes is in fact central to his identity, what exactly that sound is remains unclear. There is little consistency in the sounds referenced by the scholars above, which include roaring, howling, snarling, growling, screaming, and Dronke’s ambiguous ‘deep howling bark’. This brings us back to the question of the meaning of the verb ‘geyja’, but in order to narrow down its meaning, one must first understand the range of vocalisations that dogs are capable of. It has been observed that dogs emit a similar yet distinct range of vocalisations compared to other wild canids, including wolves. As Marcello Siniscalchi and co-authors suggest, this is very likely a result of the domestication process of dogs and their ‘adaptation to the human social environment. [...] Dogs developed, therefore, novel forms of the pre-existing vocalizations, which acquired different acoustic and functional characteristics, facilitating their communication with humans.’⁵⁷ While it is true that medieval Icelanders may have never heard actual wolves, the fact that there are distinct terms used for dog vocalisations and for wolf ones (‘geyja’, for instance, used numerous times for dogs but never wolves, and ‘emja’ used for wolves but never dogs) does suggest a possible awareness of the differences in sounds discussed below.

The divergence between dogs and other canids is most pronounced in the case of the bark, the most common dog vocalisation and the one dogs are best known for. Barks are ‘short, explosive, and repetitive signals, with a highly variable acoustic structure (dominant frequency

⁵⁵ Holthausen, *Vergleichendes und etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 80. de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 156. See also Gottfried Lorenz, *Snorri Sturluson. Gylfaginning: Texte, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), p. 487.

⁵⁶ Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, II, p. 144.

⁵⁷ Marcello Siniscalchi, Serenella d’Ingeo, Michele Minunno, and Angelo Quaranta, ‘Communication in Dogs’, *Animals*, 8.8 (2018), p. 8.

range between 160 and 2630 Hz), different between breeds and even between individuals'.⁵⁸ It has been noted that wolves rarely bark, 'with barks comprising only 2.3% of all vocalizations', while dogs bark much more frequently.⁵⁹ The barking of dogs generally has a higher duration and repetition rate than wolves, as the domestic dog 'will often bark cyclically in a "sing-song" manner, one bark following another until a train of barks results'.⁶⁰ Dog breeds that are genetically closer to wolves like Shar-pei, Chow-Chow or Basenji moreover have a much lower propensity to bark.⁶¹ Additionally, wolves bark primarily in two contexts, 'an alert and a territorial context', while dogs bark in 'virtually every behavioural context'.⁶² It is possible to interpret the meaning of different dog barks in different behavioural contexts by various factors, according to canine psychologist Stanley Coren, including 'the pitch of the sound; the duration of the sound; and the frequency or repetition rate of the sounds'.⁶³ Different barks have therefore been observed to signify alarm, greeting, loneliness, annoyance, threat, surprise, pleasure, play, and excitement.⁶⁴ Across many of these categories, barking seems to most commonly be an instinctive reaction to the approach of other animals or humans, especially unfamiliar ones. Coren goes so far as to suggest that the tendency of dogs to bark at strangers could have been a key motivation for the domestication of dogs and their inclusion in human households'.⁶⁵ As Yin explains, 'humans could have specifically selected dogs that barked

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁹ Sophia Yin, 'A New Perspective of Barking in Dogs (*Canis familiaris*)', *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 116.2 (2002), pp. 189–93 (p. 189).

⁶⁰ Stanley Coren, *How to Speak Dog: Mastering the Art of Dog-Human Communication* (Simon & Schuster, 2005), pp. 68–69. J. A. Cohen and M. W. Fox, 'Vocalizations in Wild Canids and Possible Effects of Domestication', *Behavioural Processes*, 1 (1976), pp. 77–92 (p. 82).

⁶¹ Siniscalchi and others, 'Communication in Dogs', p. 9.

⁶² Yin, 'A New Perspective of Barking', p. 189.

⁶³ Coren, *How to Speak Dog*, p. 74. Cohen and Fox similarly divide sound types by 'sound duration, separation time between consecutive sounds, principle frequencies, cyclicity, and context' ('Vocalizations in Wild Canids', p. 77).

⁶⁴ Coren, *How to Speak Dog*, pp. 79–83. See also Table I in Cohen and Fox, 'Vocalizations in Wild Canids', p. 79.

⁶⁵ Coren, *How to Speak Dog*, pp. 67–68.

more, for instance, as an alert function, or barking dogs could have increased through indirect selection.’⁶⁶

Howling, on the other hand, is the sound most commonly associated with wolves, for whom it primarily serves a dual function: ‘(1) the localisation and cohesion of pack members and (2) maintaining the territory and avoiding contact with unknown individuals’.⁶⁷ Like barking for dogs, howling for wolves ‘may be at a low threshold [of intensity] and be evoked in a variety of different contexts’.⁶⁸ Fanni Lehoczki and co-authors have hypothesised that the loss of a pack structure for many modern domestic dogs meant that howling ‘lost its communicative function in the human social niche, and probably a repertoire of exaggerated and diversified barks took its place in the communicative system of dogs’.⁶⁹ Domestic dogs do, nevertheless, howl in certain circumstances. Like wolves, howling in dogs appears to serve the function of announcing their presence to others, sometimes as a mark of territory and at other times as a signal of isolation and loneliness.⁷⁰ A similar function is performed by baying, a more melodious sound that is particularly made by hounds while tracking, used to alert other dogs and humans to the location of their quarry.⁷¹ Baying might thus have been a very familiar sound in those medieval societies where dogs were widely used in the hunt. Significantly, however, Lehoczki and co-authors found that older dogs of more ‘ancient’ breeds respond to howls more frequently than ‘modern’ breeds created approximately in the last two centuries,

⁶⁶ Yin, ‘A New Perspective of Barking’, p. 190.

⁶⁷ Fanni Lehoczki, Attila Andics, Arik Kershenbaum, Enikő Kubinyi, Daniela Passilongo, Holly Root-Gutteridge, Friederike Range, Vicente Palacios Sánchez, Lori Schmidt, Simon W. Townsend, Stuart K. Watson, and Tamás Faragó, ‘Genetic Distance from Wolves Affects Family Dogs’ Reactions towards Howls’, *Communications Biology*, 6 (2023), pp. 1–10 (p. 2).

⁶⁸ Cohen and Fox, ‘Vocalizations in Wild Canids’, p. 89.

⁶⁹ Lehoczki and others, ‘Genetic Distance from Wolves’, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Coren, *How to Speak Dog*, pp. 85–87.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

so it is possible that dogs in the Viking and Middle Ages would have been more prone to howling than we are used to today.

Growling or snarling is the dog sound most commonly associated with aggression, low-pitched vocalizations ‘mainly produced during agnostic interactions as a warning or threatening signal or during play interactions’.⁷² As a warning signal, growling is often accompanied by baring of the teeth, a visual cue used by a number of dogs in Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Other common canine vocalisations include whimpering, which usually signifies submission, fear, or terror; moaning, signifying anticipation or pleasure; yelping, signifying pain or fear; screaming, signifying extreme distress; panting, signifying stress or physiological reaction to heat; and sighing, signifying contentment or disappointment.⁷³ Of course, all these sounds and their potential meanings do vary across different breeds and individual animals, and in different contexts. It is likely that dogs in the Middle Ages had a similar range of vocalisations, but some more or less pronounced due to selective breeding in the intervening centuries. Although medieval writers may not have interpreted these vocalisations in the same ways as we do today, it is nevertheless made clear throughout this thesis that Old Norse-Icelandic texts display some intimate knowledge of dog behaviours. It is therefore worth exploring whether such knowledge extends to canine communication.

There is an equally wide lexicon of dog vocalisations in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus (Appendices F and G). In all the sources that have been considered, the most frequent term is the verb ‘geyja’ with 35 unique occurrences referring specifically to dogs, three to cynocephali, and two used alongside dogs in kennings for the wind. There are five further occurrences of the related noun ‘gauð’, three times used for dogs and twice for cynocephali. Other terms include ‘grenja’ (twice for dogs, once for demons in the form of dogs, and three times for

⁷² Siniscalchi and others, ‘Communication in Dogs’, p. 9.

⁷³ Coren, *How to Speak Dog*, pp. 89–96.

berserkers vocalising like dogs), ‘gnǫllra’ (five times, including once spelt alternatively as ‘gnǫllta’), ‘ýla’ (once for dogs, four times for men or demons like dogs), ‘gala’ (four times for dogs, once for a demon in dog-form), ‘gjǫllta’ or ‘gelta’ (three times), and ‘gnísta’ (twice, possibly three times). Occasionally, dog sounds are described in more human terms, for instance twice using the phrase ‘kvað við’ and three times using phrases with ‘láta’.

Unfortunately, there appears to be little consistency in the use of most of these terms in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus. ‘Grenja’ is used most frequently for berserkers, who are often compared to dogs and/or wolves, and once for demons in the form of dogs, and might therefore be translated as howling, or perhaps as barking or screaming. The term is used several times to refer to the sound made by lions, which one might assume to be roaring; however, in *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, a troll-woman hears a lion ‘illiliga grenia’ (‘terribly *grenja*’) but mistakes it for a dog, so perhaps growling might be more apt.⁷⁴ In other sources, the sound is made by men and women of various ranks and dispositions, demons, bears, a giantess, a dwarf, and several swords. Zoëga and Cleasby-Vigfússon interpret the verb as ‘to howl, bellow’, and Fritzner as ‘udstøde en rædsom lyd’ (‘to let out a horrible sound’).⁷⁵ Fritzner’s translation seems to be the most accurate here and ‘grenja’ might therefore be a flexible term for a loud, unpleasant, or fearsome noise to be interpreted more specifically according to context. The term ‘ýla’ is just as widespread in its use by wolves, humans, demons, a giant, and a lion. It is used once directly in relation to dogs, heard in the distance, as well as three times by men and once by demons who all sound like dogs. That being said, the use of ‘ýla’ appears to be somewhat more consistent across these different agents, and Zoëga, Cleasby-Vigfússon, and Fritzner all interpret it as howling.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, p. 148.

⁷⁵ Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary*, p. 172. Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 214. Fritzner, *Ordbog*, I, p. 640.

⁷⁶ Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary*, p. 507. Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 727. Fritzner, *Ordbog*, III, p. 997.

‘Gnöllra’ is less common, used almost exclusively with dogs except for one use with hawks. When this sound is made by dogs, three times it is in the throes of grief, which might call for howling or screaming. On one occasion, it is made by a dog leaping at a boar and on another by dogs chasing a sinful monk, in both cases barking or baying perhaps being more suitable. The verbs ‘gelta’ and ‘gjöllta’ are possibly related words that are used interchangeably in a mocking verse by the men of Hrafnagil, transcribed as the former in *Sturlunga saga* and as the latter in *Guðmundar saga biskups*.⁷⁷ Elsewhere, cynocephali are said to ‘gjöllta’ in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* and tracking dogs ‘gelta’ at escaping men in the post-medieval life of Bishop Jón Arason, both uses suggesting barking.⁷⁸ On both occasions where ‘gnísta’ is directly used with dogs, it is also at times of mourning. Unlike ‘gnöllra’, ‘gnísta’ is very extensively used elsewhere by a wide range of agents, from men to demons, fire to frost. Although never with reference to dogs, ‘gnísta’ is often paired with ‘tønnum’ to suggest the gnashing of teeth or perhaps bared teeth, and so the sound might best be translated as ‘gnashing’ or ‘growling’, not too different in pitch and duration from the sound of a crackling fire.⁷⁹

‘Gala’ is used by a Hel-hound in *Baldrs draumar*, a group of hounds on a hunt, a dog chasing a saint, and a demon in the form of a dog. In one text, the sound of church bells is also compared to a screeching crow and a *gaulandi* dog. This is a term most frequently associated with the crowing of cocks, and must thus be understood as another generic sound term to be translated according to context when referring to dogs. The same goes for verbs like ‘kvað’ and ‘láta’, the former typically signifying human speech and the latter a verb with a huge range of meanings from speaking and making noises to placing, forsaking, or causing something.

⁷⁷ *Sturlunga saga*, II, p. 73. *Biskupa sögur*, I, p. 504.

⁷⁸ *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, in *FornNorð*, II, pp. 311–55 (p. 336). *Biskupa sögur*, II, p. 355.

⁷⁹ These are both suggestions made in Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary*, p. 168; Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 206; and Fritzner, *Ordbog*, I, p. 617.

Most of these terms, then, are nonspecific to dogs, but are instead borrowed from a wider lexicon of sounds and adapted to dogs in different contexts. The one major exception is the verb ‘geyja’. While writers appear to be content with borrowing words for other vocalisations, ‘geyja’ appears to refer to a sound so frequent but at the same time so unique to dogs that it required its own term. Indeed, the verb ‘geyja’ often seems to be positioned as central to the identity of dogs. Most explicitly, the anonymous skaldic verse *Málsháttakvæði* contains the line ‘gagarr er skaptr, þvít geyja skal’ (‘a dog is made to *geyja*’).⁸⁰ In the hagiography *Matheus saga postola*, paradise is described as a place where ‘er eigi hunda gauþ ne ulfa þytr, ne grunion enna oorgo dyra’ (‘there is neither *gauþ* of dogs nor howling of wolves, not the roaring of the fierce animal (the lion)’).⁸¹ The canine side of cynocephali, dog-headed men, is usually defined by this same sound, as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4. In several instances, men are able to identify dogs from afar by this sound, King Gauti in *Gautreks saga* following ‘hundsgá’ and a handmaiden following ‘hunda gauð’ out of forests to human society, and Earl Rognvaldr’s attackers finding his hiding-place because they heard that his ‘rakki gó’.⁸² It would make sense, then, for ‘geyja’ to refer to barking, the sound most commonly and uniquely associated with dogs and the sound central to the canine refrain in the background of Old Norse-Icelandic texts.

Barking would seem to be an appropriate translation for most occurrences of the verb ‘geyja’. Three dogs *geyja* when hunting, one *geyr* at men passing by, and another tracking hound *geyr* up at a man hiding in a tree.⁸³ A king compares striking a man to beating a dog

⁸⁰ *Málsháttakvæði*, ed. by Roberta Frank, in *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, ed. by Gade and Marold, pp. 1213–43 (p. 1219). ‘Gagarr’ is an extremely rare poetical term used for dogs.

⁸¹ *PostSögur*, p. 816.

⁸² *Gautreks saga*, p. 4. *Strengleikar*, p. 48. *Orkneyinga saga*, p. 74.

⁸³ Svartr á Hofstöðum, *Skaufhala bálkr*, p. 972. ‘Jóhannes saga gullmanns: The Icelandic Legend of the Hairy Anchorite’, ed. and trans. by Marianne Kalinke, in *Beatus Vir: Studies in Early English and Norse Manuscripts in Memory of Phillip Pulsiano*, ed. by A. N. Doane and Kirsten Wolf (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp. 175–228 (p. 216). *Erex saga*, ed. and trans. by Marianne Kalinke, in *Norse*

when it *geyr* too loud.⁸⁴ A dog who is made king and given magical powers of communication is said to *geyja* two words and speak the third, and it is difficult to imagine any sound with a higher duration than a bark fitting this pattern.⁸⁵ Additionally, this verb tends not to be used in situations when one would not expect barking, such as when a dog is grieving or as it is dying and would be more likely to whine, scream, or howl.

‘Geyja’ is most frequently used in situations where household dogs or guard dogs react to the approach of strangers, intruders, or attackers, as in examples discussed in chapter 1. In many of these cases, the approaching parties are rather far away when the dog starts vocalising, often entirely out of sight, so a low-pitch, low-volume reaction like growling would be entirely ineffective and barking would be the most appropriate response. There is furthermore an expression used in a number of Christian texts, such as in the translated homilies of Gregory the Great, that compares bad priests to ‘ðumbir (hun)ðar oc mego eigi gøia’ (‘dumb dogs that cannot *geyja*’).⁸⁶ This expression is taken from the Biblical Book of Isaiah where it is said, ‘Speculatores eius caeci omnes, nescierunt universi: canes muti non valentes latrare, videntes vana, dormientes, et amantes somnia’ (‘His watchmen are all blind, they are all ignorant: dumb dogs not able to bark, seeing vain things, sleeping and loving dreams’).⁸⁷ The expression is thus a reference to the important role of dogs in keeping guard, a role for which their bark is their most valuable asset. These observations might then be applied to Garmr. If ‘geyja’ is commonly applied to guard dogs barking at signs of impending danger, a similar role might be

Romance, vol. II, *Knights of the Round Table*, ed. by Marianne Kalinke (Brewer, 1999), pp. 217–65 (p. 224). *HeilSögur*, I, p. 570. *Magnúss saga skemmri*, p. 314.

⁸⁴ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 82.

⁸⁵ *Hákonar saga góða*, in *Hmskr*, I, pp. 150–97 (p. 164).

⁸⁶ Þorvaldur Bjarnarson, ed., *Leifar: forna kristinna fræða íslenzkra: Codex Arna-Magnæanus 677 4^{to}*, ed. by Þorvaldur Bjarnarson (Hagerup, 1878), pp. 36–47 (p. 38). This is repeated in the statutes of Archbishop Eilífr (‘Skipan Eilífs erkibiskups í Niðarósi hin þriðja (1 September 1327)’, in *Diplomatarium Islandicum. Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn, sem hefir inni að halda bréf og gjörninga, dóma og máldaga, og aðrar skrár; er snerta Ísland eða Íslenzka menn*, vol. II, 1253–1350, ed. by Jón Þorkelsson (Møller, 1893), pp. 623–33 (p. 625)) and in *Thomas saga erkibyskups* (p. 356).

⁸⁷ Isaiah 56.10 (Vulgate, p. 477).

suggested for the *Völuspá* hound. In that case, a fruitful comparison might be drawn between Garmr and other guard dogs of Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

Chapter 1 earlier demonstrated the important role played by guard dogs across Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Most of the dogs in that section were tasked with guarding specific individuals, but most also appear to perform this function within particular spaces. Even without selective breeding, canids are naturally territorial animals. Wolf packs, for instance, are comprised of ‘tight, territorial social groups’ and will often fight to the death to protect their defined territory.⁸⁸ It appears that both wild and domestic dogs have similar instincts. At around 6 to 7 weeks of age, some puppies have been shown to go through a period of development termed ‘localization’, in which the puppy ‘becomes strongly attached to a place and is seriously upset if he is moved away from it.’⁸⁹ Furthermore, perhaps as a result of such localization, ‘many dogs display a tendency to react aggressively to unfamiliar individuals (human and canine), especially within their home ranges.’⁹⁰ Scientists have termed this ‘territorial aggression’ or, alternatively, ‘protective aggression’ since such aggression might be extended to protect not just a dog’s home or physical territory, but also ‘the owner, children, or other animals, regardless of whether or not they are in their “territory”’.⁹¹ This has made dogs ideal for guarding houses and the people within them. Equally so does it make them ideal for

⁸⁸ L. David Mech and Luigi Boitani, ‘Wolf Social Ecology’, in *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*, ed. by L. David Mech and Luigi Boitani (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 1–34 (pp. 2 and 5).

⁸⁹ Scott and Fuller, *Genetics and Social Behavior*, p. 112.

⁹⁰ James Serpell, Deborah Duffy, and J. Andrew Jagoe, ‘Becoming a Dog: Early Experience and the Development of Behaviour’, in *The Domestic Dog*, ed. by Serpell, pp. 93–117 (p. 102).

⁹¹ See Joaquín Pérez-Guisado and Andrés Muñoz-Serrano, ‘Factors Linked to Territorial Aggression in Dogs’, *Journal of Animal and Veterinary Advances*, 8 (2009), pp. 1412–18; Peter Borchelt, ‘Aggressive Behavior of Dogs Kept as Companion Animals: Classification and Influence of Sex, Reproductive Status and Breed’, *Applied Animal Ethology*, 10 (1983), pp. 45–61 (p. 57). Others favour more straightforward terms like ‘stranger-directed aggression’ to ‘avoid inferences about the dog’s emotional state’: Stephen Zawistowski and Pamela Reid, ‘Dogs in Today’s Society: The Role of Applied Animal Behavior’ in *The Domestic Dog*, ed. by Serpell, pp. 227–44 (p. 236).

guarding the borders between worlds, and this chapter will now consider four texts where this might be the case: *Gesta Danorum*, *Fjölsvinnsmál*, *Skírnismál*, and *Baldrs draumar*.

Mythological Guard Dogs

Gesta Danorum

Around the year 1208, on the commission of Archbishop Absalon of Lund, the Danish author and historian Saxo Grammaticus completed his work of Danish history entitled *Gesta Danorum*. Saxo depends on a wide range of sources and inspirations for his work, from classical historians and poets to first-hand accounts of oral tradition by visitors at Lund.⁹² Within his historical work, Saxo includes an array of legendary material, which will be discussed in the next chapter, but he also frequently adapts material from Old Norse-Icelandic mythology. The eighth book of *Gesta Danorum*, for instance, tells of the journey of King Gorm and his men with their guide Thorkil to the land of the giant Geiruthus. Geiruthus is likely an adaptation of the *jötunn* Geirrǫðr, slain by Þórr in Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál*.⁹³ Although Gorm and his men are able to sail to this land, it is clear that it lies in a different world, for

iter omni refertum periculo ac pene mortalibus inuium ferebatur. Ambitorem namque terrarum Oceanum nauigandum, solem postponendum ac sydera, sub Chao peregrinandum ac demum in loca lucis expertia iugibusque tenebris obnoxia transeundum expertorum assertionem constabat.⁹⁴

the journey was fraught with danger and near death. For according to those who had experienced it, one had to sail across the ocean around the world, setting the sun and stars behind you, travelling under the realm of night, and finally passing into the places subject to perpetual darkness without light.

⁹² See *Gesta Danorum*, I, pp. xxx–xxxix and xli–l. On Danish and Norse sources, see Alex Olrik, *Kilderne til Saxses Oldhistorie: en literaturhistorisk undersøgelse*, 2 vols (Wroblewski, 1892–94).

⁹³ Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, pp. 24–25.

⁹⁴ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 598.

After navigating the ocean and its many dangers, the travellers reach a river traversed by an ‘aureo ponte’ (‘golden bridge’) by which, they are warned, ‘humana a monstrosus rerum secreuisse naturam nec mortalibus ultra fas esse uestigiis’ (‘humanity is separated from monstrous things, and no mortal is permitted to step beyond it’).⁹⁵ On the other side of the river, they come across a dark and frightful town filled with shapeless spirits and bloodless monsters, soot, spikes, snakes, and a terrible stench.⁹⁶ In the middle of the main hall, they finally find the broken bodies of Geiruthus himself and his three daughters, all slain by Þórr.⁹⁷ The women’s lifeless bodies are, however, suddenly animated and launch a furious attack against the men when Thorkil attempts to steal a beautiful cloak from the hall.⁹⁸

Many different classical and medieval traditions can be observed in Saxo’s description of the journey to this hall. The men’s sea voyage is reminiscent of similar voyages by classical heroes like Odysseus and Aeneas, the *Gesta Danorum*’s ocean clearly borrowing its dangers from these older stories. The golden bridge could be compared to the Gjallarbrú in *Gylfaginning*, ‘þøkð lýsigulli’ (‘thatched with bright gold’), which Hermóðr must cross on his way into Hel.⁹⁹ With its snakes and stench, the hall takes on aspects of a Christian hell, while the reanimated corpses turn it into a burial-mound battle with undead enemies. All these different influences make it difficult to pin down Geiruthus’ hall geographically, but it is at the very least apparent that this is a world different from our own. However, like our own world and many others, this world is protected by dogs. It is said of the desolate town that

[e]ximie ferocitatis canes tuentes aditum pre foribus excubare conspecti. Quibus Thorkillus cornu abdomine illitum collambendum obiiciens incitatissimam rabiem paruula mitigauit impensa.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Ibid., I, p. 602.

⁹⁶ Ibid., I, p. 606.

⁹⁷ Ibid., I, p. 608.

⁹⁸ Ibid., I, p. 610.

⁹⁹ Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 606.

dogs of exceptional ferocity were seen guarding access to the gate. But with a horn smeared with fat for them to lick, Thorkil appeased their furious rage at little cost.

As usual, it is dogs, because of their liminality, that are best suited to stand at the entrance, regulating access to the town and hall. Of ‘*eximie ferocitatis*’ (‘exceptional ferocity’) though they may be, these dogs are very easy to bypass. All it takes is the gift of some food, in this case a horn smeared with fat. It does make sense that food is the solution, central as it is to the domestication of dogs, as discussed in chapter 1. Icelandic law codes also reflect the fact that the provision of food is what separates dogs from wolves. *Grágás*, for instance, appears to define the owner of a dog as the person who feeds it, stating:

Ef hundr jømr ifor með manne oc biðr hann mat gefa honum eða syslir vm hann er þeir coma til húss. þa abyrgiz hann hund þótt anar eigi. en eigi ef hann scriptir ser ecki af.¹⁰¹

If a dog joins a man on a journey and he asks for food for it or if he takes care of it when they come to a house, then he takes responsibility for the dog even if another owns it, but not if he does not acknowledge it.

The *Jónsbók* law code that succeeded *Grágás* in 1281 similarly states that a man takes responsibility for a dog and its actions if he feeds it.¹⁰² Dogs are thus the perfect animals to suit such a narrative as they are wild enough to serve as dangerous guards, but nevertheless domesticated enough that they can be controlled and bypassed without the need to physically confront or kill them.

Just like *Völuspá*, this narrative leaves many questions open about these dogs. Whose dogs are they? And if they are guards, whom or what exactly are they guarding? Their position at the gate suggests that the dogs perhaps belong to Geiruthus. Although he was killed long before these events, it is an extremely common medieval trope for dogs to stay loyal to their companions after their deaths, as exemplified by Vígi mourning in the first chapter.¹⁰³ Perhaps the dogs are guarding the body of their departed companion, or perhaps they are protecting the

¹⁰¹ *Grágás*, II, p. 188.

¹⁰² *Jónsbók*, p. 74.

¹⁰³ Canine loyalty after death is, for instance, a popular bestiary trope, such as in Aberdeen Univ. Lib. MS 24, fols 18^r–19^v.

treasures that lie inside the hall. If the latter is the case, considering the treasures are cursed, the dogs appear to perform a secondary role of protecting outsiders from the dangers within. Abandoning their duties enables a series of events that leads to the rise of the deadly undead inside the hall. Whoever their owner might be and whatever their real function, the mere presence of exceptionally ferocious dogs acts as a warning of the dangers that might follow.

Fjölsvinnsmál

The poem *Fjölsvinnsmál*, as mentioned earlier, recounts the quest of Svipdagr to meet his beloved Menglǫð, a quest that can also be thought of as traversing multiple worlds. Svipdagr's journey is not described in any detail in *Fjölsvinnsmál* itself, but can be pieced together from another poem, *Grógaldr*, in which Svipdagr raises his mother Gróa from the dead to receive advice for his journey to a place 'er kvæmtki veit' ('which no one knows how to get to').¹⁰⁴ Gróa teaches her son nine spells that, as Davidson explains, give 'a fairly vivid picture of the path which Svipdagr is to take':

He will encounter hostility on it; enemies will lie in wait for him, some of them actually specified as the dead. [...] His path will lie over wild rivers, said to flow out from Hel itself, over a stormy sea, and over high mountains where the cold is terrible; and always darkness may overtake him suddenly.¹⁰⁵

Svipdagr's journey, then, is quite similar to Gorm and Thorkil's in *Gesta Danorum*. It even has elements of a journey to the land of the dead in its reference, for instance, to the rivers of Hel and to the 'niflvegr' ('path of darkness', compared by Hjalmar Falk to 'helvegr', the 'Hel-road') where he might encounter a 'dauð kona' ('dead woman').¹⁰⁶ And like the hall of Geiruthus, Menglǫð's hall is guarded by dogs, here named Gífr and Geri.

¹⁰⁴ *Grógaldr* 3 (*Eddk*, II, p. 437).

¹⁰⁵ Hilda Roderick Ellis Davidson, *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature* (Greenwood, 1968), p. 176.

¹⁰⁶ *Grógaldr* 8 and 13 (*Eddk*, II, pp. 438–39). Hjalmar Falk, 'Om Svipdagsmál', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 9 (1893), pp. 311–62 (p. 356). See also Davidson, *The Road to Hel*, pp. 177–78.

Gífr and Geri are said to be particularly ideal guards because of their alternating sleep schedules, such that one of them is always awake. As Fjölsviðr explains,

Missvefi mikit
var þeim mjök lagit,
síðan þeim var varzla vituð.
Annarr of nætr sefr
en annarr of daga,
ok kemsk þá vætr ef þá kom.¹⁰⁷

They sleep very differently, for it was so fixed when the guard was given to them, that one sleeps by night and the other by day, so that no man may ever enter.

The sleep cycle of dogs is a characteristic that makes them particularly good nocturnal guards as, according to Adams and Johnson, they

have different sleep–wake cycles from people. Urban dogs have previously been shown to have approximately three sleep–wake cycles per hour during the night [...]. Although people may experience various problems with shift-work and suffer from a lack of vigilance and a disruption to their circadian rhythms, dogs may be able to cope with the demands of working at times which humans would regard as disruptive.¹⁰⁸

This explains why dogs in the sagas are so often the ones to raise an alarm when they sense danger under the cover of darkness. This is the case with Sámr in *Njáls saga*, Þorkell's dog in *Ljósvetninga saga*, and Flóki in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, as well as with the dog Gramr of the legendary *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* growling when the brothers Þorsteinn and Þórir approach him at night (more on Gramr in the next chapter).¹⁰⁹ Although Gunnarr is killed in the *Njáls saga* ambush and Gramr's supernatural companion Fullafli is killed the next morning, the dogs' warnings ensure that they are at least not killed dishonourably in their sleep.

Like in *Gesta Danorum*, food is another important part of Svipdagr's plan to get past the two dogs. He asks the watchman Fjölsviðr,

¹⁰⁷ *Fjölsvinnsmál* 16 (*Eddk*, II, p. 444).

¹⁰⁸ G. J. Adams and K. G. Johnson, 'Guard Dogs: Sleep, Work and the Behavioural Responses to People and Other Stimuli', *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 46 (1995), pp. 103–15 (p. 104). See also a similar study in Adams and Johnson, 'Sleep–Wake Cycles and Other Night-Time Behaviours of the Domestic Dog *Canis familiaris*', *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 36 (1993), pp. 233–48.

¹⁰⁹ *Brennu-Njáls saga*, pp. 185–86. *Ljósvetninga saga*, p. 51. *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, p. 166. *Þorsteins saga*, p. 218.

Segðu mér þat, Fjolsviðr,
 [...]
 hvárt sé matar nokkut
 þat er menn hafi
 ok hlaupi inn meðan þeir eta.¹¹⁰

Tell me this, Fjolsviðr, if there is any food that men may have, so that they may run inside while [the dogs] eat.

Fjolsviðr reveals that there is indeed meat that would serve this function, wing-bones of the golden rooster Viðófnir, and several stanzas are now dedicated to the complex means by which Svipdagr might go about acquiring these bones. In the end, however, none of this is necessary as Fjolsviðr reveals that the one man who may pass through is Svipdagr himself, as Menglǫð is destined to be his wife. As soon as Svipdagr reveals his identity, ‘hundar fagna, | hús hefir upp lokizk’ (‘the dogs rejoice, the house has opened up’), revealing, it seems, an even stronger tie between the dogs and their physical space.¹¹¹ What is key here is once again the dogs’ intuition and their ability to recognise Svipdagr, Menglǫð’s destined husband, even though as far as we know they have never seen him before. It is this canine intuition, as well as that of the house itself, that the knowledgeable Fjolsviðr relies on as final evidence to judge Svipdagr and recommend his entry.

Skírnismál

The poem *Skírnismál* follows a very similar pattern, this time with Skírnir setting off on a journey to woo the giantess Gerðr, daughter of Gymir, on behalf of the god Freyr. Like *Fjolsvinnsámál* (if one were to consider it separate from *Grógaldur*), the poem does not describe Skírnir’s journey, but merely relates that he

reið í jötunheima til Gymisgarða. Þar váru hundar ólmir ok bundnir fyrir skíðgarðs hliði þess er um sal Gerðar var.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *Fjolsvinnsámál* 17 (*Eddk*, II, p. 444).

¹¹¹ *Fjolsvinnsámál* 44 (*Eddk*, II, p. 449).

¹¹² *Skírnismál* (*Eddk*, I, p. 382).

rode into Jötunheimr (the world of the giants) to the courts of Gymir. There were savage dogs bound before the gate of the fence which was around Gerðr's hall.

The house of Gymir and Gerðr is therefore explicitly situated in Jötunheimr, and to reach it Skírnir must cross between worlds, only to find dogs blocking his final path. Like Svipdagr, Skírnir finds someone to question, in his case a herdsman sitting on a nearby hill. When asked how Skírnir might get past 'greyjum Gymir' ('Gymir's bitches'), the herdsman responds:

“Hvárt ertu feigr
eða ertu fram genginn?
-- -- --
andspillis vanr
þú skalt æ vera
góðrar meyjar Gymis.”¹¹³

“Are you doomed to die or are you already dead? You will never have a conversation with Gymir's excellent daughter.”

The herdsman's claim that Skírnir may not enter the house unless he is approaching death is similar to the warning in *Gesta Danorum* that mortals may not cross the golden bridge, both implying a border between different worlds, a border that is guarded by dogs. The fact that these dogs are said to be bound, very specifically 'fyrir skíðgarðs hliði' (interpreted here as 'before the gate of the fence'), is significant in the context of Icelandic law. *Grágás* declares that if a man has an 'ólmr' dog,

þa skal hann bundin vera sva at hann tacæ eigi til manna þar er þeir fara leiðar sínar. Ef hundr er bundin firir bvre manz eða búð eða stío. til varðar. þa abyrgiz sa sec er iband honom gengr. oc sva þott fe gange iband honom oc abyrgiz eigi sa er hund á.¹¹⁴

then it is to be tied up so that it cannot reach anyone who passes by. If a dog is tied up to guard a man's pantry or booth or pen, then anyone who goes inside the length of its leash must take responsibility for himself, and likewise if livestock go inside the length of its leash, then the one who owns the dog is not responsible.

The law-code goes on to specify the appropriate length of a dog's leash and method of fastening it, as well as the consequences of different situations where a guard dog gets loose. The intricate detail of this section, as mentioned above, implies that guard dogs must have been common

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ *Grágás*, II, p. 187.

enough in Iceland that the law-codes thought it necessary to cover all possible eventualities. This is not to say that the composer of *Skírnismál* had *Grágás* or Icelandic law in mind when describing this scene, but it probably does reflect the lived everyday reality of Icelandic dog owners who had to take great care to make sure their animals were properly leashed. This reality is reflected in depictions of dogs across Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Very often, when dogs are introduced by humans, especially in hunting or battle scenes, they are said to be ‘loosed’ with variations of the term ‘leysa’. Even when the Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* imagines Hundingr serving his rival Helgi in Valhöll, Helgi orders him to ‘hunda binda’ (‘tie up the dogs’) before going to sleep.¹¹⁵ Hundingr being tasked to tie up the dogs at the end of the evening, among other domestic chores like fetching a foot-bath and kindling the fire, once again highlights the importance given by medieval Icelanders to ensuring that dogs are properly leashed, even in the afterlife.

Within this wider context, we might then reconsider the Garmr stanza of *Völuspá* and the question of the *freki*’s identity. Although there is no mention in the extant corpus outside of *Gylfaginning* of Garmr being bound like Fenrir and Loki, medieval Icelanders would not have found the idea of a dog being tied up unusual, nor of a dog being released from its leash posing a potential danger to humans.¹¹⁶ In *Skírnismál*, the dogs being leashed means they do not trouble Skírnir during his brief conversation with the herdsman, before Gerðr herself comes to greet him. These dogs thus appear to have less of a functional role here than in *Gesta Danorum* and *Fjölsvinnsmál*, to the extent that one might question why the poem mentions them at all. Based on the sheer number of examples discussed in this chapter, it might be argued that guard dogs were a significant stock image in such poetry that could be used to signal possible danger

¹¹⁵ *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 39 (*Eddk*, II, p. 279).

¹¹⁶ Kenneth Gershman, Jeffrey Sacks, and John Wright (‘Which Dogs Bite? A Case-Control Study of Risk Factors’, *Pediatrics*, 93.6 (1994), pp. 913–17) do show that keeping dogs chained increases the risk of aggressive bites by (in their study) 2.8 percent. See also Lockwood, ‘Ethology, Ecology and Epidemiology’, p. 164.

or even the presence of something supernatural beyond, and this is a tradition that Garmr could very well fit into.

Baldrs draumar

The mythological hound who is most often compared to Garmr is in the poem *Baldrs draumar*, which describes the journey of Óðinn into Niflhel (literally ‘misty Hel’, usually interpreted as a level of Hel, perhaps the lowest) to speak to a resurrected *völva* and question her about the death of his son Baldr. On Óðinn’s journey into Niflhel, it is said that

mœtti hann hvelpi,
þeim er helju kom.
Sá var blóðugr
um brjóst framan,
ok galdrs fǫður
gól um lengi.¹¹⁷

he met a whelp who came from Hel. It was bloody on the front of its chest, and barked for a long time at the father of spells.

The fierce dog with a blood-stained chest certainly makes for an intimidating figure yet, much like the supposedly savage dogs guarding Geiruthus’ hall in *Gesta Danorum*, this dog appears to be ineffectual. There is no hint of this fearsome creature physically attacking Óðinn, merely vocally expressing its disapproval of his presence. It is true that this is representative of actual guard dogs, at least today, one study for instance observing that although aggressive displays by dogs deter most people, in most cases when actually ‘confronted by people the guard dogs backed, or ran away, or remained hidden’.¹¹⁸ A dog’s bark is, in fact, often stronger than its bite.

A more likely and more significant explanation, however, is that the dog does not attack Óðinn because of an innate connection with the god. The prose prologue to the poem

¹¹⁷ *Baldrs draumar* 2–3 (*Eddk*, I, p. 446).

¹¹⁸ Adams and Johnson, ‘Guard Dogs’, p. 113.

Grímnismál relates how Óðinn visits a king named Geirrðr in disguise. In advance of his visit, the goddess Frigg sends her maidservant to warn the king to beware

at eigi fyrirgerði honum fjölkunnigr maðr, sá er þar var kominn í land, ok sagði þat mark á at engi hundr var svá ólmr at á hann myndi hlaupa. En þat var inn mesti hégómi, at Geirrðr væri eigi matgóðr. Ok þó lætr hann handtaka þann mann er eigi vildu hundar á ráða.¹¹⁹

that he is not bewitched by a man skilled in magic who has come to the land, and said that he bore this sign, that no dog was so fierce as to leap at him. And it was the greatest slander that Geirrðr was not hospitable, but he had the man seized whom dogs would not attack.

While Óðinn is best known for his association with wolves, these sources suggest a similar association might have existed between the god and dogs.¹²⁰ Incidentally, as John McKinnell notes of *Fjölsvinnsmál*, both Svipdagr and Fjölsviðr are elsewhere names used for Óðinn, which might explain both characters' affinity with the two guard dogs.¹²¹ The fact that the dogs do not attack Óðinn in *Baldrs draumar* and in *Grímnismál* is especially significant for the implication that they actually manage to recognise the god even though he is in disguise. In *Baldrs draumar*, his disguise as Vegtamr, 'the Wanderer', is so convincing that even the all-knowing seeress does not recognise him until the end of the poem. Once again, canine powers of perception are on display, which makes them especially good guards. By reading the hound in this context, we might thus learn something more about Óðinn too, and find lines of influence between this text and others.

It has sometimes been suggested by readers and critics of the Poetic Edda that the whelp of *Baldrs draumar* is, in fact, Garmr.¹²² Others disagree. Boer dismisses the comparison as

¹¹⁹ *Grímnismál* (*Eddk*, I, p. 368).

¹²⁰ See Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness*, pp. 155–57. This association becomes particularly prominent in the later motif of the 'Wild Hunt' (see Cöllen, 'Djuret på tröskeln', pp. 65–69).

¹²¹ John McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend* (Brewer, 2005), pp. 202–03. This argument is fleshed out in Viktor Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. by Rasmus Anderson (Swan Sonnenschein, 1891), pp. 510–15. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, however, argue that there is no connection between these characters and Óðinn beyond their names (*Eddk*, II, pp. 194–95).

¹²² See, for instance, Lincoln, 'The Hellhound', p. 276; Hollander, *The Poetic Edda*, p. 9; Elard Hugo Meyer, *Germanische Mythologie* (Mayer & Müller, 1891), p. 108.

‘entbehrt jedes grundes’ (‘without any grounds’).¹²³ Rudy Simek similarly argues that there are ‘no grounds’ for equating the two, and Sigurður Nordal calls it ‘guesswork at random’.¹²⁴ It is true that there is no evidence in either text to make a direct comparison between the two canines. That being said, even if the whelp who came from Hel is not Garmr, its role in *Baldrs draumar* might help to shed some light on Garmr’s role in *Völuspá*. The mythological hounds in the three previously discussed texts all serve the same function as guards, keeping outsiders out. In *Baldrs draumar*, too, the blood-stained hound is very likely meant to keep intruders out of Hel, and the same might be said of Garmr.

Of course, the primary difficulty with making this comparative argument is the fact that we do not know exactly where Garmr is stationed. *Völuspá*’s Garmr stanza and its *Gylfaginning* equivalent are the only two known attestations of Gniphahellir, and the etymology of the place-name is equally uncertain. Most linguists read ‘-hellir’ as meaning ‘cave’, and relate ‘gnipa’ to terms like ‘gnípa’ or ‘gnúpr’ that refer to peaks or cliffs or the verb ‘gnapa’ meaning ‘to jut out’, and thus consider it to be a descriptor meaning something like ‘overhanging’.¹²⁵ Numerous translations including by Hollander, Larrington, Terry, and Hultgård thus refer to ‘Gnipa Cave’, and Dronke translates it as ‘Looming Cave’, stating that we ‘should probably imagine a cavernous opening—*hellir*—in a towering, overhanging—*Gnipa*—rock-face.’¹²⁶ Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon has also suggested an alternative link with the noun ‘gnipall’ meaning ‘eldsheiti’ (‘a name for fire’), and Mathias Nordvig therefore proposes the translation ‘Fire-cave’, which he suggests ‘may sustain a volcanic image [...], it is possible that the image

¹²³ Boer, ‘Kritik von *Völuspá*’, p. 329.

¹²⁴ Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Angela Hall (Brewer, 1993), p. 100. Nordal, *Völuspá*, p. 86.

¹²⁵ See de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 179; and von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar*, I, pp. 339–40. Olive Bray (*The Elder or Poetic Edda*, p. 291), on the other hand, dubiously relates ‘hellir’ to ‘Hel’ and thus translates Gniphahellir as ‘Gaping-Hel’.

¹²⁶ Hollander, *The Poetic Edda*, p. 9. Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, p. 10. Terry, *Poems of the Elder Edda*, p. 5. Hultgård, *The End of the World*, p. 58. Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, II, pp. 18 and 144.

of the barking dog before Gnipahellir is supposed to allude to the warning signs of barking dogs as well as the notion of an erupting caldera where the sounds are likened to barking dogs: the barking dog of the underworld.’¹²⁷

None of these possible etymologies are helpful in narrowing down the exact location of Gnipahellir within the Old Norse-Icelandic cosmology. If Gnipahellir does mean ‘Fire-cave’, it may be located near Múspellsheimr, the realm of the fire *jötnar*, or it could just be a reference to the *jötunn* Surtr engulfing the world in flame at Ragnarøk. Bilröst, the bridge between Miðgarðr and Ásgarðr is furthermore described as ‘brenn öll loga’ (‘burning entirely in flame’).¹²⁸ An overhanging cave, on the other hand, could be situated anywhere, associated with humans or with dwarves or, perhaps most commonly, with trolls and giants. A large number of scholars, however, tend to imagine Gnipahellir as being within or on the border of Hel. Bray, for instance, describes it as ‘the craggy rock entrance which forms the mouth of Hel’, Holthausen as the ‘Höhle vor der Hel’ (‘cave in front of Hel’), Finnur Jónsson as ‘hulen, som danner nedgangen til Hel’ (‘the cave, which forms the descent to Hel’), and Frédéric-Guillaume Bergmann as ‘l’avenue que conduit à la grille des morts (nâgrindur), ou à l’entrée du palais de Hel’ (‘the avenue that leads to the gate of the dead or to the entrance of the palace of Hel’).¹²⁹ The difficulty here is that we have few surviving descriptions of the physical landscape of Hel itself and so attempts to locate Gnipahellir within this realm are, as Simek writes, ‘pure speculation’.¹³⁰ That being said, it is not an unreasonable assumption that this afterlife would have been imagined to include fire and rocky caverns. The closest evidence we

¹²⁷ Ásgeir Magnússon, *Íslensk Orðsifjabók*, p. 263. Mathias Nordvig, ‘Nature and Mythology’, in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. by Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann, and Stephen Mitchell, 2 vols (De Gruyter, 2018), I, pp. 539–48 (p. 542).

¹²⁸ *Grímnismál* 29 (*Eddk*, I, p. 374).

¹²⁹ Bray, *The Elder or Poetic Edda*, p. 291. Holthausen, *Vergleichendes und etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 91. Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, p. 192. *Poèmes Islandais (Voluspa, Vafthrudnismal, Lokasenna)*, tire de *L’Edda de Sæmund, publiés avec une traduction, des notes et un glossaire*, ed. and trans. by Frédéric-Guillaume Bergmann (L’Imprimerie Royale, 1838), p. 235.

¹³⁰ Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 114.

can find of the latter is the poem *Helreið Brynhildar*, which describes Brynhildr's journey down the 'helvegr' ('Hel-road') where she encounters a 'gýgr' ('giantess' or 'hag') who is described as a 'brúðr ór steini' ('lady from stone') living in a 'grjóti studda garða' ('dwelling studded with stones').¹³¹ In several sources, moreover, there does appear to be a tradition of the dead residing within the mountains.¹³²

If Garmr is some kind of afterlife guard, there is an alternative function that might be suggested through a comparison with the Greek/Roman hound Cerberus. Given the strong tradition of Latin scholarship in medieval Iceland, it is quite possible that Cerberus would be known to Iceland's circle of literati. Indeed, the hound is directly referenced in at least a couple of medieval Norse texts, including in an Old Danish translation of the *Vision of Paul* and in *Trójumanna saga* where he is described as the three-headed 'varðhundr' ('watch-dog') of the god Plútu, 'hofðingi yfir helviti' ('lord over the underworld').¹³³ Bruce Lincoln has gone as far as to propose a direct etymological connection between Cerberus and Garmr, tracing both names back to the Proto-Indo-European root *ger-, but this is refuted by Ogden who views the root *ker- from which Cerberus originates and the root *gher- from which Garmr originates too disparate to be connected.¹³⁴

Even if Garmr was not a direct adaptation of Cerberus, the fact that Cerberus was indeed known in the Norse world and that the hellhound figure exemplified by Cerberus is so ubiquitous across Indo-Germanic mythology means that comparisons between the two canines can nevertheless be productive. While Cerberus does face the occasional Greek or Roman hero trying to break into the underworld, his primary function, as Daniel Ogden summarises, is 'in

¹³¹ *Helreið Brynhildar* 1 and 3 (*Eddk*, II, p. 349).

¹³² See Davidson, *The Road to Hel*, pp. 87–90 for a detailed analysis of these sources.

¹³³ 'St. Povel's Nedfart til Helvede', in *De Hellige Kvinder; En Lagende-Samling*, ed. by C. J. Brandt (Selskabet for Danmarks Kirkehistorie, 1859), pp. 24–28 (p. 28). *Trójumanna saga*, p. 2.

¹³⁴ Lincoln, 'The Hellhound', pp. 276 and 284. Daniel Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 105.

containing the ghosts within the underworld'.¹³⁵ The ancient Greek poet Hesiod wrote the following of the 'terrible dog' in his *Theogony*:

He has an evil trick: upon those going in he fawns alike with his tail and with both ears, but he does not let them leave again: instead, observing them closely he devours whomever he catches trying to go out from the gates of powerful Hades and dread Persephone.¹³⁶

Cerberus' fawning on visitors to the underworld does mirror the ultimate ineffectiveness of the mythological Norse guard dogs, especially Gífr and Geri fawning on Svipdagr in *Fjolsvinnsmál*. It could even possibly be argued that the role of the two dogs in *Skírnismál* is just as much keeping Gerðr inside the hall as it is keeping others out. When asking how he might be able to converse with Gerðr, Skírnir refers to Gífr and Geri not as her dogs but rather as 'greyjum Gymis', the dogs of her father Gymir, who could be keeping his daughter confined to the hall.¹³⁷ Once again, a focus on dogs can be used to extrapolate information about the dynamics of the rest of the household.

If we do imagine Garmr as a hound guarding the gates of Hel, might it be possible that his role is to prevent anyone from leaving? This interpretation could make sense within the greater narrative of the poem. Following the first Garmr refrain, the *freki* breaks its chains, as does Loki, the latter leading troops across the ocean on the ship Naglfar, described in *Gylfaginning* as being made of the nails of the dead.¹³⁸ Even more significantly, it is said that 'troða halir helveg' ('men tread the Hel-road').¹³⁹ Like much of the poem, the exact meaning of this half-line is unclear. The men could, as Larrington suggests, be either Óðinn's warrior *einherjar* 'coming to fight' or 'the human victims of Ragnarøk.'¹⁴⁰ The former would be

¹³⁵ Ogden, *Drákon*, p. 108.

¹³⁶ Hesiod: *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. and trans. by Glenn Most (Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 65.

¹³⁷ *Skírnismál* 11 (*Eddk*, II, p. 382).

¹³⁸ Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, p. 50

¹³⁹ *Völuspá* 51 (*Eddk*, I, p. 304).

¹⁴⁰ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, p. 285.

logical, especially considering their absence otherwise from the poem; one would expect the group of warriors whose entire purpose is preparing for Ragnarøk to be mentioned in a poem about Ragnarøk. Their presence on the ‘helveg’ would, however, be confusing, confusion only compounded by our lack of knowledge about the geography of Hel. The second interpretation is favoured by the *Edda Kommentar*, which notes that the word ‘helveg’ ‘bezeichnet sonst stets den Weg in die Hel’ (‘always means the way to Hel’).¹⁴¹ Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason thus similarly interpret it as ‘menn farast’ (‘men perish’).¹⁴²

Dronke, on the other hand, translates ‘helveg’ as ‘the path *from* Hel’, which could suggest a third possible interpretation, that the dead themselves are escaping Hel.¹⁴³ Holtsmark thus argues that ‘meningen er at de døde kommen igjen fra Hel’ (‘the meaning is that the dead come back from Hel’).¹⁴⁴ This might be supported with evidence from *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, where a maiden of Sigrún observes that ‘ríða menn dauðir’ (‘dead men ride’) and questions whether she is dreaming or witnessing Ragnarøk, as well as from *Gylfaginning* where Loki is said to be accompanied at Ragnarøk by ‘allir Heljar sinnar’ (‘all the companies of Hel’).¹⁴⁵ If the dead are indeed leaving Hel, or even if it is merely Loki and Fenrir escaping captivity, we might read the Garmr stanza as the dog finally abandoning his post or simply reacting to the escaping forces, comparable perhaps to the statement in *Fjölsvinnsmál* that Gífr and Geri keep watch until ‘rjúfask regin’ (‘the powers fall apart’, i.e. Ragnarøk).¹⁴⁶ The problem is that none of these three interpretations are directly provided by the text itself, and

¹⁴¹ von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar*, I, p. 387.

¹⁴² *Eddk*, I, p. 304.

¹⁴³ Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, II, p. 21.

¹⁴⁴ Anne Holtsmark, *Forelesninger over Völuspá* (Universitetets Studentkontor, 1949), p. 69.

¹⁴⁵ *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 40 (*Eddk*, II, p. 280). Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁶ This may also be compared to the Old Danish translation of the *Visio Pauli* (and several other texts in the wider *Vision of Paul* tradition, discussed in chapter 5), where it is related that the hellhound Cerberus reacts sadly to sinners in hell being granted a Sunday respite from torture: ‘vorth heluidis derworth vreth, thær Cerberus hetær, han ær heluidis hund och opliffæ sith houith yuer alle pyne’ (‘the doorkeeper of the punishment of hell, that is called Cerberus, became angry/gloomy; he is a hellhound and lifted his head over all the pains’) (‘St. Povel’s Nedfart til Helvede’, p. 28).

the Edda *Kommentar* views the suggestion of the dead escaping Hel as particularly ‘unplausibel’ (‘implausible’).¹⁴⁷

If Garmr is meant to be a guard, whether guarding Hel from forces within or without, one implication would be that just as Cerberus is in Ogden’s words ‘a friend and succour to the living’, so too could Garmr be considered on the side of the gods, at least until he abandons his guarding duties.¹⁴⁸ In this case, a neat distinction would be made between Garmr who works for the gods and Fenrir who fights against them, aligning perfectly with the distinction between more mundane dogs existing within human society and wolves existing without. Such a role would explain Garmr’s inclusion in *Grímnismál* and *Gylfaginning*’s list of the greatest of beings, along with Yggdrasill, Skiðblaðnir, Óðinn, Sleipnir, Bilröst, Bragi, and Hábrok, all presumably aligned with the gods. One might have otherwise expected Fenrir to be on this list, as a clear example of the greatest of wolves, and so his absence further supports the argument that enemies of the gods are not welcome here. On the other hand, however, this positivity would contradict Garmr’s portrayal by Snorri who describes him as ‘it mesta forað’ (‘the greatest monster/danger’) and actively pits him in a battle against the gods.¹⁴⁹

With all this uncertainty, it is worth considering a different function that Garmr is likely fulfilling in this poem. Garmr’s guarding potential is more to do with his mysterious role *before* Ragnarøk. However, when Ragnarøk arrives in *Völuspá*, the hound performs a different function, that of a portent or harbinger.

¹⁴⁷ von See, La Farge, and Schulz, *Kommentar*, I, p. 387.

¹⁴⁸ Ogden, *Drākon*, p. 109.

¹⁴⁹ Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, p. 50.

Dog Warnings

It has been demonstrated how the intuition of dogs has been central to their role as guards, in being able to discern friends from strangers and even good from evil. Thus dog vocalisations become a signal of impending danger, as in the previously-discussed example from *Ljósvetninga saga* where the barking of a dog is immediately followed by the noise of armed men preparing for an attack.¹⁵⁰ The association between dogs and danger might also be a result of their association with the battlefield, either as scavengers drawn to remains or as fighters themselves, as suggested perhaps by Gunnarr's statement in *Atlamál in Grœnlenzku* that 'opt verðr glaumr hunda fyr geira flaugin' ('often the din of dogs comes before the flight of spears').¹⁵¹ F. G. Bergmann in fact makes this same observation and relates it to the role of Garmr in *Völuspá*.¹⁵² While the image of dogs running is reasonably interpreted in the Edda *Kommentar* as a reference to the hunt, the flight of spears is very often used in kennings for battle.¹⁵³ Gunnarr downplays the significance of the dream even more in the version of this story told in the legendary *Völsunga saga*, interpreting the howling wolves not just as dogs but as 'smáir hundar' ('small dogs') who 'vilja oss þar bíta, ok er opt hundagnöll fyrir vápnum með blóði lituðum' ('want to bite us, for often the barking of dogs betoken bloody weapons').¹⁵⁴ To Gunnarr, then, dogs do represent violence, but violence of a very different nature and scale to that of wolves.

In some sources, the intuitive powers of dogs begin to seem almost prophetic. The Icelandic *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu*, for instance, mentions a man named Gautr who

¹⁵⁰ *Ljósvetninga saga*, p. 51.

¹⁵¹ *Atlamál in Grœnlenzku* 24 (*Eddk*, II, p. 387).

¹⁵² *Poèmes Islandais*, p. 235.

¹⁵³ Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Eve Picard, Katja Schulz, and Matthias Teichert, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, vol. VI (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2009), p. 763.

¹⁵⁴ *Völsunga saga*, p. 78. This could be related to the fact that dogs are included as the base-words of numerous kennings for swords or other weapons (as is evident in Appendix E).

átti góðan hund, er Flóki hét. Ok þat sama kveld gó Flóki einart á fjallit upp. Ok þá þóttisk Gautr vita, at manna myndi ván af fjallinu ofan.¹⁵⁵

had a good dog, who was called Flóki. And that same evening, Flóki suddenly barked up at the mountain. And then Gautr thought that men would probably be coming down from the mountain.

The dog being able to sense forces approaching all the way from the top of a mountain well out of eyeshot is a remarkable feat and one certainly beyond any natural human capabilities. Thinking back as well to *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and its identically-named dog, the earlier-mentioned edition of the saga by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson relates that

kom Hreiðarr konungr með her sinn ok sló hring um bæ Hjørleifs konungs. Þá ina sömu nótt gó hundr hans Flóki, er aldri gó, nema hann vissi konungi ótta vánir.¹⁵⁶

King Hreiðarr came with his troops and drew up a ring around King Hjørleifr's estate. That same night, his (Hjørleifr's) dog Flóki barked, who never barked unless he knew the king was in danger.

However, as Valdimar Ásmundarson has noted, the extant medieval source in GKS 2845 4to contains a different order of events such that Flóki barks *before* Hreiðarr's arrival, a small change that emphasises the dog's almost prophetic powers of perception.¹⁵⁷ As was discussed about Sámr in *Njáls saga* in chapter 1, Flóki here is not simply barking at the appearance of strangers, but is actively sensing a threat to his companion's life. Flóki's barking before the attack is especially significant since this is the first indication the saga gives that Hreiðarr intends to attack or means ill towards Hjørleifr at all. The audience learns about the attack for the first time from the dog, just as Hjørleifr does. Such powers would suit the tone of the rest of the saga, appropriately related to an earlier prophecy made by a captured merman that Hjørleifr's dog and his wife 'munu [honum] líf gefa' ('will save his life').¹⁵⁸ Flóki unfortunately

¹⁵⁵ *Reykðæla saga*, pp. 225–26.

¹⁵⁶ *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, p. 166.

¹⁵⁷ *Saga af Hálfi ok Hálfsrekum*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda*, ed. by Valdimar Ásmundarson, 3 vols (Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1886–91), II, pp. 21–46 (p. 30).

¹⁵⁸ *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, p. 164.

does not appear again in the saga and we might assume that he is burnt to death with the rest of Hjørleifr's estate.

In *Njáls saga* too, as the dog Sámur is being killed by enemies of his human companion Gunnarr, he 'kvað við hátt, svá at þat þótti með ódæmum' ('cried out loudly in a way that seemed unparalleled').¹⁵⁹ Sámur's dying cry serves as a direct warning to Gunnarr, who is awoken in his house and reflects, 'Sárt ertú leikinn, Sámur fóstari, og búð svá sé til ætlat, at skammt skyli okkar í meðal.' ('You have been sorely wounded, Sámur fosterling, but it may so come to happen that it shall not be long between the two of us.')¹⁶⁰ Gunnarr thus interprets Sámur's death cry as a signal of his own impending demise, and he is indeed soon killed by his enemies. For the audience, then, the death of Sámur might be read as the true emotional climax of this scene and of Gunnarr's entire section of the saga, rather than Gunnarr's actual death. This is the moment Gunnarr and the audience accept that he is going to die, as was foreshadowed earlier when it was said that nobody dared attack Gunnarr while his dog lived.

Even if such an explicit connection is not always made by Old Norse-Icelandic texts themselves, it is notable that there are numerous examples of a human's (or humanoid's) death being preceded by the death of their dog. This has been shown to be the case in *Njáls saga*, and will further be seen in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. In *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (discussed in greater detail in later chapters), too, although there is no direct causal link between the death of the dog Snati and the later death of his human Gestr, the two deaths are linked by the reactions they provoke. When Snati dies, it is said that '[þ]at þótti Gestinn inn mesti skaði' ('Gestr thought that the greatest loss'), and when Gestr is himself killed a mere dozen lines later, his own lord Óláfr reacts in very similar terms: 'Þótti konungi þat inn mesti

¹⁵⁹ *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 186.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

skaði' ('The king thought that the greatest loss').¹⁶¹ The parallel phrasing implies both a similar worth being ascribed to the lives of Snati and Gestr, as well as a similar lord-retainer relationship between the two pairs, Snati and Gestr on the one hand and Gestr and Óláfr on the other. Even more pertinently, it joins dog and human together in death, leaving us with the sense that before Gestr can die, his most loyal canine companion must first pave the way.

There are several examples across Old Norse-Icelandic literature about dogs being used as portents or signs that must be interpreted, some more straightforward than others. The thirteenth-century *Jómsvíkinga saga*, for instance, describes several portents witnessed by Earl Haraldr, including hearing puppies barking inside their greyhound mothers' bellies, while the mothers themselves stayed silent. This is described as a 'býsn' ('portent'), 'undr' ('wonder'), 'tákn' ('token'), and 'fyrirbenda' ('foreboding'), and is taken seriously enough by Earl Haraldr that he turns back from the journey he is on.¹⁶² Haraldr later interprets this as a sign that young reckless men who are not yet born will eventually gain more influence than their wiser elders and 'taka mál fyrir munn inum ellrum mǫnnum' ('take words out of the mouths of the older men').¹⁶³ In the apocryphal *Maríu saga*, there is a similar episode where the mother of Bernard of Clairvaux imagines her unborn child as a barking white dog inside her belly, a sign that is used to predict Bernard's blessed future.¹⁶⁴ Another canine lesson can be found in another thirteenth-century Icelandic text, *Hemings þáttur*, in a scene where King Sveinn of Denmark observes the following:

Konúngr átti einn hjarðar-hund, er fór með þeim; hundinum var gefinn einn smár brauð-hleifr. Hundrinn hleypr á brúna, ok sèr skugga sinn í vatninu; ok sýnist honum þar í sem annarr hundr, ok hafi annan hleif í munni sèr. Hleypr hann út af brúnni, ok í vatnit í kaf, ok hugðist mundu ná

¹⁶¹ *Bárðar saga*, pp. 169–70.

¹⁶² *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson and Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson (Hið Íslenszka Fornritafélag, 2018), pp. 12–13.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁴ *Maríu saga*, p. 489.

hleifnum af hundinum. Nú er hann kemr í vatnið, þá missir hann allz; ok ferr nú tómtr aptr at landi.¹⁶⁵

The king had a sheepdog that was travelling with them; the dog was given a small loaf of bread. The dog runs onto the bridge and sees his reflection in the water; and he thinks he sees another dog there, which had another loaf in its mouth. He jumps off the bridge and into deep water, and thought he would get the loaf from the dog. Now when he comes into the water, he loses everything; and goes back onto the shore empty-handed.

This story of a dog and its reflection is not unique to this Norse source, but comes from a long and very popular fable tradition, stretching back to the Greek fabulist Aesop and prominent in medieval bestiaries. Most fables and bestiaries (such as the twelfth-century Aberdeen Bestiary) use this story to deliver a generalised moral about human greed.¹⁶⁶ In the Old Norse-Icelandic version, King Sveinn himself interprets this strange sight, using it to inform his decision to not travel to England and stake a claim to the kingdom there, reflecting,

“Svó veit ek at mēr mun fars, ef ek ferr nú til Englands, þá mun ek sjá skugga minn. En þó at ek komist hingat aptr, þá má vera at Haraldr konúgr sè hēr fyrir, ok nái ek þá eigi þessu ríki. [...] því þat hefir mēr nú, at ágimast alldri meira.”¹⁶⁷

“Thus I know that it will happen to me if I travel now to England, that I will be looking at my reflection. Even if I am able to come back, then it might be that King Haraldr will be here first, and I will not then keep this kingdom. [...] So it suits me now never to covet more.”

Hemings þáttr thus cleverly turns this traditional fable with a universal message about greed into a message specific to one individual and his political future. Although fables utilise a wide range of different animals, the natural proximity of dogs to humans makes them particularly useful metaphors for human behaviour in general, and human political behaviour specifically as will be seen in chapter 4.

Unlike with many Norse prophecies that describe a future set in stone, King Sveinn is able to avoid a disastrous fate by correctly interpreting the dog portent in *Hemings þáttr*. Other texts, however, ensure that their prophecies are fulfilled by having humans misinterpret them.

¹⁶⁵ *Hemings þáttr*, in *Icelandic Sagas and Other Historical Documents Relating to the Settlements and Descents of the Northmen of the British Isles*, vol. I, *Orkneyinga saga and Magnus saga, with Appendices*, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 347–87 (p. 366).

¹⁶⁶ Aberdeen Univ. Lib. MS 24, fols 19^v–2^r, illustrated on fol. 19^r.

¹⁶⁷ *Hemings þáttr*, p. 366.

This was the case with Glaumvǫr's dream in *Atlamál in Grænlenzku*, and it is similarly the case with another dream in *Guðrúnarkviða II*. While Glaumvǫr's dream involved wolves that were mistakenly identified as dogs, the dream in *Guðrúnarkviða II* involves dogs themselves being misinterpreted. In this poem, it is Atli who recounts the following dream to his wife Guðrún:

“Hugða ek mér af hendi
hvelpa losna,
gylli báðir;
hold hugða ek þeira
at hræjum orðit,
nauðigr nái
nýta ek skyldak.”¹⁶⁸

“I thought that *hvelpar* were loosed by my hand, both *gjalla*; I thought their flesh turned into carrion, unwilling corpses that I was forced to consume.

Like Gunnarr in *Atlamál*, Guðrún also misinterprets this dream, relating it to soldiers killing and eating sacrificial animals. In her case, however, the misinterpretation is likely deliberate as the true meaning of the dream is that Guðrún will soon trick Atli into eating the flesh of his own sons. Interestingly, the version of the dream in *Vǫlsunga saga* is correctly interpreted by Guðrún: ‘Synir þínir munu vera feigir, og margir hlutir þungir munu oss at hendi koma.’ (‘Your sons must be approaching death and many heavy things shall befall us.’)¹⁶⁹

‘Hvelpr’ is a term usually used to refer to a puppy or a young dog, and is sometimes used for young humans as well. The use of a dog here is even more appropriate in order to highlight the unnaturalness of the act that Atli will soon be forced to commit. As seen in the previous chapter, the eating of the flesh of dogs is consistently portrayed in Old Norse-Icelandic literature as unnatural. Feeding on canine flesh is not the only unnatural aspect of Atli's dream, but so too might be the sound made by the whelps. ‘Gylli’ is likely a form of the verb ‘gjalla’, a verb used to denote vocalisations made by a range of animals, most commonly the screeching of birds but sometimes also the bellowing of bulls. It is uniquely here in *Guðrúnarkviða II* and

¹⁶⁸ *Guðrúnarkviða II* 42 (*Eddk*, II, p. 361).

¹⁶⁹ *Vǫlsunga saga*, p. 74.

Völsunga saga that the term is used for dogs. A semantic and etymological similarity is noted in the *Edda Kommentar* to the verb ‘gala’ used for the whelp from Hel in *Baldurs draumar*, and it might also be comparable to the verb ‘gjólta’ used for cynocephali in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it is quite possible that ‘gjalla’ carries a slightly different semantic sense not fully suited to the regular barking of a dog and therefore even more unnatural in this context.

Within a single stanza, the use of the image of a dog thus enables a complete tightly-structured narrative of an orderly dream turning into a disordered nightmare. It begins with the standard courtly image of dogs being loosed, a reference, according to the *Edda Kommentar*, to dogs on a hunt.¹⁷¹ The animals begin to vocalise, as one might expect of dogs on the hunt, but the use of the unusual verb ‘gjalla’ hints that something is not quite right. This suspicion is immediately confirmed as the lively running dogs turn into still corpses, and the dream breaks down entirely when Atli is forced to consume their flesh. Not only is the dream as a whole prophetic of Atli’s eventual fate, but even within the narrative of the dream, the howling of the dogs becomes a harbinger of the grim events to follow. In such poetry, like in some sagas described by Rohrbach, animal dreams take on ‘eine zentrale strukturierende Funktion’ (‘a central structuring function’).¹⁷²

Even more difficult to interpret is a scene in *Eyrbyggja saga* that mentions a man named Egill sterkr (‘the Strong’), a thrall of Þorbrandr bóndi. It is said that Egill went herding sheep one evening, when he saw that

qorn fló vestan yfir fjörðinn. Dýrhundur mikill fór með Agli; qorninn lagðisk at hundinum ok tók hann í klær sér ok fló vestr aptr yfir fjörðinn á dys Þórólfs bægifóts ok hvarf þar undir fjallit. Þenna fyrirburð kvað Þorbrandr vera mundu fyrir tíðendum.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ von See, La Farge, Picard, Schulz, and Teichert, *Kommentar*, VI, p. 764. *Sturlaugs saga*, p. 336.

¹⁷¹ von See, La Farge, Picard, Schulz, and Teichert, *Kommentar*, VI, p. 763.

¹⁷² Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 94.

¹⁷³ *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 115.

an eagle flew from the west over the fjord. A large foxhound was travelling with Egill. The eagle swooped at the dog and grabbed it in its claws and flew back west over the fjord to the cairn of Þórólfr lame-foot and disappeared into the mountain. Þorbrandr said that this vision must presage great events.

It is unsurprising that Þorbrandr would interpret this strange event as some kind of omen, as Þórólfr is best known in this saga as one of the restless dead, frequently arising from his grave to feed on cattle and other animals, and even killing some humans. Þorbrandr does not attempt to elaborate on what kind of tidings he foresees, but his unease is soon justified as Egill is slain not long after. This omen takes place during a brief period in the saga where Þórólfr is seemingly at peace, but a dog being violently brought to his grave certainly does not bode well. Much like in modern horror films, the death of a dog thus becomes ‘an indicator of escalating violence (or violent potential)’.¹⁷⁴

Perhaps the most vividly described canine tidings come from the *Heimskringla* text *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*. It is said in this saga that five years after the death of King Sigurðr I of Norway, there were the following ‘tíðendi mikil’ (‘great tidings’):

Þat barsk at í Konungahellu dróttinsnótt ina næstu eptir páskavíku, at gnýr varð mikill úti á strætum um allan býinn, sem þá er konungr fór með alla hirð sína, ok hundar létu svá illa, at eigi mátti varðveita, ok brutusk út, en allir, er út kómu, urðu galnir ok bitu allt þat, er fyrir varð, menn ok fénað, en allt þat, er bitit var ok blóðit kom á, þá ærðisk, ok allt þat, er hafanda var, lét burð sinn ok ærðisk. Þessi minning var nálíga hverja nótt frá páskum til uppstigningardags. Menninir óttuðusk mjök undr þessi, ok réðusk margir í brot ok seldu garða sína, fóru í herað eða í aðra kaupstaði, ok þótti þeim öllum þat mest vert, er vitrastir váru, ok hræddusk þat, sem var, at þetta mundi vera fyrir miklum stórtíðendum, þeim er þá vár enn eigi fram komin.¹⁷⁵

It happened in Konungahella the next Saturday night after Easter week, that there was a great din out on the streets throughout the town, like when a king travelled with all his followers, and dogs cried out so terribly that they could not be managed, and they broke out, and all that came out became mad and bit everyone they came across, men and livestock, and all those who were bitten and bled then went mad, and all those who were with child lost their children and went mad. This portent took place nearly every night from Easter until Ascension. The people were very afraid by this wonder, and many decided to leave and sold their dwellings, they went into the country or to other market towns, and it seemed most significant to those who were the most intelligent, and they feared, as was the case, that it must be a portent of great tidings that had not come about yet.

¹⁷⁴ Amber Hodge, “Does the Dog Die?”: Nonhuman Violence and Affective Viewership in American Horror’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Violence in Film and Media*, ed. by Steve Choe (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp. 457–75 (p. 457).

¹⁷⁵ *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*, in *Hmskr*, III, pp. 278–302 (p. 289).

These events are explicitly described by the text as a ‘minning’, an ‘undr’, and ‘fyrir miklum stórtíðendum’, all phrases referring to portents of some kind, in this case within an explicitly Christian context. The fears of the people are soon justified as the town is attacked by a foreign army, its Church is burnt to the ground, and most of its people are taken captive. As terrifying as these portents are, they are no less natural than dreams about dog meat or puppies barking inside their mothers’ bellies. Dogs becoming crazed and turning others mad with their bites is in fact a realistic depiction of the symptoms of the disease rabies and possibly reflects very real fears medieval Icelanders and Scandinavians might have held.¹⁷⁶ While rabies has never been officially diagnosed in Iceland, symptoms of very similar epizootics have been observed in historical documents that were likely this disease.¹⁷⁷ In any case, the far reach of the Viking Age and medieval Norse through travel, trade, and transmission of knowledge would have made it very likely for them to have come across either cases of the disease or information about the disease from elsewhere.

Medieval Icelandic medical treatises do display a real preoccupation with the dangers of dog bites. The late-fifteenth-century medical miscellany MS Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43, for instance, includes eight separate treatments for dog bites (using onion with honey or vinegar, mint with salt, pennyroyal, roses with salt, an antidote named Diatheseron, an electuary named Dyasperginston, the hair of a dog, or centaury and old wine).¹⁷⁸ The mint

¹⁷⁶ The detail of those who were bitten *and bled* becoming mad is a very significant one to a potential rabies diagnosis. It is often stated that a rabies infection ‘cannot take place through the unbroken skin’ (David Semple, ‘On the Nature of Rabies and Antirabic Treatment’, *The British Medical Journal*, 2.3063 (1919), pp. 333–36 (p. 333)), although this is sometimes refuted (cf. Omesh Kumar Bharti, Ramesh Chand, Anjali Chauhan, Rahul Rao, Hamender Sharma, and Archana Phull, “Scratches/Abrasions without Bleeding” Cause Rabies: A 7 Years Rabies Death Review from Medical College Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India’, *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*, 42.4 (2017), pp. 248–49)).

¹⁷⁷ Arthur King, A. R. Fooks, M. Aubert, and A. I. Wandeler, *Historical Perspective of Rabies in Europe and the Mediterranean Basin: A Testament to Rabies by Dr Arthur A. King* (World Organisation for Animal Health, 2004), p. 30.

¹⁷⁸ Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 69, 77, 84, 87, 106, and 126. Interestingly, the last two remedies are listed together, but the former is specified for the bite of a dog and the latter for the bite of a dog or a wolf. This once again implies that dogs and wolves were considered similar enough to share some remedies, but distinct enough to have species-specific ones as well.

remedy is even specified to be used against ‘galens hundz bit’ (‘the bite of a mad dog’), a phrase that could very well refer to something like rabies.¹⁷⁹ A translation of the Latin hagiographical *Vitae Patrum* furthermore mentions a miracle of St Ammon where he must heal a young man who had been bitten by a dog and ‘hann ærdiz sidan’ (‘he then became mad’).¹⁸⁰ In this case, the perceived danger is so serious that ‘var nu því bæde bundinn ok fastliga fiótradr’ (‘he was now both bound and tightly shackled’).¹⁸¹

This might also explain the preoccupation of law-codes like *Grágás* with dog bites and preventing them by keeping animals properly leashed. Indeed, it is notable that the dogs of Konungahella are not said to be roaming freely, but ‘brutusk út’ (‘broke out’) when they turned mad. An Old Danish law code from thirteenth-century Zealand, *Eriks Lov*, goes even further with a section specifically about procedure if ‘en Mands Hund bliver gal og bider enten Folk eller Fæ’ (‘a man’s dog turns mad and bites either people or livestock’).¹⁸² This law makes it clear that the only acceptable outcome is for the dog in this situation to be killed, once again reflecting real anxieties about the ‘madness’ of dogs. The crazed state of rabid dogs might also be a reason for their association with berserkers, and it is probably no coincidence that the host that besieges Konungahella shortly after these rabid portents includes heathen berserkers who ‘ýldu [...] sem hundar eða vargar’ (‘howled like dogs or wolves’) and later ‘létu [...] illiliga enn sem fyrr, ýldu ok gnístu’ (‘cried out horribly like before, howling and snarling’).¹⁸³ The parallels between the rabid dogs and the berserker attackers mean that the former can be read as directly presaging the impending destruction of the latter. For the people of Konungahella, these dogs become harbingers of their own personal apocalypse.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁸⁰ *HeilSögur*, II, p. 477.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² *Danmarks Gamle Love*, II, p. 69.

¹⁸³ *Magnúss saga blinda*, p. 293.

The terrifying nature of a rabies outbreak cannot be overstated, as exemplified in the following description of a probable rabies epizootic in Iceland in 1765–66:

The disease was first noticed in dogs which attacked each other and cattle that subsequently became sick and aberrant in behaviour. At one farm, a bitch from another farm some 40 km away entered a stable and attacked a tethered horse. The horse became sick and able to reach only its hooves, bit these to the bone and had to be destroyed. A number of cattle became sick and died after being attacked by dogs. Sheep which were bitten became demented and ran into anything in their path. Finally the epizootic in dogs began to recede, presumably partly due to the fact that in some parishes all dogs had died by this stage. On some farms all cattle had died. At this time the epizootic seemed to have been transferred to cats and arctic foxes. Cats approached people with mouths open and tongues hanging out and were easily killed. A few foxes put their heads through farm windows. Farm animals that died from the disease were generally dropped into bogs as nobody dared eat the meat. Only one human died from the disease, a young girl who was nursing a sick puppy which had bitten her.¹⁸⁴

Some of the events in this eighteenth-century outbreak are very similar to the portents in *Magnúss saga*, from the behaviour of the dogs to their effects on other animals. While this is in many ways a worst-case scenario, the imagery is close to apocalyptic, with the natural world itself imploding and turning against humanity, much like in *Völuspá*'s Ragnarøk where the skies split apart, the seas overcome the land, and many of the enemies of the gods are themselves animals of some kind. Abram thus describes Ragnarøk as an 'eco-apocalypse, which is to say that it is a breakdown of the norms that people expect or even demand from the natural world'.¹⁸⁵ All living beings who come into contact with this disease end up dead and, like in *Völuspá*, corpses are strewn everywhere. And all this begins with dogs acting unnaturally. It is not difficult to see how events like this could create superstitions about dogs being portents of a terrible future and, consequently, for a barking hound to be placed at the onset of Ragnarøk.

The 'leechbook' section from the medical miscellany quoted above includes another very interesting section on the signs of death:

Galienus mælltti. þesse eru takn daudlig j mannligum likam. Enn rodnar brunir falla. Dregur saman vinstra auga. Nasir hvitna. haka fellr. fætur kolna. kvidur fellur til hryggjar. Smyr med

¹⁸⁴ King and others, *Historical Perspective of Rabies*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁵ Abram, *Evergreen Ash*, p. 149.

fleski fætur siuks manz. ok kasta sidan firir hund. ok ef hann etur þa mun þeim manni batna. Enn er hann hafnar. þa er þeim manni haska.¹⁸⁶

Galen said that these are the signs of death in the human body. The forehead turns red, the eyebrows fall. The left eye is drawn shut. The nose turns white. The chin falls. The feet turn cold. The stomach falls to the spine. Rub the feet of a sick man with pork and throw it then before a dog. And if he eats it then the man shall recover. But if he refuses it, there is danger for that man.

Though this particular item about dogs is said to be from the Greek physician Galen, Larsen notes that it is relatively rare in the Galenic corpus, as he is only able to find one occurrence in the Latin tradition. This is in the early-twelfth-century manuscript St John's College Oxford, MS 17 fol. 2^v, which contains the instruction to offer a dog a fermenting agent (possibly something like yeast, barm, or must) rubbed against a sick person's hand.¹⁸⁷ As in the Old Icelandic, if the dog accepts it, the patient will live; if the dog rejects it, the patient will die. Vivian Nutton has argued, however, that the canine prognosis of the St John's manuscript is part of 'a series of prognostications of a general nature that are to be distinguished from those of Galen.'¹⁸⁸ Nutton suggests that it is instead 'derived from typical Anglo-Saxon medicine', but there might be comparable prognoses elsewhere in Continental sources, such as in the ninth-century BnF, lat. 12118 fol. 101^v, which prescribes a very similar test of spreading lard over the foot of a sick person and presenting it to a dog.¹⁸⁹ Peregrine Horden raises the question of whether such so-called 'cynomancy' could be 'an example of disease transference, from the sick person to the dog in the ingested lard'.¹⁹⁰ While there may be some truth in this, the question remains why a dog is chosen of all animals. It may not, in the case of the BnF

¹⁸⁶ Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 116. Larsen notes a similar item in the Old Norse manuscript AM 434.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁸⁸ Vivian Nutton, 'Prognostica Galieni', *Medical History*, 14.1 (1970), pp. 96–100 (p. 97).

¹⁸⁹ See Frederick Paxton, "'Signa Mortifera': Death and Prognostication in Early Medieval Monastic Medicine", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 67.4 (1993), pp. 631–50 (p. 646). This follows an even more unusual test of whether or not a sick man turns towards the tick of a black dog held in the left hand.

¹⁹⁰ Peregrine Horden, *Cultures of Healing: Medieval and After* (Routledge, 2019), p. 154.

Paris manuscript, be simply a matter of choosing the most easily accessible animal, for this text specifies that the dog must be ‘ignotus’ (‘unknown’).

It might be easy to dismiss such prognoses as baseless “superstition” but they are in fact rooted in the very real scientific facts of canine sensory perception, of which modern medicine has only recently been discovering the full potential. Dogs are macrosomatic animals, which means they have an extremely highly developed sense of smell, due to certain anatomical, physiological, and genetic characteristics including ‘a uniquely extended olfactory cortex, the area of the olfactory epithelium in the nasal cavity, that is particularly extended due to the presence of the turbinate bones inside the nasal cavity, the shape of canine nostrils, which ensures that sufficient odor molecules in the air flow enter the nasal cavity, the extremely high number of olfactory receptors, as well as the proportion of active/inactive genes of the olfactory receptor proteins’.¹⁹¹ As a result of these characteristics, dogs can ‘sniff out about half-a-million odorous compounds at trace concentrations’.¹⁹² There have thus been numerous scientific medical studies in recent years testing the potential of using these skills to detect various diseases in humans, including various forms of cancer (which is thought to cause the emittance of odours as volatile organic compounds), diabetes, and malaria.¹⁹³ One of the earliest proposals in Western medicine to use dogs to detect cancer came from the following 1989

¹⁹¹ Federica Pirrone and Mariangela Albertini, ‘Olfactory Detection of Cancer by Trained Sniffer Dogs: A Systematic Review of the Literature’, *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 19 (2017), pp. 105–17 (p. 106).

¹⁹² Bogusław Buszewski, Joanna Rudnicka, Tomasz Ligor, Marta Walczak, Tadeusz Jezierski, and Anton Amann, ‘Analytical and Unconventional Methods of Cancer Detection using Odor’, *Trends in Analytical Chemistry*, 38 (2012), pp. 1–12 (p. 8).

¹⁹³ For reviews of the work on dogs detecting cancer, see Pirrone and Albertini, ‘Olfactory Detection of Cancer’ and Paula Jendry, Friederike Twele, Sebastian Meller, Albertus Dominicus Marcellinus Erasmus Osterhaus, Esther Schalke, and Holger Andreas Volk, ‘Canine Olfactory Detection and its Relevance to Medical Detection’, *BMC Infectious Diseases*, 21.1 (2021), p. 838. On diabetes, see Evan Los, Katrina Ramsey, Ines Guttmann-Bauman, and Andrew Ahmann, ‘Reliability of Trained Dogs to Alert Hypoglycemia in Patients with Type 1 Diabetes’, *Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology*, 11.3 (2017), pp. 506–12. On malaria, see, for instance, Ben Kasstan, Kate Hampshire, Claire Guest, James G. Logan, Margaret Pinder, Kate Williams, Umberto D’Alessandro, and Steve W. Lindsay, ‘Sniff and Tell: The Feasibility of Using Bio-Detection Dogs as a Mobile Diagnostic Intervention for Asymptomatic Malaria in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 51.3 (2019), pp. 436–43.

observations about a patient with malignant melanoma by the physicians Williams and Pembroke:

The patient first became aware of the lesion because her dog would constantly sniff at it. The dog showed no interest in the other moles on the patient's body but frequently spent several minutes a day sniffing intently at the lesion, even through the patient's trousers. [...] This prompted the patient to seek further medical advice.¹⁹⁴

In this case, the dog's intervention meant that the patient was able to seek treatment but in the Middle Ages, when cancer was even more of an incurable and misunderstood disease, the patient would have very likely died. With this comparison in mind, one can see the logic behind the dog test for death in the above leechbook and other medical texts, especially since the odorous compounds released by conditions like cancer become more pronounced as the disease progresses and as the cells decay. It is also possible to see how a pattern of dogs behaving strangely around a human followed by the human's death could give rise to a belief in dogs as portents of death, a belief that may have found its way into the characterisation of Garmr.

Conclusion

With the importance of dogs both as guards and warnings across the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus thus established, it should now be understandable why the composer of *Völuspá* might have chosen to include a hound in the apocalyptic sequence. But what can Garmr's dog-ness tell us about his function in the poem?

Much emphasis has been placed on sound throughout this chapter because sound is not just central to the figure of Garmr but indeed to *Völuspá* as a whole. This chapter earlier discussed how the poem structurally and thematically disintegrates as the events of Ragnarøk approach, and sound is key to this process. Ragnarøk is a noisy affair. The giant herder Eggþér

¹⁹⁴ Hywel Williams and Andres Pembroke, 'Sniffer Dogs in the Melanoma Clinic?', *The Lancet*, 333 (1989), p. 734.

plays his harp and three different cocks crow (the latter sound paired with the barking of dogs at least four other times in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus). Heimdallr blows the great Gjallarhorn. Yggdrasill shudders, an eagle shrieks, Jötunheimr roars, and dwarves groan. Carolyne Larrington and Judy Quinn describe this as a ‘rising cacophony’ in which

different animals’ vocalizations sound only the bass-notes in the mounting din. [...] Along with the great tree, those who live deep within the mountains, and even the hostile territories of the *jötunnar*, all things sentient and insentient give voice to alarm as the catastrophe unfolds; and the uproar resounds across all the worlds.¹⁹⁵

Standing out in the midst of this great cacophony is the repeated barking of Garmr, the canine refrain being the ‘center in the heart of chaos’.¹⁹⁶ Not only can the bark of a dog be an incredibly visceral noise, but from a performance perspective too, barking (or, indeed, howling) is a particularly useful sound to create a cacophonous effect, as it is a relatively easy yet effective one for humans to make during a performance of the poem, an enactment of the ‘explosive theatre of *ragna røk*’.¹⁹⁷ Garmr’s bark thus fits perfectly into the chaotic and hostile atmosphere of this apocalypse. Referring to Guðrún releasing the dogs before burning down her husband’s hall in *Atlakviða*, the *Edda Kommentar* notes that the effect is that ‘ein “Pandämonium” ausbricht’ (‘a pandemonium breaks out’) and ‘eine chaotische Atmosphäre’ (‘a chaotic atmosphere’) is created.¹⁹⁸ ‘Pandemonium’ is certainly a very appropriate descriptor for the events of Ragnarøk too.

Yet, despite contributing to the pandemonium of Ragnarøk and its soundscape, the repetition of Garmr’s bark simultaneously manages to enforce some structure in the poem. The Hauksbók version in particular, Larrington and Quinn suggest, ‘seems to use the refrain to

¹⁹⁵ Carolyne Larrington and Judy Quinn, ‘I Remember Giants’: Mythological Remembering through *Völuspá*’ in *Myth, Magic, and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture: Studies in Honour of Stephen A. Mitchell*, ed. by Jürg Glauser and Pernille Hermann (Brepols, 2021), pp. 47–62 (p. 58).

¹⁹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 311.

¹⁹⁷ Larrington and Quinn, ‘Mythological Remembering’, p. 47.

¹⁹⁸ Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Simone Horst, and Katja Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, vol. VII (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012), p. 373.

frame the *ragna røk* soundscape more deliberately’, using it to flag up ‘the escalating peril of humanity and the death of Óðinn within the amplifying din’.¹⁹⁹ Even more significantly, while *Völuspá* is a narrative account of the events of Ragnarøk, this account is mediated through the prophecy of the seeress, and Larrington and Quinn argue that the Garmr refrain ‘orders the stimuli that the *völva* experiences’.²⁰⁰ For the *völva*, the sound of barking is the beacon that cuts through the chaos of the rest of the soundscape and can therefore be used to orient her vision, just like the song of Deleuze and Guattari’s child in the dark. It becomes the central transtemporal anchor for the *völva* to call upon as she navigates back and forth between present and prophetic future. The limitrophy of dogs, their presence on the borders between worlds and their ability to navigate between worlds as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, makes them especially well-suited for this role. This chapter has already demonstrated in the context of guard dogs and omens about dogs how barking could come to signal impending danger in the minds of a Norse audience. And so, within the *völva*’s prophecy and the events of Ragnarøk, Garmr’s barking serves as a powerful prophecy in itself, warning of the dangers that are about to unfold. Garmr could perhaps be part-wolf, but his dog-ness is nevertheless central to this function in the poem.

In her book on animals and humans in Old Norse religion and archaeology, Kristina Jennbert observed that in ‘the archaeological record we see a much greater variety of uses for dogs than in Norse mythology. Dogs have a low profile in Eddic texts, apart from the watchdog Garm, who guarded the subterranean Hel until he broke loose at Ragnarok.’²⁰¹ While it is true that dogs do appear to keep a low profile in Eddic texts, that is not to say that they are absent from these spaces. Dogs (literal dogs as opposed to metaphorical or linguistic ones) are present

¹⁹⁹ Larrington and Quinn, ‘Mythological Remembering’, p. 59.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁰¹ Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, p. 65.

in nine out of thirty-one of the poems of the *Konungsbók Poetic Edda*, not including poems like *Baldrs draumar*, *Rigspula*, and *Fjölsvinnsmál* preserved elsewhere. Five of these appear within the group of eleven so-called mythological ‘Goðakvæði’, several of which have been discussed in this chapter.²⁰² Once these dogs are located, it becomes clear that they do indeed have a wide variety of uses themselves. In *Fjölsvinnsmál*, *Skírnismál*, *Grímnismál*, and *Baldrs draumar*, they are guards and protectors of people and places. In *Guðrúnarkviða II* and *Atlamál in Grænlensku*, they appear as portents in dream visions. In *Rigspula*, dogs are specifically used for hunting. In *Hávamál*, *Prymskviða*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, and *Atlakviða*, they are companions within the house or symbols of status with no other clearly specified function. And Garmr does not exist separately from these texts, but should be considered alongside each of them. It is likely the importance of all the other mundane dogs discussed in this chapter and in this thesis that led to the creation of the mythological Garmr. The significance and function of Garmr within *Völuspá* thus points to the significance and function of dogs across Old Norse-Icelandic literature and society.

²⁰² The division between ‘Goðakvæði’ and ‘Hetjukvæði’, though useful in many regards, is one fabricated by the editors and Judy Quinn notes that ‘it possibly encourages too formal a division between the sequences of poems within the Codex Regius since the interpenetration of the mythological and the heroic is evident in many of the poems’ (review of Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (eds), *Eddukvæði* (2014), *Scripta Islandica*, 67 (2016), pp. 135–40 (p. 139)).

CHAPTER 3. LEGENDARY DOGS I: GIANT COMPANIONS

II. Now we are at home. But home does not preexist: it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile center, to organize a limited space. Many, very diverse, components have a part in this, landmarks and marks of all kinds. [...] Sonorous or vocal components are very important: a wall of sound, or at least a wall with some sonic bricks in it. A child hums to summon the strength for the schoolwork she has to hand in. A housewife sings to herself, or listens to the radio, as she marshals the antichaos forces of her work. Radios and television sets are like sound walls around every household and mark territories (the neighbor complains when it gets too loud) ...¹

Introduction

The legendary *Gautreks saga* begins with a classic royal hunting scene, similar to the many found across *riddarasögur* and *konungasögur*.² King Gauti of Vestra-Gautland (West Götaland) is out in the forest with his retainers and ‘sínun inum bestum veiðihundum’ (‘the best of his hunting hounds’).³ In avid pursuit of a particularly fine stag, the king ends up getting separated from his men and hounds, alone and lost deep in the forest in the middle of the night. Fortunately for Gauti, he hears ‘hundsgá’ (‘the barking of a dog’) and, like Deleuze and Guattari’s child orienting himself with a song, he follows this sound ‘því at honum þótti þar helst manna ván’ (‘because it seemed to him that he could definitely expect people there’).⁴ As expected, the barking of a dog does prove to be a refrain of human society and leads Gauti straight to a small farmstead where he is able to find help.

Yet it quickly becomes apparent that there is something strange about the world Gauti has stepped into. Upon seeing the king approach the farmstead, a man with an axe immediately

¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 311.

² More specifically, it is in the first section of the saga often entitled *Dalafífla þáttr* or *Gauta þáttr*. There are two redactions of *Gautreks saga*, a shorter one and a longer one, the shorter of which is assumed by most scholars to be the older. Although this opening *þáttr* is present in both redactions, it is significantly expanded in the longer version, from which quotations are drawn below, since this chapter deals largely with the *fornaldarsögur* and, as Michael Chesnutt notes, the shorter text ‘can scarcely be called a *fornaldarsaga* at all’ (‘The Content and Meaning of *Gjafa-Refs saga*’, in *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. by Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen (Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2008), pp. 93–106 (p. 94)).

³ *Gautreks saga*, p. 4.

⁴ Ibid.

subverts the king's and audience's expectations by killing the barking dog, remonstrating, 'Eigi skaltu oftar vísa gestum á garð várn' ('No longer shall you show guests the way to our yard').⁵ The dog thus created a sense of familiarity for Gauti and for the audience of the saga, but its sudden death quickly undercuts this familiarity. The inhabitants of this farmstead are human, but of a kind that would certainly be considered strange by the saga's audience. They are described as being extraordinarily miserly, hence killing the dog who brought them an extra guest to feed, and possessing a strange, possibly Óðinnic custom of suicide in reaction to any occurrences out of the ordinary.⁶ The longer redaction of *Gautreks saga* is careful to separate these forest inhabitants from the other humans of the saga, by explaining how they came to be so isolated:

Þar eru stórar merkr ok illt yfirferðar, þá er þelalaust er. [...] Í þann tíma var víða byggt, þar sem miklir skógar váru umhverfis, því at margir menn ruddu mörkina, þar sem fjarlæg var almannabyggð, ok gerðu sér þar alhýsi sumir, þeir sem flýit höfðu af almannaveg fyrir nokkur sín ranglig tiltæki. Sumir flýðu fyrir ljóðæsku eða nokkur ævintýr ok þóttust þá síðr spottaðir eða hæddir verða, ef þeir væri fjarri annarra manna athlátri, ok lifðu svá út allan sinn aldr, at þeir fundu enga aðra menn en þá, sem hjá þeim váru.⁷

In that place are large forests which are very difficult to traverse, when the ground is unfrozen. [...] At that time, that place was widely settled where great forests were all around, because many men cleared the forest in a place where populated land was far away, and some made farmhouses for themselves there, they who had fled from the high roads because of certain of their wrongdoings. Some fled because of their *ljóðæska* or certain incidents and they thought they would be less mocked or taunted, if they were farther from the mockery of other men, and so lived out all their lives, that they met no other men than those who were with them.

These forest people are thus set apart from human society in every way: temporally though the phrase 'í þann tíma' ('at that time'), geographically across large nearly-uncrossable forests, and in character by their 'ranglig tiltæki' ('wrongdoings'), 'ljóðæska' (possibly 'peculiarities' or

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This custom has produced a very wide range of scholarly interpretations, from attempts to extrapolate real historical rituals (Davidson, *The Road to Hel*, pp. 73–74), to commentaries about the 'oppressiveness of heathenism' (Dennis Cronan, 'The Thematic Unity of the Younger "Gautreks saga"', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 106.1 (2007), pp. 81–123 (p. 121)), to comparisons with conception-story motifs (James Milroy, 'The Story of *Ætternisstapi* in *Gautreks saga*', *Saga-Book*, 17 (1966–69), pp. 206–23).

⁷ *Gautreks saga*, p. 3.

‘habits’ or even ‘language’), and ‘ævintýr’ (‘incidents’).⁸ Their miserliness, exemplified by the killing of their dog, is further set in juxtaposition to the culture of generosity, reciprocity, and gift-giving, not to mention care for canine companions, that characterises aristocratic human society over the rest of the saga.⁹

These are all typical, if perhaps unusually explicit, world-building strategies employed by the genre of legendary sagas collectively (though somewhat loosely) referred to by modern scholars as *fornaldarsögur*, a genre that is the focus of this and the succeeding chapter. Legendary texts are particularly useful for studying the textual functions of dogs through a narrative ethology framework because their temporal dislocation allows them great creativity in the construction of storyworlds that are at once familiar and unfamiliar. In landscapes populated by giants, trolls, mermen, monsters, and other fantastical beings, the inclusion of domestic dogs is thus a very deliberate choice that should not be taken for granted. Paying attention to narrative choices about how these dogs are characterised can reveal much about how their texts are constructed and to what end.

Beginning with an introduction to the genre of *fornaldarsögur* and critical strategies of approaching them, this chapter applies a narrative ethological approach to five texts where dogs are implanted into supernatural landscapes as the companions of giants and similar beings. In *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, the presence of a canine inhabitant makes a gigantic house more familiar and better incorporated into the rest of the saga. In *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, two dogs help create structural unity by moving between the different human and supernatural

⁸ ‘Ljóðæska’ is a rare word in the Old Norse corpus. Snorri mentions it in the list of *heitir* which includes ‘mál’ (‘speech’ or ‘language’) and ‘orð’ (‘words’) in *Skáldskaparmál* (Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, p. 109), which could imply here either that these men are exiled for certain words they said (i.e. slanderous or grievously insulting) or that they were shunned for different language use. Cleasby-Vigfússon alternatively suggest that ‘ljóðæska’ is a form of ‘lýðska’ meaning ‘peculiarity’ or ‘habits’ (*An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, p. 394).

⁹ This unfortunate dog can also be contrasted with two little dogs with gold collars and chains themselves exchanged as gifts later in the saga (*Gautreks saga*, pp. 41–42). For more on the parallel themes of miserliness and generosity, see Cronan, ‘Thematic Unity’.

spheres inset within the text. The later *Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu* appears to adopt textual strategies from both the above sagas, directly or indirectly, in its portrayal of a dog and its giant and human companions. The Latin *Gesta Danorum* plays with these multiple facets of the canine figure in a single episode where a dog goes from peacefully guarding a giant's herd to fighting extraordinary battles for a human. Finally, a dog in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* becomes a representative of and an anchor to not just Iceland's supernatural worlds, but also its heathen past.

Critical Approaches to the Fornaldarsögur

The *Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre* describes *fornaldarsögur* as

prose narratives compiled largely in the thirteenth through the fourteenth centuries that take place primarily in Iceland, generally in an undetermined ancient (pre-colonisation) time period. They contain both historical (or pseudo-historical) personages and mythical figures and thus may preserve narrative motifs from the Germanic legendary heritage.¹⁰

It is the 'mythical' aspect of the *fornaldarsögur* that is often considered central to the genre. Stephen Mitchell tentatively suggests that their 'numerous fabulous episodes and motifs' are one of the key features of the genre, a feature that Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir attributes to the temporal 'dislocation' of the genre in an ancient past that 'always seems to be more accommodating to witchcraft and magic'.¹¹ Within the 'mythical' *fornaldarsaga*, there is an often-complex interplay between the natural and the supernatural. Margaret Clunies Ross explains that

[j]ust as the protagonists of many *fornaldarsögur* are said to have connections with individuals who lived in historical times, so the kind of world that they inhabit is half familiar in terms of Icelandic social conventions [...]. These characters marry, have children and live lives that

¹⁰ *Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, p. 314. For an interesting wider discussion on defining the genre, see Quinn and others, 'Interrogating Genre in the *Fornaldarsögur*'.

¹¹ Stephen Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 27. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'The Narrative Role of Magic in the *Fornaldarsögur*', *ARV*, 70 (2015), pp. 39–56 (p. 42).

involve everyday tasks like cutting hay, driving cattle into a byre and catching fish. Yet at the same time strange things happen to them, and they frequently interact with beings that are not fully human, such as dwarves, trolls, mound-dwelling heroes of a past age, giantesses, a poetry-spouting mountain and a merman.¹²

It is this interplay between the familiar and the unfamiliar that forms the focus of this chapter, which considers the role that dogs play in creating a sense of familiarity through their own interactions not just with humans but also with the ‘beings that are not fully human’. Three *fornaldarsögur* (*Þorsteins saga Vikingssonar*, *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, and *Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu*) and two other texts with *fornaldarsaga*-like properties (*Gesta Danorum* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*) are examined with a focus on how dogs influence the way their supernatural giant-like companions are characterised within the text.

Rebecca Merkelbach reads the *fornaldarsögur* as ‘storyworlds’ which ‘arise out of a dialogue between a narrative and its audience: they are experiential, both for the characters within the world who experience the changes it undergoes and for the audience whose experiences and prior knowledge help create and shape the world.’¹³ To facilitate the creation of a narrative world, it is important that the audience is able to find some familiarity within the narrative that they are able to identify with, which is where dogs can play a significant role. Storyworlds, therefore,

cannot simply be imagined in isolation, as free-floating entities that bear no resemblance to the primary world. In order for the audience’s participation in worldbuilding to work, mental models on which the audience can draw in building an image of this world have to be available. These prior experiences and knowledge are then used in constructing the world. This means that storyworlds, even those of nonrealistic genres like fantasy or science fiction, draw on known models of the universe and import primary world data into the secondary worlds. This is what Tolkien refers to as “subcreation”: not creation *ex nihilo*, of which (in his perspective)

¹² Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 77.

¹³ Rebecca Merkelbach, ‘Dreamworlds, Storyworlds: Narrative Proliferation and the Case of *Stjörnu-Odda draumr*’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 121.1 (2022), pp. 6–33 (p. 13).

only God is capable, but creation, worldbuilding, on the basis of knowledge derived from the primary world.¹⁴

Referring to the *Íslendingasögur* (family sagas), Torfi Tulinius similarly talks about the author's 'frame of reference', described as 'the field of significations within which the author's own construction of meaning throughout his text will be displayed through all sorts of reference and allusions, or simply through presumptions about prior knowledge shared by his readers'.¹⁵ Tulinius distinguishes seven components of the frame of reference of an early-thirteenth-century Icelandic writer, namely 'law, scientific knowledge, history, mythology, heroic literature, religion, and real life.'¹⁶ It is in the final category of 'real life' that dogs might best be considered (though, of course, they feature in each of the other categories as well) and are thus some of the most potent objects to be imported into the narrative worlds of the *fornaldarsögur* and indeed of all Old Norse-Icelandic literature. As one of the animals closest to humans, dogs come with a very wide set of behaviours and expectations that are employed by saga composers to make their work more familiar to their audiences. As Marie-Laure Ryan writes, 'when a text mentions an object that exists in reality, all the real-world properties of this object can be imported into the storyworld unless explicitly contradicted by the text.'¹⁷ It will be demonstrated throughout this chapter how even as companions of giants and other supernatural beings, dogs are depicted with certain very familiar, recognisably canine traits, traits that allow audiences to connect with the story and immerse themselves within the storyworld.

¹⁴ Ibid. See also Rebecca Merkelbach, *Story, World and Character in the Late Íslendingasögur: Rogue Sagas* (Brewer, 2024), pp. 163–70.

¹⁵ Torfi Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth Century Iceland*, trans. by Randi Eldevik (Odense University Press, 2002), p. 220.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁷ Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instruments of a Media-Conscious Narratology', in *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, ed. by Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon (University of Nebraska Press, 2014), pp. 25–49 (p. 35).

By bringing a sense of familiarity to stories about giants, dogs therefore play important roles in bridging the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’ within *fornaldarsögur*, challenging the notion that the two exist as separate spheres within the text. These two spheres, as Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir explains, are very often imagined as constituting a ‘dichotomous worldview, which may be said to reflect ideas about ‘this world’ and the ‘other’ and involve frequent changes of scene between these two worlds.’¹⁸ Aðalheiður and other scholars, however, challenge such a dichotomous worldview. Helen Leslie, for instance, argues that ‘a narrative “Real” or “Our” World exists in the *fornaldarsögur* along with one or more Other Worlds’, imagined in some sagas as ‘a series of inset worlds,’ but all of these worlds are ‘real places, accessible under the right conditions and via the right routes.’¹⁹ Rebecca Merkelbach similarly imagines a *fornaldarsaga* storyworld as containing several navigable worlds ‘through embedding and nesting, rather than the chronological or parallel sequencing of worlds.’²⁰ In each of the sagas discussed below, dogs are once again used to interrogate these borders between worlds and test their permeability. They cross the borders between the inset worlds, not just symbolically, but also physically, and are often instrumental to the ability of humans and the audience to navigate between these worlds. In doing so, these extraordinary limitrophic animals once again bridge the gap between the natural and supernatural, the familiar and unfamiliar, in a way that is characteristic of legendary sags.

¹⁸ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, ‘On Supernatural Motifs in the *Fornaldarsögur*’, in *The Fantastic in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, ed. by John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kirk, 2 vols (Durham University, 2006), I, pp. 33–41 (p. 33).

¹⁹ Helen Leslie, ‘Border Crossings: Landscape and the Other World in the *Fornaldarsögur*’, *Scripta Islandica*, 60 (2009), pp. 119–36 (pp. 120–22).

²⁰ Merkelbach, ‘Dreamworlds, Storyworlds’, p. 7.

Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar

Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar is a late-thirteenth-century tale concerning three generations of earls, focusing in succession on Vífill, Víkingr, and Þorsteinn.²¹ Filled as it is with elements of the fabulous, this saga did not find much favour with earlier scholars, described by Margaret Schlauch simply as ‘fantastic and incoherent’.²² Though later scholars have made convincing arguments for the thematic and structural cohesion of the saga, a deliberate mixture of generic styles from *fornaldarsögur*, *Íslendingasögur* and *riddarasögur* has also been noted.²³ Fulvio Ferrari, for instance, writes that ‘a ogni spostamento di luogo o di tempo corrisponde una diversa tradizione narrativa, una diversa relazione motivi/tecniche e, anche, un diverso orizzonte d’attesa da parte del pubblico’ (‘each shift in place or time corresponds to a different narrative tradition, a different relationship with motifs/techniques and, also, a different horizon of expectation by the public’).²⁴ It is with the third and final generation of this family that the saga shifts into a clearer *fornaldarsaga* mode.

Towards the beginning of this third-generation narrative, the brothers Þorsteinn and Þórir are sent away by their father Víkingr to escape the saga’s cycle of vengeance-driven violence. In order to reach a safe location, they must first traverse a dangerous mountain, populated by two ‘skálabúar’ (‘hut-dwellers’), Sámr and Fullafli, the latter having a dog named Gramr. Helen Leslie has described how changing landscapes are employed within *fornaldarsögur* for the purpose of ‘determining the boundary and passage between worlds and

²¹ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe suggests a date of 1280–90 for its composition (‘Absent Mothers and the Sons of Fornjótr: Late-Thirteenth-Century Monarchist Ideology in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 14 (2004), pp. 133–60 (pp. 149–50)).

²² Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (Russell & Russell, 1973), p. 37.

²³ See, for instance, Rowe, ‘Absent Mothers’; Emily Lethbridge, ‘The Place of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in Eggertsbók, a Late Medieval Icelandic Saga-Book’, in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson (University of Iceland Press, 2012), pp. 375–404; and Fulvio Ferrari, ‘La *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* e la questione dei generi’, *Studi Nordici*, 1 (1994), pp. 11–23.

²⁴ Ferrari, ‘La *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*’, p. 22. See also Rudolf Simek, ‘Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar’, in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (Garland, 1993), p. 675; and Rowe, ‘Absent Mothers’.

in the identification of inhabitants as otherworldly.’²⁵ *Þorsteins saga* thus employs a mountainous landscape to indicate a shift to a more supernatural narrative, and even more sharply indicates a shift back out by making the brothers bypass a chasm so large that Víkingr knows ‘enga menn hafa yfir komizt’ (‘no men who have been able to cross it’), thus ‘building up a series of inset worlds’.²⁶ In fact, it is through this landscape and its supernatural inhabitants that the text as a whole becomes what Rowe had called a ‘pure *fornaldarsaga*’.²⁷

It is quickly apparent that the mountain-dwellers are no ordinary men. Their great strength and stature are evident from the heft of their hut doors; when Þórir approaches Sámr’s door, ‘varð þó öllu afli at kosta’ (‘it took all his strength to open it’), but even all his strength isn’t enough for Fullafli’s door.²⁸ Only Þorsteinn, the stronger of the two, is able to open the latter. Fullafli’s arrival is marked by the sound of strong, heavy footsteps (‘fast var niðr stigit’), and he is visually described as ‘inn risi furðuliga mikill’ (‘the extremely large *risi*’), carrying a large bear and a bundle of fowl.²⁹ These characteristics perfectly suit his name, meaning ‘full-strength’. ‘Risi’ is a category of supernatural being, usually non-specifically translated as ‘giant’, that populates many *fornaldarsögur* worlds. Though, as Tom Grant notes, *risar* are often less physically and socially monstrous than other ‘giants’ like *jötnar*, they are always characterised as preternatural in some way.³⁰

Being companion to a *risi* means that the dog Gramr is also somewhat preternaturally gifted, true to his name which refers to anger and is sometimes used as a term for demons. Víkingr earlier warned his sons that Gramr was ‘litlu betri viðreignar enn skálabúi’ (‘little better

²⁵ Leslie, ‘Border Crossings’, p. 121. See also Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, ‘Narrative Role of Magic’, p. 43.

²⁶ *Þorsteins saga*, p. 216. Leslie, ‘Border Crossings’, p. 122.

²⁷ Rowe, ‘Absent Mothers’, p. 155. See also Ferrari, ‘La *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*’, pp. 19–20.

²⁸ *Þorsteins saga*, p. 217.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³⁰ Tom Grant, ‘A Problem of Giant Proportions: Distinguishing *Risar* and *Jötnar* in Old Icelandic Saga Material’, *Gripla*, 30 (2019), pp. 77–106.

to deal with than the hut-dweller’), drawing an immediate close comparison between dog and giant with a classic Germanic understatement as the hound proves more difficult to defeat in battle than either of the giants.³¹ Mysteriously able to ward off strikes with his tail and bite, Gramr is able to fight for three hours before Þórir finally defeats him ‘því at rakinn sló af sér hvert högg með halanum, en ef hann stakk með kesjunni, beit hann af sér hvert lag’ (‘because the dog fended each blow off himself with his tail, and if he thrust with his halberd, he bit each thrust off himself’).³² Gramr fights almost like a human here, his extraordinarily powerful jaws and tail taking the place of a human sword and shield, but they are still canine jaws and a canine tail.³³

Despite all this, Gramr is thus still recognisably canine and his relationship with Fullafli is not unlike a normal human–dog one. It might be reasonably assumed from Fullafli and Gramr’s entrance with their catch of bear and fowl that the dog assisted in procuring this food in a hunting role.³⁴ Meanwhile, an unusually soft aspect of the *rísi* Fullafli’s hut is the fact that Gramr is provided with a special place to sleep. It is said that across from Fullafli’s massive ‘sæng’ (‘bed’) within his ‘skáli’ (‘hall or hut’) is a ‘flet mikit, sem rúm væri, kringlótt at vexti’ (‘large platform, as if it were a sleeping-space, circular in shape’), affording the dog a level of comfort and intimacy with the supernatural *rísi*.³⁵ This small detail goes a long way towards explaining why Gramr would be willing to fight and die for his *rísi* companion and, along with other detailed descriptions of Fullafli’s hut and its furniture, creates an almost domestic picture of their life before the protagonists come to disturb them.

³¹ *Þorsteins saga*, p. 216.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³³ Interestingly, Gramr is used in several sources as a sword-name, and even as a dog here Gramr turns into a kind of sword.

³⁴ Though Lee Hollander does note that a giant carrying home a large catch is a common motif in these kinds of stories (‘The Gautland Cycle of Sagas. I. The Source of the Polyphemos Episode of the *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 11.1 (1912), pp. 61–81 (p. 75)).

³⁵ *Þorsteins saga*, p. 218.

Fullafli and Gramr do behave rather respectably towards the intruding brothers, which is especially remarkable given that Þorsteinn and Þórir have just killed Fullafli's brother. Strictly adhering to an ethos of honour, Fullafli does not attack them outright, but promises: 'Ekki skal níðast á ykkir í nótt [...]. Skuluð þit bíða morguns ok hafa mat sem ykkir líkar.' ('I shall not behave shamefully with the two of you tonight. You two shall wait until the morning and have as much food as pleases you.')36 It is unclear why Fullafli temporarily spares the brothers; as Lee Hollander notes, the wait does not impact the story as neither side deceives the other during the night.³⁷ The peaceful night is itself significant, undermining possible stereotypes about the deceitfulness of supernatural beings like *risar*. Gramr himself appears to play an important role in upholding this temporary peace. It is said that '[i]lla lét hundrinn, þá þeir fóru hjá honum. Hvárigir leituðu þar til svika við aðra.' ('the dog growled when they (the brothers) approached him. Neither tried to deceive the other.')38 Timothy Bourns interprets Gramr's growls as 'metonymically reflecting Fullafli's true thoughts and [ill-]intentions', but equally plausible is Hollander's supposition that Gramr's role is to prevent any attempt by the brothers to flee or to shamefully (and illegally, according to Icelandic law) attack Fullafli in his sleep, ensuring honourable combat the next day.³⁹

The delay of the battle turns what might have otherwise been a chaotic skirmish into a more formal combat, a type of *einvígi*, or even a more formal *hólmganga*. R. Radford notes that one distinguishing feature of a *hólmganga* is a lapse between challenge and contest, in effect 'a brief cooling-off period'.⁴⁰ The use of the verb 'níðast' ('behave shamefully, like a

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Hollander, 'The Gautland Cycle', p. 74.

³⁸ *Þorsteins saga*, p. 218. 'Illa lét' is translated here as 'growled' but more literally means 'expressed disapproval' and is usually a very human reaction.

³⁹ Bourns, 'Between Nature and Culture', p. 60. Hollander, 'The Gautland Cycle', pp. 74–76.

⁴⁰ R. Radford, 'Going to the Island: A Legal and Economic Analysis of the Medieval Icelandic Duel', *Southern California Law Review*, 62.2 (1989), pp. 615–44 (p. 641).

níðingr’) in Fullafli’s promise above is particularly significant to the formality of a *hólmganga*, as a man who failed to turn up at an appointed duel ‘would legally be declared a *níðingr*, a man devoid of honor’.⁴¹ More explicitly, on the morning of the duel, Fullafli issues what amounts to a formal challenge to combat, declaring: ‘Nú skulum vit Þorsteinn reyna með okkr, en Þórir við hund minn í öðrum stað.’ (‘Now Þorsteinn and I shall compete with each other, and Þórir with my dog in the next place’).⁴² The verb ‘reyna’ means ‘to test or try’ with the notion of a trial of strength, but is also used in sources like *Grágás* to denote a legal challenge.⁴³ Þorsteinn’s response, ‘þessu muntu ráða’ (‘you shall have your way in this’), similarly amounts to a formulaic acceptance of the challenge.⁴⁴ The parties must then leave the house to fight in an appointed place, a certain ‘völlr’ (‘field’).⁴⁵

In a study of what he refers to as the ‘Polyphemos episode’ of the ‘Gautland cycle of sagas’, Lee Hollander has noted how this episode featuring Þorsteinn, Þórir, and the *risar* brothers is part of a popular tradition common across Scandinavia and much of the rest of the world with strong parallels to similar episodes in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Vatnsdæla saga* among other sources.⁴⁶ The addition of a dog is, however, more unusual, certainly in the sagas considered by Hollander. Though himself supernaturally gifted, Gramr’s presence, along with small details like that of his ‘bed’ imported into the storyworld from the world of its audience, do a lot of work to not necessarily ‘humanise’ Fullafli but to cast him in a slightly

⁴¹ Marlene Ciklamini, ‘The Old Icelandic Duel’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 35.3 (1963), pp. 175–94 (p. 178). See also Gwyn Jones, ‘Some Characteristics of the Icelandic “Hólmganga”’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 32.2 (1933), pp. 203–24 (pp. 208–10). This charge is made in *Vatnsdæla saga* (in *Vatnsdæla saga. Halfréðar saga. Kormáks saga*, ed. by Einar Sveinsson, pp. 1–131 (p. 88)); *Kormáks saga* (in *Vatnsdæla saga. Halfréðar saga. Kormáks saga*, ed. by Einar Sveinsson, pp. 201–303 (p. 280)); and *Þórðar saga hreðu* (in *Kjalnesinga saga. Jökuls þáttir Búasonar. Víglundar saga. Króka-Refs saga. Þórðar saga hreðu. Finnboga saga. Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfjfls*, ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2007), pp. 161–226 (p. 224)).

⁴² *Þorsteins saga*, p. 218.

⁴³ Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 496.

⁴⁴ *Þorsteins saga*, p. 218.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Hollander, ‘The Gautland Cycle’.

more sympathetic light. Supernatural though he may be, the *rísi* is made more familiar by his dog. This, along with the language used throughout the encounter, also integrates Fullafli and his dog into the human social order. Characterising the fights with Gramr and Fullafli as more formal duels creates parallels with other duels fought throughout the saga. Characterising them as necessary to avenge the death of Fullafli's brother not only anticipates Þorsteinn's struggles against another set of supernatural brothers, Úfi and Faxi, but in a way also reflects the more central human struggle between the sons of Víkingr and the sons of Njörfi. Although they play the role of supernatural antagonists in this saga, Fullafli and Gramr can nevertheless be seen to be adhering to a specifically human set of values.

Rowe sees the theme of loyalty as uniting the adventures of the successive generations in the saga, each of which 'is faced with the same problem—that of proper loyalties—in forms that become ever more complex.'⁴⁷ On this Lethbridge continues that the 'more fantastically-coloured episodes in the narrative [...] do not necessarily have to be seen as detracting from, or undermining, the gravity and impact of the social and ethical issues that are present in their most undiluted form in the 'feud' section'.⁴⁸ Not only does the dog episode not detract from the social and ethical issues of the saga, it very much adds to their impact. The theme of proper loyalties is played out in Gramr's loyalty to Fullafli and in both being loyal to Fullafli's brother, and there is a constant reflection on what constitutes proper action. This episode thus fits quite neatly into the overall themes that are borne out repeatedly over the course of the saga, and the dog is an important part of this. As a result, the episode is better thematically integrated into the saga and contributes to the cohesion of *Þorsteins saga* as a whole. The episode is indeed 'pure *fornaldarsaga*', but in a genre characterised by an interplay between the 'real' and the

⁴⁷ Rowe, 'Absent Mothers', p. 136.

⁴⁸ Lethbridge, 'The Place of *Þorsteins saga*', p. 397.

‘mythical’, it is the dog that acts as an anchor to reality, both to the natural world and to the social order of the rest of the saga.

Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar

A similar giant-dog scene can be encountered in the early-fourteenth-century *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, which deals with two ninth-century Norwegian kings, Eysteinn and his son Hálfðan. Over the course of his journey, Hálfðan encounters and acquires two canine companions. The first, which comes to be referred to as Karlsnautr (literally ‘gift from a man’), is gifted to him by a couple of poor healers to guide him through a series of dark forests. The second he encounters in one of these forests, originally companion of the forest-dweller Selr and thus named Selsnautr (literally ‘gift from Selr’). Like with the mountain of *Þorsteins saga*, this saga signals entry into a supernatural realm through its series of forests, Kolskógr (‘Coal-Black Forest’), Klifskógr (‘Cliff Forest’), and Kálfarskógr (‘Calf’s Forest’).⁴⁹ And like the chasm beyond the mountain, there is another unsubtle exit out of the supernatural forest world here, in the form of a mysterious ‘lögr’ (a body of water like a sea) that ‘engi veit, hvar hann sprettr upp’ (‘nobody knows where it arises’) and that can only be crossed by the best swimmers.⁵⁰

Befitting the landscape in which he dwells, Selr is at different points in this saga described as a ‘skálabúi’ (‘hut-dweller’), ‘spellvirki’ (‘robber’), and ‘þurs’ (another kind of giant).⁵¹ The robber’s gigantic nature is evident in his size, since he arrives carrying a bear and a young whale, and even more so by a tooth ‘er fram stóð ór múlasykkinu á honum’ (‘which

⁴⁹ *Hálfðanar saga*, p. 305. ‘Kálfr’ sometimes also refers to a small island next to a bigger one, which might be the case here as the third forest is the smallest one. Perhaps there is also some connection to the fact that the dog Selsnautr of Calf’s-Forest is said to be as big as a cow.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 305 and 308.

stuck out of his snout') like a tusk.⁵² The dog Selsnautr is similarly impressively proportioned, said to be as large as a cow; additionally, 'hann hefir manns vit ok er betri til vígs en tólf karlar' ('he has the intelligence of a man and is better in a fight than twelve men').⁵³ It is clear that Selsnautr is no ordinary dog and Karlsnautr knows this. On seeing the giant hound, Karlsnautr, a *skikkjurakki*, immediately runs away to hide.⁵⁴

Yet Selsnautr is not completely unnatural; he does have some recognisable canine traits. During his encounter with the robber and his dog, Hálfðan manages to incapacitate Selsnautr by forcing a stick between his jaws so that he is unable to close his mouth.⁵⁵ Once he defeats Selr, the saga relates:

Hann gekk nú at hundinum ok mælti til hans: "Aldri skal þetta kefli ór þínum kjapti ganga, nema þú sér mér jafnhollr, sem þú vart áðr Sel."

Hundrinn skreið at honum ok sneri upp á sér maganum. Hálfðan tók þá keflit ór kjapti honum; hundrinn varð svá feginn, at vatn rann ofan eftir trýninu á honum.

He went now to the dog and said to him: "Never shall this stick be removed from your jaw, unless you are just as faithful to me as you were to Selr."

The dog crawled over to him, and turned his belly up to him. Hálfðan then took the stick out of his jaw; the dog was so joyful, that water ran down over his snout.⁵⁶

Selsnautr turning his belly up is an extremely significant act, one that may be recognised as distinctive canine behaviour. A dog presenting its belly is an act of submission; when a dog (or cat) 'displays its underbelly, it indicates, by exposing one of its most vulnerable areas, that it is exhibiting deferential behaviour'.⁵⁷ Although Selsnautr's size and strength might be somewhat exaggerated, this particular gesture is evidence that the composer of the saga had some close

⁵² Ibid., p. 308.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 305.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 306 and 308.

⁵⁵ Franz Rolf Schröder (*Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* (Max Niemeyer, 1917), pp. 34–35) suggests connections to the incapacitation of the wolf Fenrir by the gods sticking a sword between his jaws, as well as to the romance motif of a hero saving a lion from a dragon as in *Ívens saga* and *Konráðs saga*.

⁵⁶ *Hálfðanar saga*, p. 309.

⁵⁷ Karen Overall, *Manual of Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Dogs and Cats* (Elsevier, 2013), p. 344. Overall clarifies that this could also be an act of fear and withdrawal (p. 134), another reasonable explanation for Selsnautr's behaviour.

familiarity with actual dogs and intended the giant's companion to be recognised as such. This canine behaviour is precisely the kind of minute detail that would make this forest world more recognisable and credible to its audience, despite the supernatural beings occupying it.

Although Hálfðan's treatment of the dog may appear extremely harsh, a comparison with Gramr's more unfortunate end reveals that sparing Selsnautr was an act of mercy, and a very significant one. In this series of forest episodes, Hálfðan encounters four supernatural humanoid robbers, a wild boar, and the dog, but Selsnautr alone is spared. It is unusual for a legendary saga hero to leave a monstrous enemy alive at the end of a battle. Indeed, it would probably have been easier for Hálfðan to kill Selsnautr than to incapacitate him in the manner he did. Using a stick that he put a lot of effort into sharpening over the night, despite possessing a much more powerful magical sword, suggests that the dog isn't entirely monstrous. This does, however, turn out to be a sensible decision, as Selsnautr proves to be just as loyal to his human companion as he was to his *jötunn* one, willingly fighting other supernatural enemies later in the saga. The two dogs together take on two *Finnakonungar*, Sámi kings Flóki and Fiðr, the latter transforming into a walrus in the middle of the battlefield. This battle ends with all four combatants dead. It is striking that, with the exception of Hálfðan himself, the dogs do not fight a single 'normal' human. Each of their adversaries is supernatural in some way and, by virtue of their own liminality, these dogs are integral to Hálfðan being able to defeat such enemies.

The ability of a dog, alone of all beings, to be able to switch allegiances is indicative of its position as a limnorphic animal, on the threshold between 'civilisation' and 'wilderness', and thus able to serve either side to suit a saga composer's narrative requirements. Notably, however, the switching of loyalties from 'giant' to human here is not simple or peaceful, but requires the death of the original supernatural being, a violent severing of supernatural ties. In contrast, switching loyalties or being gifted from human to human is much smoother. In both cases, despite their changed loyalties, the dogs do continue to maintain a link to their origins

through their names, ‘Gift from a man’ and ‘Gift from Selr’. Being named after and thus constantly referred to in connection with their former companions means that we never forget the dogs’ dual allegiances or where they come from. This is structurally significant too, as it better integrates the supernatural forest world into the rest of the saga. Rather than remaining distinct isolated episodes, the encounters with the forest-dwellers become linked to other parts of the saga by the dogs.⁵⁸

The very fact that Selsnautr is able to leave the forest world is unusual in a legendary setting. In fact, like the barking dog of *Gautreks saga*, Selsnautr is actually instrumental to Hálfðan’s exit from the supernatural realm. At the intimidating lake outside the forest, it is Selsnautr who manages to find a boat hidden under some moss, allowing Hálfðan and the two dogs to leave the supernatural forest together.⁵⁹ Just as Selsnautr was the one to lead Hálfðan out of the forest, it was Karlsnautr who earlier led him into the forest, with the ability to navigate the supernatural world. The dog’s original owner earlier instructed Hálfðan to ‘þar eptir fara, sem hann fœri undan, ok fara aldri þá gøtu, sem hann vildi eigi fara, ok kvað hann kunna at forðaz bygðir þeirra illvirkjanna’ (‘follow him wherever he set forth, and never go down a path he did not want to take, and said that he knew how to avoid the dwellings of evil-doers’).⁶⁰ As promised, Karlsnautr finds a ‘leynistíg’ (‘secret path’) through the forest, avoiding all supernatural enemies, even though the heroic Hálfðan insists on engaging all the robbers of the forest anyway.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Another interesting parallel is the fact that, like Selsnautr, a man named Kolr is also said to have the strength of twelve men. Although this appears to be a stock phrase to indicate strength (used also for the supernatural forest-boar), Kolr’s faithfulness to Earl Skúli does in a way parallel the dog’s relationship with Hálfðan.

⁵⁹ *Hálfðanar saga*, p. 309.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Besides fulfilling the monster-killing obligations of a saga hero, Hálfðan does this to repay the healers for all their generosity. He does not take any spoils from the robbers’ huts for himself, but leaves everything behind for the healers who gifted him their dog.

Karlsnautr's ability to so effectively navigate this supernatural world may seem remarkable, and there is something extraordinary about his ability to discern 'evil-doers', but his general scouting skills are well within a dog's natural abilities, as evidenced by the many tracking and hunting dogs discussed throughout this thesis. In any case, as limitrophic beings that exist on the threshold between human and animal, it makes sense that dogs are able to traverse the multiple worlds inset within the sagas, both natural and supernatural. They are thus the perfect choice of companion to help the hero navigate these different spheres and crucial in fulfilling the heroic obligations of the saga.

Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu

Around the year 1700, the priest and chronicler Eyjólfur Jónsson wrote down a text that was later printed in *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* as 'Inntak úr söguþætti af Ásmundi flagðagæfu' and is sometimes thought to be a version of a lost *Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu*.⁶² Whether or not there was indeed such a medieval saga is up for debate. Although there is a long Norwegian ballad tradition centred on the same protagonist, this is the only surviving 'saga' version of the text.⁶³ Eyjólfur claims that his text is based on a story related to him by his mother and grandmother, and Judith Jesch has made the case that this story could be fairly closely related to a lost saga about Ásmundr flagðagæfa.⁶⁴ There are furthermore fragments of *rímur* interspersed throughout the text that Eyjólfur or his grandmother may have relied on in the construction of their tale, but the origins of which are themselves unclear. Knut Liestøl suggests dating the *rímur* to at least 1600, arguing that they cannot be among the earliest *rimur*, 'til det

⁶² 'Inntak úr söguþætti af Ásmundi flagðagæfu', in *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*, ed. by Jón Árnason, 2 vols (Hinrichs, 1862–64), I, pp. 171–79. This text will henceforth be referred to as *Ásmundar saga*. See Judith Jesch, 'Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu', *ARV*, 38 (1982), pp. 103–32.

⁶³ The ballad is titled 'Ásmund Frægdegjevar', for instance in *Norske trollvisor og norrøne sogor*, ed. by Knut Liestøl (Olaf Norlis Forlag, 1915), pp. 15–22.

⁶⁴ Jesch, 'Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu'.

svipar dei altfor mykje paa dei seine umdiktingar av eldre sogeemne som var so vanlege paa Island, med samanstøyping av litterære drag fraa alle kantar' ('because they draw far too much on the late recompositions of older saga themes that were so common in Iceland, with the merging of literary features from all sides').⁶⁵ This merging of features is, however, precisely what makes the text so useful to this study. The composer of the text, be it Eyjólfur himself, his grandmother, or a medieval writer, was evidently well-versed in the motifs and techniques employed by Old Norse-Icelandic legendary literature, and a dog in the saga bears such close resemblance to the dogs of *Porsteins saga* and *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* that it almost seems to itself be a deliberate study of the themes under discussion in this chapter.

The protagonist of this text is Ásmundr, whose family are themselves isolated from other humans like the strange family of *Gautreks saga*, in 'dal einum fjarri þjóðbygð í Noregi' ('a valley far from the inhabited areas of Norway').⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Ásmundr and his two brothers must venture even further, walking continuously for three days to a certain lake, to encounter their first monstrous adversary and his dog. This adversary is first referred to simply as a 'maðr [...] mikill og þrýstinn' ('large and stout man') and (once) as a 'tröll', then later as a 'risi' until he is finally named Naddr.⁶⁷ In his actions, Naddr is not initially portrayed as a violent monster. He is first seen herding cattle with his dog along the lake, and later carrying a bear and a bundle of birds as in the previous texts. Like Fullaflí of *Porsteins saga*, he does not immediately attack Ásmundr, but instead invites him to join him in skinning the bear. It is actually Ásmundr who first strikes Naddr during the skinning, leading to a physical confrontation between the two and the eventual death of the *risi-maðr*.

⁶⁵ *Norske trollvisor*, p. 30.

⁶⁶ *Ásmundar saga*, p. 171.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 171–73.

Ásmundr goes through all this alone, his cowardly brothers hiding elsewhere. He must therefore first ensure that the dog, ‘mikill og grimmlegr’ (‘large and fierce’), is not a threat, trapping him inside the hut while he fights the *rísi* outside.⁶⁸ The dog’s desperate attempts to get out and help his companion are rather poignant, capturing the animal’s loyalty to his companion: ‘heyrir rakkinn í skálann hvat um er, skilr að húsbóndi hans er illa staddr, og tekr að láta grimmlega og rífa hurðina, konst þó eigi út.’ (‘the dog in the hut hears what is happening outside, understands that his master of the house is doing poorly, and starts to make ferocious noises and tear at the door, but he still cannot get out.’)⁶⁹ It is only after killing Naddr that Ásmundr releases the dog from the house, proceeding to incapacitate him with a stick:

[H]ljóp rakkinn þá móti honum með uppspertum kjapti og vildi rífa hann, rak Ásmundr þegar keflið þvers um í gin honum, lagðist hann við það niðr og skreið til fóta Ásmundi, en tárin runnu eptir trýninu. Ásmundr klappaði þá rakkanum og mælti við hann þessum orðum: „Nú vil eg gjörast lánardrottinn þinn í stað Naddar, skaltú veita mér alla slíka þjónustu sem þú veittir honum;” stóð rakkinn þá upp, flaðraði við Ásmund og fylgdi honum síðan, varð Ásmundi að honum hið mesta lið þá hann átti við illar vættir.⁷⁰

The dog then ran towards him with gaping jaws and wanted to tear him apart. Ásmundr immediately drove the stick crosswise into his mouth. At that, he lay down and crept to Ásmundr’s feet and tears ran down his snout. Ásmundr then petted the dog and said these words to him: “Now I wish to become your master in place of Naddr. You shall grant me all the same services that you granted him.” The dog then stood up and fawned on Ásmundr and followed him afterwards. He became the greatest help to Ásmundr when he had dealings with evil beings.

This scenario is nearly identical to the one played out between Hálfðan and Selsnautr, right down to the detail of the tears running down the dog’s snout, so we may reasonably conclude that one text might very well have influenced the other.⁷¹ It is unclear, however, which version of *Ásmundar saga* might have drawn on *Hálfðanar saga*, whether it was the original saga, its *ríma* counterpart, Eyjólfur’s grandmother’s version, or Eyjólfur’s own. Even if this interaction was largely constructed by Eyjólfur himself, drawing on *Hálfðanar saga* or some other source,

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 172–73.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 173–74.

⁷¹ As suggested also by Schröder, *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, pp. 35–36.

it is nevertheless clear that it has some basis in an older tradition, for it is summarised in a *ríma* verse:

Ásmundr klappar hundi sín
og með orðum gladdi,
þú skalt alla æfi þín
þjóna mér sem Naddi.⁷²

Ásmundr pets his dog and makes him glad with words, “You shall serve me all your life like you did Naddr.”

Ásmundr petting the dog and making him ‘með orðum gladdi’ not only indicates that the dog is able to understand human speech and experience positive emotions, but also demonstrates that a dog’s shifting of allegiances can very much be an act of agency and self-interest. Agency is somewhat undermined, however, by the objectification inherent in the fact that the dog is later referred to as Naddarnautr, ‘gift from Naddr’. That being said, this name is used only once and never again, suggesting some instability in the text and perhaps direct inspiration being drawn from the two named dogs of *Hálfðanar saga*.⁷³

Naddarnautr does stay by Ásmundr’s side for the rest of the saga, though his helpfulness varies. In the second of three supernatural encounters in the saga, the dog’s presence is highlighted by Ásmundr’s supernatural adversary Þorgerðr herself, who greets Ásmundr saying, “Hèr ertu kominn, Ásmundr, kenni eg þig gjörla, draptu Nadd og fylgir þèr hundr hans, veit eg erindi þitt, þú átt að sækja skatt af eyju þessari fyrir Ólaf konúng.” (“Here you have come Ásmundr, I recognise you clearly, you killed Nadd and his dog follows you, I know your errand, you have to seek tribute from this island for King Óláfr.”)⁷⁴ This slightly jarring greeting serves as a sign of the troll-woman’s omniscience and intelligence, and also perhaps as a quick recap for the audience of the saga of everything that happened in the first section. Or perhaps

⁷² *Ásmundar saga*, p. 174.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

the implication here is that Þorgerðr is able to recognise Ásmundr precisely because of the large dog by his side, linking the identities of man and dog. The reference is also important to maintain the dog's link to Ásmundr and to the saga, for he does not play any further role in this episode beyond Þorgerðr's mention.

Nevertheless, the dog returns to play a larger role in the third and final encounter of the saga. Here, Ásmundr accompanies his benefactor King Óláfr Haraldsson to a remote farmhouse, where they are served by a large animated horse's phallus, worshipped by the resident family as a deity named Vǫlski. This episode is very clearly related to *Vǫlsa þáttur* from the Flateyjarbók manuscript, in which King Óláfr Haraldsson encounters a very similar family venerating a horse phallus.⁷⁵ Like the strange family at the beginning of *Gautreks saga*, the family of *Vǫlsa þáttur* is similarly isolated, living 'fiarri meginbygðinne ok suo þíodlæid' ('far from the main district and the high road'), and they too have a dog, 'etiutik stora er Lærir het' ('a large female hound who was named Lærir').⁷⁶ And just like the dog who led King Gauti to the farmstead, Lærir too ends up inadvertently betraying her human family when Óláfr casts the phallus to the hound, addressing her as 'hundr hiona' ('dog of the household').⁷⁷ The hound immediately grabs it in her mouth, much to the agitation of the matriarch of the house, who angrily chastises her:

[L]jegg þu niðr Lærir
ok lat mig æigi sia
ok svelg æigi niðr
sartikin rög.⁷⁸

Put it down, Lærir, and don't let me see it and don't swallow it, dastardly sore-bitch.

⁷⁵ *Flateyjarbók*, II, pp. 331–36.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 331–32.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

In a way, this ‘dog of the household’ unintentionally transfers her loyalties but, fortunately, the woman’s anger is limited to her harsh words. Lærir remains unharmed, having helped Óláfr complete his mission, and the entire family eventually converts to Christianity.

Ásmundar saga is even more creative, having the phallus-servant transform into a troll when Ásmundr attempts to exorcise it. The dog’s role is thus expanded from passively receiving the phallus from Óláfr to more actively battling the Vølski troll alongside Ásmundr and Óláfr.⁷⁹ Just like Selsnautr, Naddarnautr hence comes full circle from companion of one supernatural being to antagonist of another. Even if *Ásmundar saga* is merely a late reconstruction and not a true medieval saga, it is nevertheless instructive about how certain saga tropes about dogs and their supernatural companions were interpreted and replicated in specific ways, not just in the *fornaldarsögur* but, as will be seen next, in other sources as well.

Gesta Danorum

The previous chapter discussed Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum* for its inclusion of elements from Old Norse-Icelandic mythology, but the historical text also includes an array of legendary material that is inclined to ‘tilkende det mytiske en plads i virkeligheden’ (‘assign the mythical a place in reality’).⁸⁰ Several critics have thus approached *Gesta Danorum* alongside the legendary sagas. Annette Lassen concludes that ‘Saxo did not only use material from *fornaldarsögur* told by Icelandic informants, entire *fornaldarsögur* seem to have been

⁷⁹ *Ásmundar saga*, p. 178.

⁸⁰ Karsten Friis-Jensen, ‘Saxo Grammaticus og fornaldarsagaerne’, in *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og Virkelighed*, ed. by Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Lassen, pp. 67–78 (p. 76).

preserved by him.’⁸¹ Lassen even goes on to suggest that some Icelandic authors may have been inspired by Saxo to write their own legendary sagas.⁸²

Like the *fornaldarsögur* discussed above, chapter six of the *Gesta Danorum* mentions a giant with a preternaturally talented dog. The dog in question is unnamed, but said to be dwelling with the giant Offotus in a certain place where it ‘inter pascua tuebatur armentum’ (‘guarded the herd among the pastures’).⁸³ This is unfortunately the extent of the information Saxo provides about the giant Offotus, as the dog is by this point in the story already with another man named Björn. Björn is one of twelve Norwegian brothers described as ‘giganteis clari triumphis’ (‘famous for triumphs over giants’) and it is therefore likely that Björn acquired this dog in the same way that Hálfðan acquired Selsnautr: by deadly force.⁸⁴ Interestingly, unlike in *Hálfðanar saga*, it is the human Björn and his brothers who are described in this chapter as violent plundering ‘predones’ (‘robbers’), while the minimal information provided about the giant Offotus leads to him being merely characterised as a shepherd.⁸⁵ The dog itself, however, is said to be ‘inuitate ferocitatis canis [...], horrende quidem acerbitatis bellua atque humano conuictui formidolosa, que sepius bisse nos sola uiros oppresserit’ (‘a dog of unusual ferocity, a horrendously severe beast that was terrible for people to live with often overpowered a dozen men alone’).⁸⁶ The word ‘inuitate’ (‘unusual’) highlights that this is not a normal dog, and indeed the specific detail of it being stronger than twelve men is exactly the same as the gigantic Selsnautr. Saxo does characteristically express some doubt about the extraordinary abilities of this hound, advising that this report is ‘tradita magis quam cognita’ (translated by

⁸¹ Annette Lassen, ‘*Origines Gentium* and the Learned Origin of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*’, in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Lassen, Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, pp. 33–58 (p. 40).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸³ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 360.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 359.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 361.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 359.

Fisher as ‘heresay rather than certainty’).⁸⁷ Interestingly, Saxo mentions that Bjørn also has a fantastical horse but makes no attempt to explain its origin, which just underscores the dog’s gigantic one.

Despite at first expressing uncertainty over the dog’s strength, Saxo goes on to put this strength to the test when Bjørn ends up fighting for the prince Frithlef. In the middle of one large battle, when Bjørn’s side is losing, he, ‘solutum nexibus molossum concitavit in hostem, quam ferro obtinere non poterat, canino morsu uictoriam adepturus’ (‘unleashing his dog, stirred it against the enemy, to obtain with a dog’s bite victory that which he could not obtain by sword’).⁸⁸ Saxo’s use of ‘molossus’ to describe the dog is an interesting detail, the Molossus being a specific famed ancient Greek breed of dog bred in Epirus. Aristotle wrote in his *Historia Animalium* that there were two types of this breed, hunting dogs and sheepdogs, the latter being ‘superior to the others in size, and in the courage with which they face the attacks of wild animals’.⁸⁹ This description suits both the ferocity and herding role of Offotus’/Bjørn’s dog quite well. Perhaps Saxo is merely using ‘molossus’ as a synonym for ‘dog’, but considering his classical influences, this might very well be a deliberate choice of term to draw attention to the strength of the gigantic hound, as well as its preternatural background. Some Greek sources do trace this breed back to a hound of the goddess Artemis herself.⁹⁰

Unleashing his hound turns out to be a very good strategy, as Bjørn’s enemies are quickly routed. Yet Saxo appears somewhat hesitant to condone the use of the dog in battle, briefly interrupting the course of the plot to reflect on this ‘probrosam’ (‘shameful’) incident

cum fortium phalanx mordicus laccessita profugeret. Quorum fuga tristior an turpior fuerit, nescias. Erubescendus siquidem Normannorum exercitus erat, quem hostis opem a bellua

⁸⁷ Ibid., I, pp. 359–60. Lassen suggests that Saxo uses such ‘apologiae’ clauses because ‘he does not wish to appear to relate in an uncritical manner stories which are not commonsensical’ (*Origines Gentium*, p. 41).

⁸⁸ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 372.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, p. 608a.

⁹⁰ See Harry Thurston Peck, *Harper’s Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities* (Brothers, 1897), p. 268.

mutuatus obtruiuit. Nec fraudi Fridleuo fuit labentem militum uirtutem canino reparare presidio.⁹¹

when a phalanx of warriors fled on being assailed by bites. You could not know a sadder or more dishonourable flight. Indeed, the army of the Northmen should blush that the enemy borrowed the aid of a beast against them. But it was not deceitful for Frithlef to restore the fallen courage of his soldiers though canine protection.

It is a little uncharitable of Saxo to characterise the hound's attacks as mere bites, considering its gigantic origins and strength, but these lines do bring out the ambiguity inherent in the portrayal of dogs in literature. Saxo considers it perfectly acceptable and not 'fraudo' ('deceitful') for Frithlef's troops to rely on 'canino presidio' ('canine protection'), yet sad and dishonourable for the enemy's troops to be overcome by 'opem a bellua' ('the aid of a beast'). Such contradictory statements are made possible by the many contradictions inherent in dogs, at once natural and supernatural, beloved companions and terrible beasts, and the next chapter will explore how these contradictions are further exploited by other legendary sagas in interesting ways. In this case, directly comparing the dog's bite to a sword positions the dog as a weapon to be used by Björn like any other, and perhaps even as an extension of Björn himself. The dog is a neutral force to be used by others, with no positive or negative judgement placed on the animal itself. Like the other dogs of this chapter with gigantic origins, this dog's natural abilities are amplified by its supernatural origins and fully taken advantage of by its new human companion, so that it plays a role that no mere human could.

Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss

One of the dogs most skilled in the ability to navigate different worlds within a saga is Snati of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*. Dated to the late thirteenth or fourteenth century, this saga is often considered by critics to be on the 'periphery' of the genre of family sagas (one of the so-called

⁹¹ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 372.

‘post-classical’ *Íslendingasögur*), but includes many *fornaldarsaga* elements and motifs.⁹² As Eleanor Barraclough has explained, ‘the conventions of this social realistic genre [of the *Íslendingasaga*] are fundamentally subverted when a pagan clan of monstrous descent takes centre stage as a set of unlikely protagonists.’⁹³ Its combination of genealogy and place-name history alongside a range of supernatural beings leads Elizabeth Ashman Rowe to classify it as a hybrid ‘Icelandic mythic-heroic saga’.⁹⁴

The saga may be roughly divided into two halves, the first centred on the Icelander Bárðr and the second on his son Gestr. As protagonists, Bárðr and Gestr differ from other *fornaldarsaga* heroes like Þorsteinn and Hálfðan in that they are themselves not entirely human. Bárðr’s mother is described as ‘kvenna fríðust ok nær allra kvenna stærst, þeira sem mennskar váru’ (‘the most beautiful woman and nearly the largest of all women who were human’), and his father is said to be descended from both ‘risakyni’ (‘*risi*-kind’) and ‘trölllaættum’ (‘troll-lineage’).⁹⁵ The connotations of ‘tröll’ vary widely across sources, though Ármann Jakobsson argues that ‘the troll is always anti-social and disruptive [...], it is always strange, inexplicable and thus supernatural or magical’.⁹⁶ In this saga, *tröll* appear to form a category distinct from and more negatively-coded than *risar*, and both categories are certainly very distinct from humans. Bárðr is further fostered by the ‘bergbúi’ (‘mountain-dweller’, seemingly another category of supernatural beings) Dofri, who instructs him in ‘alls kyns íþróttir ok ættvísi ok vígfimi’ (‘all kinds of skills and genealogical knowledge and feats of

⁹² Ármann Jakobsson, ‘History of the Trolls? *Bárðar saga* as an Historical Narrative’, *Saga Book*, 25.1 (1998), pp. 53–71 (p. 53). On the category of ‘post-classical’ *Íslendingasögur*, see Merkelbach, *Story, World and Character*, pp. 1–26.

⁹³ Eleanor Barraclough, ‘The Metamorphosis of the Troll-Woman in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*’, *Quaestio Insularis*, 9 (2009), pp. 52–62 (p. 52).

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, ‘Generic Hybrids: Norwegian “Family” Sagas and Icelandic “Mythic-Heroic” Sagas’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 65.4 (1993), pp. 539–54.

⁹⁵ *Bárðar saga*, pp. 101–02.

⁹⁶ Ármann Jakobsson, ‘The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: The Meanings of *Troll* and *Ergi* in Medieval Iceland’, *Saga Book*, 32 (2008), pp. 39–68 (p. 54).

arms'), and possibly also 'galdra ok forneskju' (terms usually referring to forms of ancient sorcery).⁹⁷ Bárðr emigrates to Iceland where he lives in Snæfellsnes in closer contact with humans, until a series of events leads him to disappear from society and withdraw into the mountains. Ármann Jakobsson describes this as Bárðr 'heeding the pull of his ancestry', and the explanation given by the saga is that 'var hann tröllum ok líkari at afli ok vexti en mennskum mönnum' ('he was more like trolls in strength and size than human men').⁹⁸

If Bárðr's pull is towards his heathen ancestry, Gestr's trajectory is the opposite in this saga. The shift in protagonists from Bárðr to Gestr might be identified as happening at a Yule feast of the 'tröllkona' ('troll-woman') Hít, who is said to live in a cave named Hundahellir.⁹⁹ Hundahellir is located near the bottom of the mountain Bæjarfell, just north of Hítardalur in west Iceland, the landscape situating this episode firmly within a legendary world of trolls, giants, and other supernatural beings. The name of the cave already hints at an association between dogs and the supernatural in this saga, and it is therefore fitting that we are first introduced to the dog Snati here. Also attending Hít's feast is the *purs* Kolbjörn, who is tripped by Gestr in the middle of a game, leading to a violent scuffle that ends with Kolbjörn swearing vengeance on Gestr. The feast is broken up but, before Gestr leaves, Hít gives him the dog Snati. Hít's motivations behind this gift are left unexplained. Perhaps this was done out of respect or fear of Bárðr of whom, it is said, 'allir þursar váru [...] hræddir' ('all the giants were afraid').¹⁰⁰ Or perhaps it was out of her friendship with Bárðr and in reaction to Kolbjörn's threat of revenge, Snati's intended function being a protective one.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *Bárðar saga*, p. 103.

⁹⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, 'History of the Trolls', p. 62. *Bárðar saga*, p. 119.

⁹⁹ *Bárðar saga*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁰¹ Ármann Jakobsson does describe the relationship between Bárðr and Hít as 'one of the few examples in medieval Icelandic literature of friendship between a male and a female on an equal basis' ('History of the Trolls', p. 65).

If the latter was indeed her reasoning, Hít's gift does prove to be extremely foresightful as Snati is later crucial in helping Gestr in battle against Kolbjørn and his mother Skrukka. In an attempt to rescue the maiden Sólrún from Kolbjørn, Gestr splits up his allies, instructing Snati to take on the formidable troll-woman Skrukka. Snati is able to single-handedly defeat his challenger in an ingenious manner: he climbs up a cliff and rolls down large stones, eventually breaking her back with a boulder.¹⁰² Bourns sees this resourcefulness as 'non-canine ingenuity [...]'; instead of simply following human orders, he uses his own initiative and shows foresight.¹⁰³ Snati's ingenuity is indeed remarkable, but not necessarily 'non-canine', as dogs have time and again been shown to have varying levels of intelligence and problem-solving abilities.¹⁰⁴ That being said, throwing stones and boulders is actually a common manoeuvre employed by giants and trolls, so Snati's strategy might be another reminder of his supernatural origins.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, having Snati sit and eat by Gestr's feet and sleep with him in his tent on other occasions, as was discussed in the first chapter, does bestow a sense of familiarity and normalcy upon the protagonist. The text thus manages to anchor Gestr in both the human world and the supernatural one through his dog and, in the process, blurs the borders between the two.

It is extremely significant that Snati is introduced at the very moment of Gestr's promotion to saga protagonist. As all these examples demonstrate, having a loyal canine companion is a characteristic feature of a saga hero. Like Selsnautr, Snati is the perfect

¹⁰² *Bárðar saga*, pp. 156–57.

¹⁰³ Bourns, 'Between Nature and Culture', p. 53.

¹⁰⁴ Studies on this subject, for instance, are summarized in Ádam Miklósi, J. Topál, and V. Csányi, 'Comparative Social Cognition: What Can Dogs Teach Us?', *Animal Behaviour*, 67.6 (2004), pp. 995–1004. In *The Intelligence of Dogs: Canine Consciousness and Capabilities* (Headline, 1994), pp. 161–72, Stanlen Coren has created his own 'Canine IQ Test'. Albeit, most of these tests involve finding food rather than killing trolls, but do effectively demonstrate a canine's intelligence in problem-solving.

¹⁰⁵ See Lotte Motz, 'Giants in Folklore and Mythology: A New Approach', *Folklore*, 93.1 (1982), pp. 70–84 (p. 71). In *Kjalnesinga saga*, for instance, a man Búa hundr is said to be 'hund og tröll' when he throws stones at his enemies from atop a hill (in *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson, pp. 1–44 (p. 11)).

companion to Gestr as he moves between different worlds within the saga, the focus of a struggle not just between natural and supernatural, but also between Iceland's heathen past and Christian present, fulfilling, according to Eleanor Barraclough, 'dual functions as both a 'conversion' hero [...] and a supernatural being with roots deep inside the pagan world.'¹⁰⁶ Although he very effectively helps Gestr navigate these different functions throughout the saga, Snati's own background as companion to trolls anchors Gestr to his pre-Christian legendary heritage, an aspect that will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

Conclusion

It was demonstrated in chapter 1 that dogs were a staple of Old Norse-Icelandic literature and the medieval Icelandic and Scandinavian society that may be extrapolated therein. Thus, the mention in a text of a *hundr* or *rakki* would immediately conjure up a specific image in the audience's minds, regardless of whether it appears alongside a human or a giant. Each of the texts described above adds further small details that are easily recognisable as canine, from physical details of tails and snouts (enhanced though they may be) to behavioural depictions like growling or displaying a belly.

This familiarity is not just limited to the dogs themselves, but extended as well to their companions. In many ways, the relationships of care, loyalty, obedience, and sacrifice shared between the dogs of this chapter and their supernatural companions closely resemble the relationships between dogs and their supposedly more "ordinary" human owners. Descriptions of the huts in *Porsteins saga*, *Hálfðanar saga*, and *Ásmundar saga* create scenes of a domestic life shared by dog and giant, as does the feasting hall and tent in *Bárðar saga*. Details of the

¹⁰⁶ Eleanor Barraclough, 'Following the Trollish *Baton Sinister*: Ludic Design in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 4 (2008), pp. 15–43 (p. 27).

catch of bears, whale, and fowl cast Fullafli and Selr in the role of hunters, while Naddr and Offotus are depicted as pastoral herders, more familiar and perhaps even more sympathetic. Deleuze and Guattari's statement that 'home does not preexist' is true of most worlds, real and fictional, but is especially true of these *fornaldarsögur* that must therefore use dogs and other landmarks in their worldbuilding to organise and define their landscapes and the homes within them. Having established this familiarity, the dogs and their companions may then be bestowed new sets of supernatural skills without challenging the audience's belief. The dogs thus act as what Merkelbach terms a 'transuniverse anchor', through which 'audience involvement in worldbuilding is initiated—the mind has entered the world and secondary belief is possible.'¹⁰⁷

Establishing secondary belief is especially important in the *fornaldarsögur*, a genre that often addresses familiar contemporary societal concerns through a cast of more fabulous unfamiliar characters. As Margaret Clunies Ross explains, both 'the personae of the *fornaldarsaga* and the geographical settings in which they move must have signalled to the medieval audience that the action of this saga subgenre was removed from the world of the everyday' but, importantly, 'not so fully removed that its subject-matter could not be meaningful to them.'¹⁰⁸ It has been shown how *Þorsteins saga* addresses questions of honour, hospitality, loyalty, and kinship obligations as much in its giant-dog episode as in the rest of the saga. Even if such themes are not directly addressed in the other giant episodes discussed in this chapter, the presence of a dog ensures that these episodes do not detract from the more socially 'meaningful' parts of the narrative, but are instead fully integrated into the social order that binds the narrative together. Moreover, the unique natural scouting skills of dogs and their ability to transfer loyalties from giants to humans further blurs physical and conceptual borders within the sagas. The result is a thematic and structural unity that scholars have sometimes

¹⁰⁷ Merkelbach, 'Dreamworlds, Storyworlds', p. 15.

¹⁰⁸ Clunies Ross, *Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*, pp. 77–78.

denied the *formaldarsögur*. As Rohrbach explains, the ‘tierische Blick impliziert [...], daß durch eine alternative Lesart der Sagatexte unterliegende Strukturelemente der Texte aufgedeckt werden sollen, welche die Texte als Gesamtheit gliedern und verknüpfen’ (‘the animal gaze implies that an alternative reading of the saga texts should reveal underlying structural elements of the text, which structure and link the texts as a whole’).¹⁰⁹ A narrative ethology that pays closer attention to often-overlooked characters like dogs can thus facilitate a more complex understanding of these sagas and the genre they represent.

When a dog is companion to a giant or a saga hero, it is easy to see why the animal might be overlooked in favour of its more exciting companion, but there is value in looking at the dogs on their own. One motif that is worth briefly exploring more is that of dog tears. As discussed in the first chapter, “real” dogs do not cry, but with Selsnautr, Naddarnautr, and Vígi, Old Norse-Icelandic literature gives us three stunning examples of dogs shedding tears. *OddsÓl* explicitly instructs the reader to interpret these tears as a sign of grief and anguish and *Hálfðanar saga* as a sign of joy and relief. *Ásmundar saga* is not as explicit, but the dog howling and clawing at the closed door, shedding tears with a stick stuck in its mouth, and gladdened when petted and praised by Ásmundr are all scripts into which the audience is primed to read emotions of desperation, pain, and joy. These are all emotions that bring a further layer of familiarity to the storyworld, but also emotions that tend to be recognised as human. In his book on animals and violence in the Middle Ages, Karl Steel writes that faced

with a constitutive and irreparable disparity between themselves and their human self-image, humans assert that animals lack what uniquely afflicts humans. To give this assertion strength, they treat animals “like animals,” as instruments available for labor or slaughter, violence which does not count as morally significant violence and which therefore qualitatively differs from the violence humans suffer.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 62.

¹¹⁰ Steel, *How to Make a Human*, p. 5.

Violence and death abound in the *fornaldarsögur* and dogs are not spared. While it might sometimes be easy to dismiss violence against animals as morally insignificant or qualitatively different from violence against humans, the tears of Selsnautr, Naddarnautr, and Vígi are more difficult to ignore and provide an answer to Jeremy Bentham's famous question on the ethical treatment of animals: 'The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?'¹¹¹ It appears from these texts that Old Norse-Icelandic dogs can and do suffer, which raises the question of what really separates them from humans. Dogs in the *fornaldarsögur* thus not only challenge the boundaries between natural and supernatural, but also the boundaries between human and animal, and this is where this thesis will turn next.

¹¹¹ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (T. Payne and Son, 1789), p. 309. This question was taken up by Derrida in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, pp. 27–28.

CHAPTER 4. LEGENDARY DOGS II: HUMAN/ANIMAL HYBRIDITY

...For sublime deeds like the foundation of a city or the fabrication of a golem, one draws a circle, or better yet walks in a circle as in a children's dance, combining rhythmic vowels and consonants that correspond to the interior forces of creation as to the differentiated parts of an organism. A mistake in speed, rhythm, or harmony would be catastrophic because it would bring back the forces of chaos, destroying both creator and creation.¹

Introduction

In the ninth century AD, St Rimbert, the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, spent some time on mission in Scandinavia. At some point during this period, Rimbert wrote a letter to the Carolingian theologian-monk Ratramnus about the possibility of encountering cynocephali, creatures with the bodies of humans but the heads of dogs. This letter is unfortunately lost to us, but we presume it included a description of what he had heard and believed about these dog-headed men supposedly living in organised communities in Scandinavia and questioned the possibility of converting them to Christianity. We are able to piece together the contents of Rimbert's letter because Ratramnus wrote a long reply back, which includes the following statements:

Inter hæc sciendum vero si contenti fuerimus opinion nostrorum, videlicet ecclesiasticorum doctorum, inter bestias potius quam inter homines deputandi sunt, siquidem et forma capitis et latratus canum, non hominibus sed bestiis similes ostendit. Hominum denique est rotundum vertice cœlum aspicere, canum vero oblong capite rostroque deducto terram intueri. Et homines loquuntur, canes vere latrant.

Verum quo litterae a vestra charitate nobis direct, dum naturam illorum diligentius significarunt, nonnulla docuerint auæ humanæ rationi potius quam bestiali sensibilitati convenire videntur: scilicet quod societatis quædam jura custodiant, quod villarum cohabitation testificatur; quod agri culturam exercent, quod et frugum messione colligitur; quod verenda non bestiarum more detegant, sed humana velent verecundia, quæ res pudoris est indicium; quod in usu legminis, non solum pelles, verum etiam et vestes eos habere, scripsistis: hæc enim omnia rationale quodammodo testificari videntur eis inesse animam.²

¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 311.

² *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 121 vols (Migne, 1841–65), CXXI, p. 1153.

About these things, it should be known that, if we are satisfied with the opinion of our ecclesiastical teachers, they are to be counted among animals rather than humans, since both the form of their heads and their canine barking shows that they resemble not humans but animals. In fact, a human looks up at the heavens with a round head, but a dog looks at the ground with its long oblong head. And humans speak, dogs bark.

It is true that the letter that you kindly sent to me, by more carefully indicating their nature, has taught some things which seem to suit human reason rather than beastly sensibility: namely, that they keep certain laws of society, which is testified to by cohabitation in villages; that they practice agriculture, which is inferred from the harvest; that they do not expose themselves in the manner of beasts, but prefer human modesty, which is a sign of decency; that you wrote that they use skins not only for meat but also clothes: all these seem to rationally testify that they have a soul.

Rimbert's letter and Ratramnus' reply are evidence of a great concern in this period, at least within the Church, about what separates humans from other animals. Theologically, this distinction was sought in the Book of Genesis where God made man in his image and gave humans authority over all other living beings, a special status that was seen as key not just to life on earth but to eternal salvation.³ And so, one by one, Ratramnus considers criteria used throughout medieval Europe to define the human. Dogs, he notes, bark, and so lack the ability of complex communicative language that even today is argued (with much debate) to be unique to humans.⁴ Physical differences are of course the most overt, the focus usually being the shape of a human's head as compared to most other animals, especially quadrupeds. This, too, has theological meaning. Dorothy Yamamoto explains the belief that animals

proclaimed their lesser role in God's design through their bodily stance. They looked downwards, focusing on the things of this earth. [...] Conversely, man's upright posture was tangible evidence of his divine vocation, his orientation towards the things of the spirit.⁵

Living in human society means following certain human laws and living in built settlements. Sam Ottewill-Soulsby has thus explained how variant accounts of the cynocephali in Greco-Roman texts locate more human ones in urban settlements but non-human ones outside the city, and the previous chapter already described how a shift to the fabulous in the

³ Genesis 1.26 (Vulgate, p. 1).

⁴ On modern debates about this theory, see Tim Ingold's introduction to *What is An Animal?* (pp. 7–8).

⁵ Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human*, p. 8. This is discussed in *Stjórn*'s commentary on Genesis (p. 20).

fornaldarsögur is often signified by a retreat into the wilderness.⁶ Since the Agricultural Revolution, diet has been another factor often used to distinguish between species (and, even more problematically, between different human cultures), as has clothing.⁷ The latter once again has roots in Genesis, going back to Adam and Eve's shame at their nakedness after the Biblical Fall.⁸ Perhaps the most important human characteristic to medieval thinkers from Isidore of Seville to Thomas Aquinas was the possession of a rational soul.⁹ Joyce Salisbury explains this as a 'perceived lack of reason'; as 'animals lacked the power to make rational decisions, medieval philosophers attributed animal action to instinct, and animals (unlike humans) were incapable of acting apart from instinctive behavior.'¹⁰

Although Ratramnus fascinatingly concludes that the cynocephali are more human than animal, most Christian thinkers in this period used the above criteria and more to establish a much sharper human/animal binary. In less overtly religious texts, however, this binary is not usually given as much import. Bintley and Williams argue that for 'the majority of early medieval people, living their lives at some remove from the learned and literate world of ecclesiastical scholarship, category questions would not have been irrelevant but probably incomprehensible.'¹¹ To call such questions 'incomprehensible' might be underestimating the average medieval mind, but it is true that they were less relevant in certain genres of texts. Referring to Marie de France's *Lay of Bisclavaret*, Susan Crane writes that medieval poetry 'sometimes unfolds a contrasting conception that humans and other animals occupy together a

⁶ Sam Ottewill-Soulsby, 'City of Dog', *Journal of Urban History*, 47.5 (2021), pp. 1130–48.

⁷ See John Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 27.

⁸ This theme is also the starting-point of Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, for instance, contrasts the 'natural inclination' of a sheep fleeing a wolf with the 'cogitative power' and 'reason' of human beings (*Questions on the Soul*, p. 167). Isidore makes a similar argument in his classification of 'beasts', discussed more below (*The Etymologies*, ed. and trans. by Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 251).

¹⁰ Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, p. 5. The question of non-human rationality and intelligence is still fiercely debated; see, for instance, Ingold, *What is an Animal?*, pp. 6–13.

¹¹ Michael Bintley and Thomas Williams, 'Introduction', in *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia*, ed. by Bintley and Williams (Boydell & Brewer, 2015), pp. 1–12 (p. 4).

field of resonances, equivalences, and differences—and not differences that precipitate into a sharply delineated binary.¹² She thus identifies a ‘climate of wonder and adventure peculiar to Marie’s lays, a space of imagination that can do without the clarifying dichotomy between man and wolf.’¹³ The Old Norse-Icelandic legendary sagas share precisely this ‘climate of wonder and adventure’, this ‘space of imagination’ that establishes boundaries only insofar as it can challenge them.

This chapter demonstrates how dogs, among the most oft-forgotten of *fornaldarsaga* characters, are excellent examples of these stretched boundaries that create the imaginative storyworlds of the legendary sagas. It begins by examining the implications of human/canine hybridity in the medieval motif of the dog-king and instances across Old Norse-Icelandic literature where dogs are used as replacements for humans. Next, episodes in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Sturlaugs saga* are used as examples of human-to-animal transformation, investigating just how complete these transformations really are. Other examples of the cynocephali are then explored as ideals of human/animal hybridity that are used creatively by specific texts to interrogate specific boundaries. Finally, this chapter turns to *Hrólfs saga kraka*, a text where all these themes of hybridity and transformation are brought together to challenge the limit between humanity and animality. Throughout these individual sagas, it will thus be demonstrated that through processes of hybridity and transformation, dogs are constantly crossing the traditional boundaries between human and animal, challenging the limits of humanity and animality laid out in Ratramnus’ letter. As Caroline Walker Bynum writes, both metamorphosis and hybridity

can be understood both to destabilize and to reveal the world. In other words, hybrid and metamorphosis can, on the one hand, be ways of suggesting that the reality they image is what the world really is; in this sense they are revelations. [...] On the other hand, both hybrid and metamorphosis can be destabilizings of expectation. Both can suggest that the world, either in

¹² Crane, *Animal Encounters*, p. 48.

¹³ Ibid.

process or in the instant, is disordered and fluid, with the horror and wonder of uncontrolled potency or violated boundaries. [...] At an even deeper level, they shake our confidence in the structure of reality, in the basic synchrony between inner and outer we tend to assume.¹⁴

It will be observed, however, that while dogs do destabilize and reveal through hybridity and transformation, they are able to do so without threatening or effacing the human-animal binary or the definition of humanity. Compared to any other animal, dogs are able to avoid this because they are already so close to humanity, existing and thriving on the boundary. Our confidence in the structure of reality is shaken but not broken. Dogs are therefore important narrative tools in creating imaginative *fornaldarsaga* worlds and are used by saga composers in all kinds of interesting ways without threatening an existential crisis about what it means to be human. And so, the limitrophic dog is key to maintaining the limit, feeding it, generating it, raising it, and complicating it.

The Dog-King

Several classical and medieval authors mention societies ruled by dogs. According to Pliny the Elder, for instance, this is the plight of an African society by the Nile, which the ancient Greek philosopher Plutarch more specifically identifies as a tribe of Ethiopians.¹⁵ Lily Weiser-Aall has traced this motif in an old Ethiopian folktale, as well as in Arabic, Hebrew, Indian, and Chinese traditions.¹⁶ Scandinavian sources, on the other hand, tend to localise this motif, making the dog-king a feature of their own legendary past. The twelfth-century Danish *Chronicon Lethrense* (*Chronicle of Lejre*), written in Latin, constructs an elaborate tale

¹⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (Zone Books, 2005), pp. 30–31.

¹⁵ Pliny, *Natural History, Volume II: Books 3-7*, ed. by Jeffrey Henderson, trans. by H. Rackham (Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 480. Plutarch, *Moralia, Volume XIII, Part I*, ed. by Jeffrey Henderson, trans. by Harold Cherniss (Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 699.

¹⁶ Lily Weiser-Aall, 'En Studie over Sagnet om Hundekongen', *Maal og Minne* (1933), pp. 134–49.

featuring a dog-king after King Helgi flees the country from the shame of marrying his daughter.¹⁷ It is then said that a Swedish king Athislus (Eadgil or Aðils)

a Danis suscepit tributum. Quibus constituit regem catulum quondam latrabilem, nomine Raka, nimis <sibi> dilectum. Qui dum una dierum sederet cum exercitu suo, regali seruicio honoratus, uidit canes in fundo luctantes; quos dum a lesione separare uellet, prosiliens de mensa inter eos Rachi ad mortem oppressus est. Quod nullus Athislo nunciare audebat, quia, siquis nunciaret interitum Racha, decollacione protinus interiret.¹⁸

received tribute from the Danes. Over them he made a *quondam*-barking young dog named Raka king, who was very dear to him. One day, while sitting with his army, honoured by royal service, he saw dogs fighting on the floor; trying to keep them from injury, Raka leapt from the table and was crushed to death among them. Nobody dared inform Athislus of this, for whoever announced the death of Raka would immediately perish by beheading.

Although Raka clearly is still a dog (evident in his very name, the Old Norse ‘rakki’ literally meaning ‘dog’), he is treated like any other human king with an army and royal service, and even appears to take on some human qualities. He now sits at the table with his probably-human retainers, explicitly separated from the more naturally animal dogs ‘in fundo’ (‘on the floor’, or possibly ‘in the field’). The dogs’ wildness in fighting on the ground is further juxtaposed against Raka’s noble concern for them, attempting to prevent injury and killed by his own species in the process.¹⁹ The earlier qualifying phrase ‘quondam latrabilem’ is also significant to this characterisation, though its implications are uncertain. ‘Latrabilem’ means barking, highlighting Raka’s canine nature, and yet the barking is only ‘quondam’, which could mean either ‘formerly’ or ‘occasionally’. Either way, there is perhaps a suggestion here that, as king, Raka no longer barks at all or as much as he previously would, losing a part of this crucial canine attribute.

¹⁷ This is the same King Helgi who will be met later in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.

¹⁸ *Chronicon Lethrense. De Antiquissimis Danie Regibus*, in *Scriptores Minores Historiæ Danicæ*, ed. by Martin Clarentius Gertz, 2 vols (Gad, 1917–20), I, pp. 43–53 (p. 48).

¹⁹ One Old Danish text (in the c. 1400 ‘Rydårbogen’, Copenhagen, Royal Library, E donation variorum 3 8°) instead has Raka (here Hathi) killed in the process of fighting for bones with the rest of the dogs, highlighting its continued animal nature despite the royal position (Anja Ute Blode, “‘Of Lice and Men’: A Comparison of the King Snio Episode in the Annales Ryenses”, in *Beyond the Piræus Lion: East Norse Studies from Venice*, ed. by Jonathan Adams and Massimiliano Bampi (Selskab for Østnordisk Filologi, 2017), pp. 153–70 (p. 159).

This entire episode is characterised by subversions of the natural order. A man named Snio (Snjór) is sent to deliver the news to the king, first engaging in a series of animal riddles that involve sheep eating wolves, wolves eating a cart instead of its horses, and mice eating an axe but not the haft. Each of these riddles does have a rational (if absurd) solution, but nevertheless draws on and reinforces the atmosphere of the inversion of nature established by the dog-king. In order to avoid being beheaded, Snio ingeniously makes the king infer on his own that Raka had been killed, by enigmatically declaring, ‘Apes equidem omnes sine principe existent errantes’ (‘the bees are indeed wandering without a leader’), casting the (dog-)kingless people as a swarm of aimless insects.²⁰ Having greatly impressed Athislus, Snio is made the new king of the Danes, but he is said to be a cruel king, ‘superbus et iniquus, elatus et in malicia nimis potens, per omnia terribilis’ (‘arrogant and unjust, proud and exceedingly powerful in malice, terrible in all things’).²¹ Focusing on the Old West Norse texts in this tradition (discussed below), Timothy Bourns argues that these stories

also establish cultural anxieties about breaking the boundaries between human and animal, wild and domestic. To transgress these dichotomies by not only making an animal quasi-human, but also a king, has disastrous consequences: [...] dogs are meant to be domestic companions—not rulers with dominion over human lives.²²

We can certainly read cultural anxieties about the human-animal boundary in this story, especially keeping in mind man’s mastery over all other living beings in the Book of Genesis.²³ Humanity’s supreme authority has so often been used as its distinguishing characteristic from other animals, but this authority is fully inverted by the figure of the dog-king. That being said, there is actually a striking absence of ‘disastrous consequences’ to the dog-king’s rule. In many versions of the story, the people are supposedly humiliated by the dog’s heightened status and the dog does itself end up being killed, yet not a single text mentions any adverse effects to the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

²¹ Ibid., p. 50.

²² Timothy Bourns, ‘Becoming-Animal in the Icelandic Sagas’, *Neophilologus*, 105 (2021), pp. 633–53 (p. 643).

²³ Genesis 1.26 (Vulgate, p. 1).

people's security or material prosperity. Even though the dog-king may have been a strange, unnatural, even insulting figure, according to the *Chronicon Lethrense*, it is his successor who is truly "monstrous". Snio furthermore has some connection to giants, as he is said to be the giant Læ's herdsman, and he may even be gigantic himself. At least one later version of the story by the fifteenth-century Swedish theologian Ericus Olai actually makes the giant (here Lääs) a king as well, reigning between the dog and the herdsman.²⁴ In contrast, as strange as it might be for a dog to become king, perhaps this animal's natural loyalty and innate association with kingship make it more likely to be good in the role. Interestingly, in one c. 1400 Old Danish 'Rydårbogen', Snio actually goes to the king with the dead dog's skin 'sythæ [...] i mallum sinæ hærdæ' ('sewn between his shoulders'), a striking act of physical hybridity that would usually suggest a shift to animality but might here be read as a means of claiming royal legitimacy, merging not simply with a dog, but with a dog-king.²⁵

Although Athislus' motivations in appointing his dear companion as king go unstated in the *Chronicon Lethrense*, most sources specify that his aim is to impose humility and humiliation upon the Danes. Nowhere is this case made more strongly than in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, where it is a Swedish king named Gunnar who so imposes upon the Norwegians, going into great detail about his motivations but omitting the dog's death and the end of its reign entirely.²⁶ To Saxo, this is a clear act of insult and punishment, the intention being that 'plenus superbie populus insolentiam suam manifestius puniri cognosceret, dum obnixos latranti uertices inclinaret' ('the people full of pride would know their insolence to be more clearly punished, when they bowed their heads to a barking animal').²⁷ The subversion of normal human-animal roles here therefore lies not so much in the dog's raised status as in

²⁴ Ericus Olai, *Chronica Regni Gothorum*, ed. by Ella Heuman and Jan Öberg, 2 vols (Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), I, p. 42.

²⁵ Blode, 'Of Lice and Men', p. 160.

²⁶ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 499.

²⁷ Ibid.

its human subjects' debasement, forced to bow and lower themselves before a dog in 'despicable [...] obsequium' ('despicable obsequiousness').²⁸ If it weren't already obvious, Saxo states explicitly that this dog does no ruling of its own, but is surrounded by governors and different ranks of nobility who rule in its name. The dog itself isn't even considered important enough to name in this story and is thus denied even the most basic of anthropomorphic attributes.

Another group of Old (West) Norse texts localises this story even further to a king named Eysteinn illráði ('ill-advised') and the people of Þrándheimr. In the Hauksbók manuscript, the short genealogical text commonly titled *Af Upplendinga konungum* says that Eysteinn 'lagði undir sik Eynafylki í Þrándheimi ok fekk þeim til konungs þar hund sinn, er Sórr hét; við hann er kenndr Sórshaugr' ('conquered the Eynafylki in Þrándheimr and set his dog who was called Sórr over them as king; Sórshaugr is named after him').²⁹ The likewise genealogical *Hversu Noregr byggðist* of the Flateyjarbók manuscript describes the same Eysteinn making the dog Saurr king, explaining it as an act of revenge over the people who killed his son.³⁰ Although only very briefly mentioned, both texts use this story to introduce an unusual yet not entirely unrealistic element to their semi-legendary genealogies, the former text drawing a clearer link to this past by using the dog-king motif to explain the origins of a place-name.

Perhaps the most creative interpretation of this motif, however, is in the *konungasaga Hákonar saga góða*, which briefly introduces King Eysteinn and the dog-king as an explanation for why so many people fled Þrándheimr and established societies in other parts of Scandinavia. Having conquered the Þrændir, Eysteinn asked the people

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Af Upplendinga konungum*, in *FornNorð*, II, pp. 153–55 (p. 153).

³⁰ *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, in *FornNorð*, II, pp. 137–48 (p. 141).

hvárt þeir vildi heldr hafa at konungi þræl hans, er hét Þórir faxi, eða hund, er Saurr hét. Þeir kuru hundinn, því at þeir þóttust þá mundu heldr sjálfráða; þeir létu síða í hundinn þrjú mannavit, ok gó hann til tveggja orða, en mælti hit þriðja. Helsi var honum gert ok viðjar or silfri ok gulli, en þegar er saurugt var, báru hirðmenn hans hann á herðum sér. Hásæti var honum búit, ok hann sat á haugi sem konungr, ok bjó í eyjunni Iðri, ok hafði atsetu þar sem heitir Saurshaugr. Þat er sagt, at honum varð at bana, at vargar lögðust á hjörð hans, en hirðmenn eggjuðu hann at verje fê sitt. Hann gékk af hauginum ok fór þangat til sem vargarnir váru, en þeir rifu hann þegar í sundr.³¹

whether they would rather have as a king his thrall who was called Þórir faxi, or a dog who was called Saurr. They chose the dog because they thought then they would have more independence; they cast magic to give the dog the intelligence of three men, and he barked for two words and spoke the third. A collar was made for him and a withy of silver and gold, and when it was muddy, retainers carried him on their shoulders. A high-seat was built for him, and he sat on a mound like a king, and lived on Eyin Iðri and had a residence there called Saurshaugr. It is said that he was killed when wolves attacked his flock, and retainers urged him to defend his livestock. He descended from the mound and went to where the wolves were, and they immediately tore him apart.

Within the dog-king tradition, giving the people a modicum of choice is an aspect unique to this saga. Perhaps the intention of the text is to allow the Norwegians to retain some of their pride, but one consequence either way is a humanisation of the dog and a dehumanisation of the thrall by placing them on the same level.³² The people's choice of the dog in the hopes of some independence does, however, indicate that the two options are not equal in their eyes, the dog still lacking the humanity to make decisions as a ruler. Yet this position is immediately undermined as the dog is magically bestowed with intelligence and limited human speech, again attributes unique to this particular dog-king. Even though Saurr's ability to speak is limited, its significance cannot be understated. As Bourns explains, '[m]agic here enables a becoming-human process: when humans and animals communicate, the two categories are both established and disrupted; for by necessity, either the human becomes-animal, comprehending animal speech—sharing the animal mind, its interiority—or the animal becomes-human,

³¹ *Hákonar saga góða*, p. 164.

³² See Weiser-Aall, 'En Studie over Sagnet om Hundekongen', p. 145.

understanding human language and expression.’³³ Of all the hybrid dog-kings in the medieval corpus, Saurr’s speech makes him the most human.

Saurr’s speaking/barking is not the only expression of his hybrid nature. Like any great human king, he has his very own high-seat at ‘Eyin Iðri’, which refers to Inderøy, an important centre of power by Trondheimsfjord. Sitting on top of a mound, his raised status is emphasised by the fact that he must descend to confront the wolves and even more so by the fact that retainers carry him on their shoulders when it is muddy. Saurr’s collar and leash are made of gold and silver, but the items themselves are undeniably remnant representations of his canine nature, however high his status might be. The greatest evidence that the people still see Saurr as a dog comes from the Þrændir insisting that he protects their livestock from wolves, perhaps the most basic canine responsibility in medieval Scandinavia. Once again, the dog-king is killed by non-human animals, here by the most natural enemy of his species. Bourns furthermore reads Saurr being immediately torn apart as evidence of his ‘movement from wild to domestic’, lacking ‘the strength and ferocity of wild animals’.³⁴ Whatever the reasons for Saurr’s defeat, it may be read as nature fighting back and restoring the natural world order.

Some scholars like Axel Olrik have viewed the dog-king story in its various forms as a ‘rent skæmtesagn’ (‘purely humorous tale’), but within each of the above texts the humorous tale is employed to some fairly complex ends.³⁵ In most texts, there is a sharp political commentary underlining the dog-king episode, highlighting questions of independence and subjugation by a foreign power. Each text is able to adapt the tale to play out these concerns with different groups of people. The Old West Norse texts incorporate the trope within local

³³ Bourns, ‘Becoming-Animal’, p. 642. Bourns’ description of the dog-king as a ‘becoming-human process’ is a reference to and inversion of Deleuze and Guattari’s landmark concept of ‘devenir-animal’ (‘becoming animal’), which they lay out in *A Thousand Plateaus* (pp. 233–309).

³⁴ Bourns, ‘Becoming-Animal’, p. 642.

³⁵ Olrik, *Kilderne til Saksens Oldhistorie*, II, p. 306.

and national histories, some using it as a place-name origin, and *Hákonar saga góða* further using it to account for mass demographic shifts in the country. As with most elements of human/animal hybridity discussed in this chapter, all this is only effective if the animal is a dog, the absurdity of the accession tempered by the animal's prior relationship to humanity in general and kingship specifically. Insulting though it may be, no other animal could better rule humans than the eternally loyal dog, and so the human/animal divide is not entirely effaced throughout the fabulousness.

Dogs in Place of Humans

In the thirteenth-century *fornaldarsaga*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the stepson of an unnamed queen goes missing while she is having an affair. Panicked, the queen attempts to convince her husband King Heiðrekr that his son had suddenly died. When the king insists on seeing the body, the queen

segir þat auka mundu harm hans. Honum var þó þangar fylgt. Þar var dúkr, vafðr saman ok hundr innan í. Heiðrekr konung mælti: “Illa hefir sonr minn nú skipazt, ef hann er orðinn at hundi.”³⁶

says that would add to his grief. He was nevertheless brought there. There was a cloth, folded together, and a dog inside. King Heiðrekr said: “My son has now changed badly, if he has become a dog.”

Heiðrekr's droll response to seeing the dog's body conveys an attitude that the idea of such a transformation is laughable to him, 'illa' unsurprisingly implying that turning into a dog is not seen as a positive prospect. This attitude makes it even more remarkable that the queen ever attempts to pass off a dog as her stepson. She could have far more easily come up with a different reason for his disappearance, or perhaps set another human in his place. The ridiculousness of the lie is nevertheless key to Heiðrekr's own plan who, having hidden his son

³⁶ *Hervarar saga*, p. 211.

himself, now has even better grounds to leave his wife. After all, how could he possibly mistake a dead dog for his own son?

The idea that one could pass off a whole dog as a human is used to comedic effect here, yet it is a frequent trope recurring across several different genres of Old Norse-Icelandic literature. In many of these instances, the substitutions or disguises are unsurprisingly unconvincing but, in some cases, they are actually successful. Although such episodes often lean heavily into comic absurdity, it will be demonstrated in this section that they play into the larger debate about the limits of humanity. Narratives like this one, attempts to pass off animals as humans, can be very fertile testing grounds to judge where saga composers fell in this debate. By noting what works and what does not work in these disguises and deceptions, it may be possible to trace where the line is drawn between human and animal or, at least, between human and dog. At the heart of this trope is therefore a discussion about what it means to be human.

The basic purpose behind the dog-as-human trope in *Hervarar saga* is to protect a woman, and this is the case in several other occurrences of the trope. Another good example is in the mythological Eddic poem, *Hávamál*, when the god Óðinn is attempting to seduce a woman in a so-called ‘love quest’. The woman in question is unnamed, referred to only as ‘Billings m[ær]’.³⁷ The character Billigr is largely unattested to elsewhere in the corpus but suggested by John Lindow to be either a dwarf or a giant.³⁸ Most translations of ‘mær’ interpret the woman as Billigr’s daughter, although Sigurður Nordal suggests understanding her as Billigr’s wife.³⁹ The key point here is that the woman, daughter or wife of Billigr, is unmoved

³⁷ *Hávamál* 97 (*Eddk*, I, p. 341).

³⁸ John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 79. Lindow notes that Billigr is elsewhere once listed as a dwarf name and once found in a kenning for poetry.

³⁹ Sigurður Nordal, ‘Billings mær’, in *Bidrag til Nordisk Filologi, tillägnade Emil Olson, den 9 Juni 1936* (Levin & Munksgaard, 1936), pp. 288–95 (p. 290).

by Óðinn's wooing, but has no choice but to instruct Óðinn to come to her room at night. When Óðinn does so, however, he relates that

grey eitt ek þá fann
innar góðu konu
bundit beðjum á.⁴⁰

I then found a bitch bound to the bed of the fair woman.

Billings's *mær* could have left anything in her bed, animate or inanimate, or simply have left it empty, but a dog is a particularly suitable choice given the connotations of sexual lasciviousness often attributed to female dogs in the literature and the misogyny that underlines them. These connotations of female dogs are explicitly juxtaposed against the description of Billings's *mær* as a 'góð kona', 'góðr' often used to describe moral goodness. Although McKinnell suggests that this episode is 'illustrating the unreliability of women towards men', at least in Óðinn's first-person telling of it, it is Óðinn himself whose sexual impropriety might be best compared to the animal and who is foiled by its use.⁴¹ Nordal therefore describes the use of a dog as 'et grovt hån' ('a gross mockery').⁴² McKinnell and Dronke both similarly read the episode as comic, perhaps an attempt to make the god more relatable, Dronke speculating that the 'story of the offer of a dog instead of a woman probably became a great joke.'⁴³ It is nonetheless telling about attitudes towards both dogs and women and the comparisons drawn between them in literature of this kind.

Dronke further compares this episode to one in the thirteenth-century so-called *samtíðarsaga* ('contemporary saga'), *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, in which a priest conceals a woman from the man trying to woo her, ultimately sending him away with a dog instead and composing a *lausavísa* that ends:

⁴⁰ *Hávamál* 101 (*Eddk*, I, p. 342).

⁴¹ John McKinnell, 'The Making of *Hávamál*', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 3 (2007), pp. 75–115 (p. 109).

⁴² Nordal, 'Billings's *mær*', p. 291.

⁴³ Ibid. Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, III, p. 42.

En hofðu heim
þat er hœfði þeim:
var hundr í fôr
með hjálma bqr.⁴⁴

But they took home what was fitting for them: a dog was in the company of the man.

While there is a mocking tone to the poet's statement that the dog was more fitting for the man, it is nevertheless true that a dog (especially a male one, as opposed to the bed-bound *grey*) is a good choice of companion and the man may thus allay his growing 'sût' ('grief').⁴⁵ A dog is especially suitable for a warlike man, emphasised by the kenning 'hjálma bqr' ('helmet's tree'). Once again, the ultimate purpose of the substitution is ensuring a woman is protected from unwanted attention.

In neither of the previous episodes, of course, is there any expectation that the dogs will be direct replacements or could possibly be mistaken for the women. The element of comedy, indeed, is based on this understanding. The replacement is more convincing, however, in an original *riddarasaga* from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century: *Samsons saga fagra*. Rudolf Simek observes two different generic modes in this saga, a romance mode 'in the Arthurian style, mingled with motifs from fairy tales' and a *fornaldarsaga* mode.⁴⁶ Both influences are evident in an episode concerning a *miohundr* who accompanied Ólympia, the sorcerous foster-mother of the protagonist Samson. As in the two previous episodes, Ólympia's dog is used to protect a woman, Samson's beloved princess Valentina. Valentina is abducted by an evil harpist, but Ólympia saves her by substituting her with the dog:

[H]un tok þrad ok bindur vm hals hundinum ok syndizt hann þa sem ein mey. hun visar honum nu epter þiofinum.⁴⁷

She took a thread and tied it around the dog's neck and it then looked like a maiden. She sent it now to the thief.

⁴⁴ *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Rudolf Simek, 'Samsons saga fagra', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Pulsiano and Wolf, pp. 565–66 (p. 565).

⁴⁷ *Samsons saga fagra*, in *Riddarasögur*, ed. by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, III, pp. 345–401 (p. 356).

It is Ólympia's use of magic that makes the disguise visually convincing enough to trick the thieving harpist, who accepts the dog into his home and attempts to take it to bed with him. In distinguishing between humans and animals, then, physical appearance is clearly important, and so the characters in *Heiðreks saga*, *Hávamál*, and *Hrafn's saga* fail to clear this first basic hurdle to make their replacements convincing. *Samsons saga*, on the other hand, finds a way around this through the use of magic. However, the transformation is entirely superficial, and the saga makes it clear that the dog is still a dog in every other way:

Hún vill ei annað eta en þann mat, er hann lagði í hennar munn. Og líður svo máltíðin, og mælir hún ekki við hann, en er þó hin blíðasta við hann í öllum atvikum. Og síðan fer hann til sængur og biður sína frú leggjast niður. Hún gerir svo og leggst niður til hans fôta og vill klá hans tær, en hann sviptir henni upp á beddenn hjá sér, en hún gnarrar í móti og þrífur sínum tönnum í hans brjóst.⁴⁸

She does not want to eat anything but that food which he put in her mouth. And so the meal passes, and she does not speak to him, but is nevertheless most gentle with him in all circumstances. And later he goes to the bed and asks his lady to lie down. She does so and lies down at his feet and wishes to scratch his toes, but he pulls her up onto the bed next to him, but she snarls in return and latches her teeth onto his chest.

Unlike Saurr, this dog thus lacks the power of human speech, despite her magically-induced human appearance. The verb 'gnarra' could indicate snarling, but could refer to some other sound or action since this is the only known attestation. Like any other dog, she is friendly towards the man, accepting food from him and choosing to lay at his feet, but becomes aggressive when provoked, demonstrating her animal instincts and ultimately escaping through the window. Ólympia then repeats this process with a cat. By using magic, a dog (and cat) therefore becomes an effective means to protect a woman, but even magic cannot enable a true animal-human transformation. There is no real danger of the line between human and animal being breached, and humanity is therefore preserved.

There are two further texts, however, where the dog-as-human disguise is more convincing. The first is an *Íslendingasaga*, *Svarfdæla saga*, where the solution is apparently

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 356–57.

for the dog to be headless. This is done by a man named Qgmundr who wishes to convince two women that their friend Skíði has betrayed and killed another friend. To do so,

hljóp hann suðr um húsin með kyrtlinn ok dró með sér tík mikla ok hjó af henni hofuðit ok færði bukin í kyrtlinn ok lét taka strjúpann niðr ór hofuðsmáttinni ok dró at dyrunum, þar sem þær váru inni Ragnhildr ok Yngvildr. Hann mælti þá: “Hér meguð þit sjá, hvat vér hofum fundit; illa hefir sá, er svá ótrúan vin hefir sem Skíði er, því at hann hefir sagt til þeira bræðra, ok megu þit sjá hér annan þeira.”⁴⁹

he ran around the house with the cloak and took a large dog with him, and he cut off its head and put the body into the cloak and put the neck stump through the head-opening and carried it to the doorway where Ragnhildr and Yngvildr were indoors. He then said, “Here you can see what we have found: they have it bad who have such an unfaithful friend as Skíði is, because he has betrayed the brothers and you can see one of them here.”

Qgmundr’s hope seems to be that, by dressing the body in human clothes, a beheaded dog is indistinguishable from a beheaded man, and his plan somehow works. Although the women pretend not to hear him, they rush out to confront Skíði, confirming what Qgmundr wanted to know. The key differences between a man and a dog are therefore presumed to be their heads and their clothes (or lack thereof), both important characteristics brought out in Rimbert and Ratramnus’ musings and in many of the texts discussed in this chapter. These two changes are thus all it takes for Qgmundr to successfully blur the line between human and dog. It almost seems as if these texts are attempting to put to the test everything that Ratramnus laid out, experimenting to determine the true borders of humanity. It is curious that it is in an *Íslendingasaga*, supposedly more historically “realistic” as a genre than the legendary sagas, but this just emphasises how entrenched the dog was in the medieval mindset as the animal closest to humans in every way.

⁴⁹ *Svarfdæla saga*, in *Eyfirðinga sogur*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1956), pp. 130–208 (pp. 184–85). Of the two manuscripts mentioned in this edition, this thesis refers to AM 445c II 4to (1440–60). Both versions of the text are practically identical in this section.

The most elaborate disguise attempt in the corpus is made in *Gesta Danorum* by a man named Jarmerik. In order to secretly escape the household of the king and queen of the Wends, he must leave behind a replacement.

Fiscellam itaque byblo ac uimine textam, qua agrestes instar hominis formata aues aristis deturbare consueuerant, uiuo cane compleuit. Quam etiam detracto sibi cultu, quo uerisimilius humanam representaret imaginem, texit.⁵⁰

And so he wove a basket out of rushes and osiers, shaped like a man, which peasants used to deter birds from grain, with a living dog inside. He also covered it with his removed clothes, to better resemble a human form.

Human clothes are once again important, with the added use of a scarecrow to hide all canine physical features. The fact that the dog is still alive is important to ensure that the scarecrow isn't motionless, but it does create a different problem: the dog's barking. Jarmerik, however, takes advantage of the barking in an ingenious manner, instructing his friend to

absentiam socii dissimulare [...] illata in regiam fiscella impulsoque ad latrandum cane percentanti, quidnam hoc esset, regine mente captum clamitare retulit Iarmericum. Illa ad aspectum statue similitudinis errore delusa insanum ede eiici iubet.⁵¹

cover the absence of his companion. [...] He brought the basket to the court and impelled the dog to bark. When the Queen enquired what this was, he replied that Jarmerik was crying out because he was deprived of his senses. Deluded by the figure's misleading appearance, she ordered the madman to be cast out.

This might be the most interesting approach yet to the human-dog boundary. Rather than implying a fixed linguistic barrier between the two species, this passage suggests a more nebulous area in between where insanity may reduce humans to the vocalisation of dogs, their lack of self-control and reason possibly making them comparable to animals. It is in this nebulous hybrid zone that we might place another important Old Norse-Icelandic figure: the *berserkr*. A well-known passage in *Ynglinga saga* states that men of the god Óðinn

fóru brynjulausir ok váru galnir sem hundar eða vargar, bitu í skjöldu sína, váru sterkir sem bimir eða griðungar. [...] Þat er kallaðr berserksgangr.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 578.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Ynglinga saga*, in *Heimskr*, II, pp. 1–83 (p. 17).

went without mail and were mad like dogs or wolves, biting their shields, they were strong like bears or bulls. [...] That is called *berserksgangr*.

Outside *Ynglinga saga*, *berserkir* are most commonly compared to wolves or bears, but *Eyrbyggja saga* also mentions *berserkir* who ‘fóru galnir sem hundar’ (‘went mad like dogs’) and two other *Íslendingasögur*, *Grettis saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga*, specify that they howl like dogs.⁵³ The legendary *Örvar-Odds saga* introduces an even broader spectrum of animality when the protagonist Oddr hears twelve *berserkir* brothers and proclaims, ‘Mér þykkir stundum sem griðungar gelli eða hunda ýli, en stundum er því líkt sem grenjat sé’ (‘Sometimes it seems to me like the bellowing of a bull or the howling of dogs, and sometimes it is like screaming’).⁵⁴

In both the figure of the *berserkr* and the fake-Jarmerik, we therefore have men (or pretend-men) barking like dogs. In the latter case, this is assumed to be a sign of madness, which could be instructive in interpreting *berserkir* as well. Indeed, *berserksgangr* is frequently interpreted as a psychological state, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir positing that the condition is ‘psychological in the case of the berserk, but physical in the case of werewolves and other shape-shifters’.⁵⁵ Although she remarks that this distinction is not always clear-cut, Ralph O’Connor has noted that of all the mentions of *berserkir* in approximately 170 Icelandic sagas and *rímur*, none describe a *berserkr* physically transforming into an animal.⁵⁶ Some have therefore even attempted to pinpoint specific psychological conditions that could lie behind depictions of *berserkir*.⁵⁷ In the absence of complete physical transformation, the sources

⁵³ *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 61. *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar; Bandamanna saga*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1936), pp. 1–290 (pp. 67–68). *Vatnsdæla saga*, p. 124.

⁵⁴ *Örvar-Odds saga*, p. 324. This fluidity of animal sounds might be usefully compared to the multiple animal transformations in *Bósa saga* and *Sturlaugs saga* discussed later in this chapter.

⁵⁵ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, ‘The Werewolf in Medieval Icelandic Literature’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 106.3 (2007), pp. 277–303 (p. 282).

⁵⁶ Ralph O’Connor, ‘Monsters of the Tribe: Berserk Fury, Shapeshifting and Social Dysfunction in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, *Egils saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*’, in *Kings and Warriors in Early North-West Europe*, ed. by Jan Erik Rekdal and Charles Doherty (Four Courts Press, 2016), pp. 180–236 (pp. 205–07).

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Michael Heath and Max Cooper, ‘Wearing the Wolf Skin: Psychiatry and the Phenomenon of the Berserker in Medieval Scandinavia’, *History of Psychiatry*, 32.3 (2021), pp. 308–22; and Jon Geir Høyensten, ‘Madness in Old Norse Society. Narratives and Ideas’, *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 61.5 (2007), pp. 324–31.

quoted above suggest that it is animal noises like barking, bellowing, and howling that are the external attributes that signal a shift to *berserkr* animality. Bourns thus states that ‘animal sounds are indicative of a psychological transition: the emulation of a ferocity and wildness that separate the *berserkr* from their human consciousness’.⁵⁸ The dressed up dog in *Gesta Danorum* thus becomes a similar kind of hybrid being occupying a limitrophic state between human and animal. To the queen and other characters within the text, it is a human that has descended out of humanity by its mad barking; to the audience of the text, it is a dog that has ascended out of animality by its clothes and physical form.

Another point of comparison may be drawn between berserkers and these episodes of human/dog hybridity. The ‘ferocity and wildness’ of *berserksgangr* is never depicted as peaceful or pleasant, but usually as a frenzy that can end in total exhaustion. Crossing the line from human to animal in these cases, though possible, does seem to come at a price. In a similar manner, in contrast to true shapeshifting, none of the dogs disguised as humans are willing participants in the boundary-blurring stories. In most cases, great violence is inflicted upon the animals, one physically bound to a bed and two killed and mutilated. And even then, none of these dog-human disguises can be read as true cases of metamorphosis. It does appear far easier for humans in these sagas to slip into or draw upon animality and wilderness than it is for animals to ascend to a state of humanity. While dogs come closest to such ascension, there is nevertheless a line they too are unable to cross. Humanity as a concept and as an ideal is maintained, even if only tenuously.

That being said, their ability to get close to this ideal makes dogs excellent narrative devices for saga composers, perhaps better than most other animals. The episodes in this section may all be influenced by a popular fairy-tale motif common across western Europe, titled

⁵⁸ Bourns, ‘Becoming-Animal’, p. 645.

‘Compassionate executioner: substituted heart’ (K512.2) in Thompson’s index, which involves an animal organ substituted for a human one to prevent the killing of an innocent like Snow White.⁵⁹ In the chivalric *Drauma-Jóns saga*, for instance, the protagonist is saved from having his heart cut out and eaten by using a dog’s heart instead, and in *Piðreks saga* a dog’s tongue is cut out instead of that of Queen Sisibe.⁶⁰ Replacing an entire body is, of course, much more difficult than convincingly passing off an animal heart or tongue as a human one, but these Old Norse-Icelandic texts seem to believe that a dog would be the best suited of all animals for the task. This may not make much sense comparing the physical attributes of the two species, but it is once again the social status of dogs that makes them the best candidates. Dogs are thus used in Old Norse-Icelandic texts in place of humans to protect women and men from danger, violence, or unwanted attention, to cover up mistakes or to sow seeds of discord, to add elements of humour or comedy sometimes to troubling narratives, and all the while to debate the limits of humanity and animality without causing dangerous existential chaos. Of all legendary texts, however, it is *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* that perhaps best demonstrates the narrative potential of a dog’s proximity to humans.

The Dog Riddle of Ragnars saga loðbrókar

One of the most well-known scenes of the thirteenth-century *fornaldarsaga*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, involves a riddle thought up by the protagonist Ragnarr to test the intelligence of his future wife Kráka (otherwise known as Áslaug).⁶¹ Ragnarr’s riddle-instructions for Kráka are as follows: ‘Hvárki vil ek, at hún sé klædd né óklædd, hvárki mett né ómett, ok fari hún þó

⁵⁹ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature. A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, 6 vols, rev. edn (Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955–58), IV, pp. 304–05.

⁶⁰ *Drauma-Jóns saga*, p. 160. *Piðreks saga*, p. 229.

⁶¹ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar ok sona hans*, in *FornNorð*, I, pp. 95–148. *Ragnars saga* is preserved in two major redactions, and this text is based on one preserved complete in the c. 1400–25 manuscript NKS 1824 b 4to.

eigi ein saman, ok skal henni þó engi maðr fylgja' ('I wish that she is neither clothed nor unclothed, neither full nor unfed, and moreover she must not walk alone and yet no man should accompany her').⁶² Kráka's solution is ingenious. She wears a fishing net with her hair hung low so that she is neither clothed nor naked. She licks a leek, so she is neither fed nor unfed. And in fulfilment of Ragnarr's third condition, Kráka is accompanied by a dog belonging to her foster-father Ári, explaining, '[E]k mun láta fylgja mér hund [Áris], ok fer ek þá eigi ein saman, en þó fylgir mér engi maðr' ('I shall let Ári's dog accompany me, and I will then not be going alone, and yet no man will be accompanying me').⁶³

Jan de Vries made a convincing argument that this specific set of riddles has its roots in a more universal folktale tradition, named 'The Clever Farmgirl' (type 875) in the Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index.⁶⁴ Variants of the folktale involve a range of different riddles, including 'weder nackt noch bekleidet' ('neither clothed nor unclothed') and 'weder hungrig noch gesättigt' ('neither fed nor unfed').⁶⁵ The dog component of Ragnarr's riddle, however, is unique to the Old Norse-Icelandic *Ragnars saga* tradition, with no other known occurrences.⁶⁶ de Vries does suggest influence from a variant of another folktale, ATU-type 981, in which a dog is the solution to a riddle about a man's best friend, staying faithful to its owner despite being beaten by him.⁶⁷ While de Vries makes a convincing case that the ATU 981 tale could have been known in Scandinavia, his chief argument for influence is that there is violence inflicted on the dogs in both stories.⁶⁸ This argument is not in itself wholly convincing since the levels of violence are quite different in both cases and violence inflicted upon dogs is not

⁶² *Ragnars saga*, p. 106.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Jan de Vries, *Die Märchen von Klugen Rätsellösern: Eine Vergleichende Untersuchung* (Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1928), pp. 218 and 230. Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 2011), I, pp. 494–95.

⁶⁵ de Vries, *Die Märchen von Klugen Rätsellösern*, pp. 181–86 and 210–11.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 220. Uther, *Types of International Folktales*, I, pp. 612–13.

⁶⁸ de Vries, *Die Märchen von Klugen Rätsellösern*, pp. 227–28.

uncommon in the sagas themselves. The two riddles are certainly distinct enough that even if there was some mutual influence, we must nevertheless credit the composer of *Ragnars saga* for some originality. While both riddles emphasise the faithfulness and loyalty of a dog, Kráka's solution is especially reflective of the unique position occupied by dogs in this literature; on the borders between human and animal, they are not human but very much an integral part of human society. This hybridity creates a useful loophole where dogs are able to perform human social obligations when humans themselves cannot.

In this case, Kráka exploits this loophole not only to solve the riddle, but also to allow herself a companion and protector when she goes to meet Ragnarr on his ship. Kráka refuses to go aboard the ship 'nema henni sé grið gefin ok förunaut hennar' ('unless a promise of safe-conduct is given to her and to her companion').⁶⁹ This is one of the first times the usually silent and powerless Kráka speaks in the saga, and she speaks to advocate not just for herself but also for another living being under her care. By turning the dog into a charge under her protection, Kráka here is able to claim some agency for herself, styling herself like any other kings or chieftains who are responsible for the safety of their retainers.

Unfortunately, Kráka's agency in this is soon lost. When they climb aboard the ship, Ragnarr is said to 'seilist í mót henni' ('reach out towards her').⁷⁰ The verb 'seilast' usually has the implication of stretching out one's hand towards something, often with the intention of taking hold of it; whether Ragnarr is for some reason reaching towards Kráka or merely raising his hand is greeting is unclear. Whatever the intention, its consequence is that the dog, as protector and perhaps in fulfilment of its animalistic nature, bites Ragnarr on the hand. Ragnarr's men immediately jump in and quite gruesomely kill the dog, thus violating the *grið*. Carolyn Larrington notes that this slaying 'suggests a degree of impetuosity on the part of

⁶⁹ *Ragnars saga*, p. 107.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Ragnarr's men, a quality shared by their lord' and, indeed, this is not the last time that Ragnarr will violate Kráka's personal space or agency.⁷¹ Shortly after they are married, Ragnarr forces himself on Kráka despite her explicitly stated desire to wait a few days, leading to the conception of a boneless child.⁷² The killing of the dog in a way foreshadows this incident and does seem to be looked on critically by the narrator of the saga, who adds this rare statement of judgement: 'ok er eigi betr griðum haldit við hana en svá' ('and no better was the promise of safe-conduct held up for her than this').⁷³

The specific way in which Kráka's dog is killed also seems unnecessarily cruel and reflects badly on Ragnarr and his men: 'Þeir menn hans hlaupa til ok drepa hundinn ok reka bogastreng at hálsi honum, ok fær hann af því bana' ('His men leapt at and struck the dog and tied a bowstring around its neck, and it died from this').⁷⁴ It is difficult to find a reason to justify this extreme act of violence, although perhaps there is some influence from another dog-killing episode in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* involving a similar Ragnar-figure. Rory McTurk has suggested that this episode in *Gesta Danorum* may 'represent a Danish stage on the route from England to Norway in the case of the faithful dog motif', in between the 'Clever Farmgirl' folktale and *Ragnars saga*.⁷⁵ In Book 9 of *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo's Ragnar woos an uninterested female warrior named Lathgertha, who 'urso canem in edis sue uestibulo religari precepit, contra omne amatoris studium per obiectas belluas proprium tutatura conclaue' ('ordered a bear and a dog to be tethered in the entrance of her house to defend with animals her own chamber from all her lover's desires').⁷⁶ Like Geirruthus' hounds of the previous chapter, this dog and

⁷¹ Carolyne Larrington, 'Þóra and Áslaug in *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*. Women, Dragons and Destiny', in *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, ed. by Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay (Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010), pp. 53–68 (p. 56).

⁷² *Ragnars saga*, p. 110.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues* (Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1991), p. 229.

⁷⁶ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 633.

bear thus stand on the threshold as guards. Ragnar, however, quickly dispenses with the guards, ‘a belluis alteram telo traicit, alteram faucibus apprehensam obtorto gutture strangulauit’ (‘slicing one of the animals with his weapon, and seizing the other by the jaws to strangle it by twisting its neck’).⁷⁷ Though slightly different in the implements used, the strangling of the dog in both episodes are similarly disturbing enough to suggest possible influence.

A comparison between the two episodes might change the way we approach the killing of Kráka’s dog in a couple of important ways. Firstly, the Lathgertha episode is read by critics like Rory McTurk as an example of the trope where ‘the hero wins a maiden, usually after overcoming great dangers’, and Lathgertha’s dog and bear thus take on the role of dangers to be overcome.⁷⁸ Like the dragon encircling Þóra’s bower earlier in the saga, Kráka’s dog might be similarly seen as an obstacle to be overcome by Ragnarr, which would explain the addition of the dog biting him. Although the bite might at first seem unimportant since we are not told of it causing Ragnarr any serious harm, it is quite significant in the context of the rest of the saga. This is the first and only time in the saga up until the very moment of his death that Ragnarr suffers any physical injury. In fact, much is made of the fact that he remains unscathed in his fight against the dragon early in the saga, in the late battle against the English army, and for a long time in the snake pit where he eventually meets his death.⁷⁹ The dog bite thus becomes the only consequence Ragnarr suffers for his ‘impetuosity’ and his unwanted advances.

A comparison between Lathgertha and Kráka’s “guard dogs” therefore also suggests that Ragnarr’s advances are, to some extent, unwanted by both women. Just as the impetuosity of Ragnarr’s men is, according to Larrington, shared by their lord, so too can Kráka’s dog be

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga*, p. 77.

⁷⁹ *Ragnars saga*, pp. 101 and 134–35.

seen as a reflection of her own intentions. Bourns has argued that in the sagas ‘qualities of pet dogs are metonymically emblematic of the people that they follow; they are thematically similar to animal *fylgjur*, which metaphorically reflect a person’s characteristics’.⁸⁰ The dog biting Ragnarr when he gets too close reflects Kráka’s own reservations about responding to Ragnarr’s courting, and represents her (ultimately futile) effort to defend herself against him. The introduction of a dog, who may play a role similar to a human protector but whose death as an animal may pass unavenged, thus allows these reservations to be played out without much altering the course of the marriage plot that is so important to the saga. All this is only made possible by the complexity inherent within the dog, a faithful companion who is neither fully human nor animal, but something in between.

Human-to-Dog Transformations

There have thus far not been any clear transformations from animal to human, but some examples may be sought of humans physically transforming into different animals. This is the case in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, a *fornaldarsaga* composed sometime before 1350 and extant in two independent recensions and a set of *rímur*.⁸¹ Towards the end of the saga, the older recension features an attack by a boar, a transformed form of Hárekr, king of the supernaturally-tinted Bjarmaland. In this sea-battle, King Hárekr first fights as himself, then as a dragon that is brought down by a mysterious bird called a *skergípr*. Picking himself up, Hárekr then transforms into a boar and fights the saga protagonist Herrauðr, both injuring each other. It is finally said that

⁸⁰ Bourns, ‘Between Nature and Culture’, p. 58. Kráka does in fact refer to the dog as a ‘fylgi’ in a verse (*Ragnars saga*, p. 107).

⁸¹ Hans-Peter Naumann, ‘Bósa saga (Herrauðs saga ok Bósa)’, in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Pulsiano and Wolf, p. 54. The older recension is replicated in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, in *FornNorð*, II, pp. 465–97.

kom at glatunshundtík mikil á skipit ok hafði stórar vígtenn. Hún reif gat á náranum á geltinum ok rakti þar út þarmana ok hljóp fyrir borð. En Hárekr var þá í mannslíki ok steypiti sér fyrir borð eptir henni, ok sukku þau til grunna, ok kom hvárki upp síðan, ok þótti mönnum sem þat mundi verit hafa Busla kerling, því at hún sást aldri síðan.⁸²

a great *glatunshundtík* arrived on the ship and had large battle-teeth. She tore a hole in the boar's groin and tore out its intestines and jumped overboard. And Hárekr was then in the form of a man and dived overboard after her, and they sank down to the bottom, and neither came up afterwards, and men thought that it must have been the old woman Busla, because she was never seen again.

Although the dog is assumed to be a transformed form of Busla, the saga composer makes no attempt to elaborate with details of a physical transformation or of the woman sending out some kind of disembodied spirit like a *fylgja*.⁸³ The dog does appear quite suddenly out of nowhere, which is even more striking here since this battle is taking place at sea. Nevertheless, there is a sense that it has to be a dog that confronts a boar in battle, just as it would in the hunt. This is emphasised by the fact that the old woman Busla, who 'kunni margt í töfrum' ('knew much of sorcery'), could probably have chosen to transform into any other animal.⁸⁴ The woman-turned-dog saves Herrauðr and helps him win the battle, but likely at the cost of her own life.

The term 'glatunshundtík' used to describe Busla's transformation is curious, having only a single other known attestation in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, and that one (in *Egils saga einhenda*) using 'glatúnshundr' merely as an object of comparison for another similarly enigmatic creature.⁸⁵ The term is not mentioned in Cleasby-Vigfússon's dictionary, and Johan Fritzner mentions it with no suggestion of a possible translation.⁸⁶ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards translate it as 'monstrous bitch' and Lorenzo Gallo as 'dangerous she-dog'.⁸⁷ E. Matthias Reifegerste simply calls it 'unklar' ('unclear'), describing it as 'eine große

⁸² *Bósa saga*, p. 495.

⁸³ A full discussion about *fylgjur* and their debated implications is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a summary may be found in Bourns, 'Between Nature and Culture', pp. 131–34.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁸⁵ *Egils saga einhenda*, p. 155.

⁸⁶ Fritzner, *Ordbog*, I, p. 609.

⁸⁷ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Seven Viking Romances* (Penguin, 1986), p. 226. Lorenzo Lozzi Gallo, 'The Giantess as Foster-Mother in Old Norse Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 78.1 (2006), pp. 1–20 (p. 17).

Zauberhündin’ (‘a big magic dog’).⁸⁸ Árni Böðvarsson’s *Íslensk orðabók* refers to it as an ‘ævintýradýr’ (‘fairy-tale animal’), tentatively suggesting ‘jarfi’, a wolverine.⁸⁹ Jan de Vries’ *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* similarly refers to it as a late and rare ‘fabeltier’ (‘fable or fabulous animal’), suggesting two possible origins.⁹⁰ The first is from the French ‘glouton’ and Latin ‘gluttonem’, meaning ‘glutton’, and Zoëga very hesitantly suggests the same.⁹¹ The second possible origin is from the verb ‘glata’, meaning ‘to lose’ or, perhaps more appropriately here, ‘to destroy’, often used in the sense of killing someone. Along these lines, ‘glatunshundr’ or the feminine ‘glatunshundtík’ might be translated as something like ‘dog of destruction’ or ‘dog of death’, compounds which would not be inappropriate for the creature in this saga.

Somewhat relatedly, it is also possible that the term is connected to the noun ‘glatan’, used in Christian contexts to mean perdition or damnation, and ‘glatunshundtík’ might thus be translated as something like ‘hellhound’. ‘Hellhound’ might at first seem like an odd choice of term for this earthly transformation, but could suit Busla herself quite well. Earlier in the saga, Busla recites a series of curses (referred to as ‘Buslubæn’, ‘Busla’s prayer’) to Herraúðr’s father, King Hringr, ending with the following lines:

þá skulu þik hundar

í hel gnaga,

en sál þín

sökkvi í víti.⁹²

‘then dogs shall gnaw you in hel(l), and your soul sink into hel(l).’

⁸⁸ E. Matthias Reifegerste, ‘Die Bósa saga: Eine kritisch kommentierte Übersetzung’, *Mediaevistik*, 18 (2005), pp. 157–208 (p. 188).

⁸⁹ Árni Böðvarsson, *Íslensk orðabók: handa skólum og almenningi* (Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1985), p. 289.

⁹⁰ de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 172.

⁹¹ Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary*, p. 167.

⁹² *Bósa saga*, p. 474. *Bósa rímur* (ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1874), p. 73) carries a similar curse: ‘Hundar skulu [þig] hilmir slita huossum tonnum | sal þín bíð eg at sockui j uiti.’ (‘Dogs shall tear at you, prince, with sharp teeth | I command your soul to sink into hel(l).’)

In the ship battle, it is as if Busla takes on the role of these prophesied dogs, and the way she and Hárekr both ‘sukku til grunna’ (‘sank down to the bottom’) mirrors the image of the soul sinking into hell. Continuing the infernal theme, the mysterious *skergípr* bird that flies in to fight the dragon is said to have ‘höfuð svá mikit ok hræðiligt, at honum er jafnat til fjándans’ (‘such a large and fearful head, that it is comparable to the devil’s’), and also falls into the sea at the end of its battle.⁹³ Such vocabulary evokes an apocalyptic atmosphere, while the multiple animal transformations additionally resemble a dream sequence, like the ones discussed earlier in the second chapter. The animals thus turn an already exciting battle scene into an even more fantastical denouement for the saga. And yet, at the heart of the final battle is a very familiar image cutting through the layers of the fabulous, a dog hunting a boar. The line is pushed to its limit by the multiple transformations, magnifying the magical fantastical atmosphere, but ultimately stabilised by the heroic dog who comes out of nowhere and returns to the darkness, its task fulfilled.

Battle scenes like this with multiple animal transformations are not an uncommon feature of legendary sagas. There is another contained in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, a late-fourteenth-century saga extant in two versions and several *rímur*.⁹⁴ At one point in the saga, the protagonist Sturlaugr is challenged to a *hólmganga* by a man named Framarr. Before the two men themselves duel, some of their allies step up to fight each other first, each duel becoming progressively less natural. The last of these fights involves a Sámi (‘Finnr’) companion of Framarr and Sturlaugr’s companion Svipuð who is said to be ‘margvís ok fróð í flestu’ (‘much-knowing and knowledgeable in most things’, both terms that often indicate sorcerous ability).⁹⁵ Their duel soon takes a very supernatural turn:

⁹³ *Bósa saga*, p. 495.

⁹⁴ Due to the poor condition of the extant medieval manuscripts, the *FornNorð* version of this saga is based on the c. 1700 paper AM 173 fol., with input from earlier sources.

⁹⁵ *Sturlaugs saga*, p. 313.

[Þ]á vǫru þeir þegar horfnir, en þar vǫru komnir hundar tveir ok bitust ákafliga. Ok er minnst varði, vǫru hundarnir horfnir, en menn heyrðu í loftit upp ólæti nokkur, ok líta menn við ok sáu, at emir tveir flugust á í loftinu ok rifu af hvárr annars fjaðrir með klóm ok nefjum, svá at blóðit fell á jörð. En svá lauk með þeim, at annarr fell dauðr niðr á jörð, en annarr fló í braut, ok vissu menn eigi, hvárr sá var.⁹⁶

Then they suddenly disappeared, and two dogs appeared there and bit each other furiously. And when least expected, the dogs vanished, and men heard some unrest up in the sky, and the men looked up and saw that two eagles were flying in the sky and each tore at the other's feathers with claws and beaks, so that blood fell to the earth. And it ended in this way, that one fell dead to the ground and the other flew away, and men did not know which one that was.

A third battle scene with a dog transformation can be found in the fifteenth-century original Icelandic *riddarasaga*, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. The two protagonists of the saga fight two berserker rulers, the brothers Falr and Sóti. Falr fights in succession as himself, a dragon, and a lion. When Falr is killed, Sóti angrily ‘verdr at olmum hundi ok færer klærnar framan j briostit aa B(lauus) med suo afli at brynian slitnar en hringarner bresta’ (‘becomes a savage dog and strikes his claws over Blávus’ breast with such great strength that the mail-coat tears and the rings burst’) before he too is killed.⁹⁷

The multiple successive transformations in these sagas, rather than a single transformation from one species into another, do suggest a worldview in which boundaries are fluid and categories meld into one another. Siv Kristoffersen has argued of pre-Christian Scandinavia that ‘every indication points to a prevailing perception of the human-animal relation as a dynamic unity open to changes and transformation’.⁹⁸ Such a worldview aligns with Deleuze and Guattari’s explanation of a ‘becoming-animal’ process in which ‘packs, or multiplicities, continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other. [...]

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 328.

⁹⁷ *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, in *LMIR*, I, pp. 1–49 (pp. 30–31).

⁹⁸ Siv Kristoffersen, ‘Half Beast—Half Man: Hybrid Figures in Animal Art’, *World Archaeology*, 42.2 (2010), pp. 261–72 (p. 265).

A fiber stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible.’⁹⁹

Whether or not this was really the way the Norse generally viewed their relationship with their environment and the natural world is extremely difficult to say with any certainty. These transformation episodes, however, appear to indicate some uncertainty or unease on the part of the saga composers about the mechanics of such a fluid worldview. None of the three sagas provides any detail about how one being physically transforms into another. *Sturlaugs saga* instead describes the change much more abruptly as one species vanishing and another appearing elsewhere. The resulting transformation is one that perhaps resembles a cheap magic trick more than true metamorphosis. The magical nature of the combatants is also significant to this argument. It makes sense that one of them is said to be a Sámi man, a recognition of the close relationship the Sámi have with the natural environment, but also of the sorcerous abilities they are so often depicted with in the sagas.¹⁰⁰ The fact that the transformations of these episodes are rooted in sorcery makes them less natural in a way. While the human-animal boundary may therefore be crossed through transformations, it is never simple or natural and rarely ends well. And, as has already been argued, even if the human-animal relation is open to change and transformation, it appears to be a one-way street, human to animal but not vice-versa. Only dogs come close to achieving the reverse, but they too can never be fully human.

⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 249.

¹⁰⁰ See Elina Helander-Renvall, ‘Animism, Personhood and the Nature of Reality: Sami Perspectives’, *Polar Record*, 46.1 (2010), pp. 44–56; and Else Mundal, ‘The Perception of the Saamis and their Religion in Old Norse Sources’, in *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, ed. by Juha Pentikäinen (De Gruyter, 1996), pp. 97–116.

Cynocephali

The above magical battle is not the only case of othering by canine connection in *Sturlaugs saga*. Later in the narrative, Sturlaugr and his sworn-brothers travel far north into a place called Hundingjaland, where they find a ‘borg’ (‘town or fortress’) with

höll miklu meiri en aðra. Þangat fóru þeir, ok stóðu menn í dyrum, ok var haka þeira gróin í bringuna. Þeir gjöltu sem hundar. [...] Þeir bönnuðu þeim inngöngu.¹⁰¹

a hall much bigger than the others. They go over, and men stood in the doorways, and their chins were grown into their chests. They barked like dogs. [...] They were prohibiting their entrance.

The barking of these creatures has led most readers to conclude that they are cynocephali, the dog-headed men that so concerned Rimbart and Ratramnus. The chins ‘grown into their chests’ might thus be an attempted depiction of dog snouts or perhaps a detail implying that their heads face downwards unlike an aloft human head.¹⁰² The description also bears some resemblance to Blemmyes, mythical men with faces on their chests very often encountered in the same sources and geographies as cynocephali.

In classical and medieval European texts, cynocephali (and Blemmyes) were usually located somewhere in an uncharted “East”, beyond the borders of the known world of their writers. In the fifth century BC, the ancient Greek historian and geographer Herodotus located both creatures in Libya, while in the first century AD, the Roman Pliny the Elder depicted cynocephali as the flock of a tribe of Ethiopians.¹⁰³ Isidore of Seville in the early seventh century moved these dog-headed men to India, and the Old English ‘Wonders of the East’ described a group of ‘healf-hundingas’ (‘half-dogs’) called *conopenas* near Egypt.¹⁰⁴ Several

¹⁰¹ *Sturlaugs saga*, p. 336.

¹⁰² Ratramnus does put it similarly that the dog ‘oblong capite reostroque deduct terram intueri’ (‘looks at the ground with its long oblong head’) (*Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, CXXI, p. 1153).

¹⁰³ *Oxford World’s Classics: Herodotus: The Histories*, ed. by Robin Waterfield and Carolyn Dweald (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 299. *Pliny, Natural History*, p. 526.

¹⁰⁴ Isidore, *Etymologies*, p. 244. Isidore here also mentions a group of dog-toothed people called *cynodotes*. *The Wonders of the East*, in *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and The Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. and trans. by R. D. Fulk (Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 16–31 (pp. 18 and 20).

Old Norse-Icelandic texts similarly banish the cynocephali to the borders of their worlds. The Biblical collection *Stjórn*, the c. 1387 *Alfræði íslenzk* miscellany of learned texts in AM 194 8vo, and the encyclopaedic section of the c. 1302–10 Hauksbók manuscript all describe dog-headed men in and around India.¹⁰⁵ Drawing on all three texts, the mid-fourteenth-century original Icelandic *riddarasaga*, *Kirjalax saga*, puts them in the army of a Muslim king of Babylon.¹⁰⁶

In several other Northern European writings, however, there is a shift of such fantastical creatures from the “East” to the “North”. Writing in the second half of the eleventh century, the German chronicler Adam of Bremen describes a group of Amazon women living around the Baltic Sea, who give birth to (male) cynocephali. Adam relates that

Cynocephali sunt, qui in pectore caput habent; in Ruzzia videntur sepe captive, et cum verbis latrant in voce.¹⁰⁷

There are cynocephali, who have their heads on their breasts; in Russia they often seem to be captives and they voice words in barks.

Even more of a conflation of cynocephali and Blemmyes, this description is perhaps closest to the one in *Sturlaugs saga* and represents a movement of the borders of the familiar known world from the East to the North. Such a shift certainly makes sense for Adam, whose own move from Germany to Denmark gave him a natural interest in the Northern frontiers. Adam might have also been influenced by St Rimbart, who preceded him by several centuries at Hamburg-Bremen.

¹⁰⁵ *Stjórn*, p. 68. *Alfræði íslenzk: Íslandsk encyklopædisk litteratur*, vol. I, COD. MBR. AM. 194, 8vo, ed. by Kristian Kålund (Møller, 1908), p. 35. *Hauksbók, udgiven efter de Arnemagnæanske Håndskrifter*, no. 371, 544 og 675, 4^o, samt forskellige papirhåndskrifter af det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskrift-selskab, ed. by Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson (Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1892), p. 166.

¹⁰⁶ *Kirjalax saga. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur*, ed. by Kristian Kålund (Møller, 1917), p. 28.

¹⁰⁷ *Adami Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum: Ex Recensione Lappenbergii. In Usus Scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae Historicis Recusa*, ed. by G. Waitz (Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1876), p. 167.

In each of these sources, the dog-headed men are being used to demarcate specific societal borders. To the missionary Rimbert, the cynocephali could represent the fully human but pagan Scandinavians who had not yet been converted to Christianity. Though Rimbert was probably Danish himself, his letters represent Scandinavia as being in the hinterlands of the Christian world, further set apart by the presence of hybrid creatures. By the time Adam of Bremen travelled to Scandinavia, and certainly by the time *Sturlaugs saga* was composed, much of Scandinavia had been converted and so, from a Christian perspective, Scandinavia was now included within the borders of true “civilisation”. In both texts, therefore, the cynocephali were pushed even more to the margins, to the eastern Baltic and Russia by Adam of Bremen and further to the North by *Sturlaugs saga*. In the latter, Hundingjaland is situated somewhere between Finnmark and Bjarmaland, both locations already known to be populated by magical and fantastic inhabitants in the sagas. As Ian Wood elucidates, these descriptions of cynocephali ‘can be interpreted as a debate about the categorisation of beings, and hence about the definition of a frontier’.¹⁰⁸

Thinking about ‘the categorisation of beings’, in addition to defining geographical borders, cynocephali are also used in medieval texts to interrogate the borders between humans and other animals. There is a certain anxiety underlining the insistence of some texts that these creatures cannot be human. In his description of cynocephali, Isidore of Seville made a point of clarifying that ‘their barking indeed reveals that they are rather beasts than humans.’¹⁰⁹ Augustine of Hippo similarly argued in the fifth century about the cynocephali that their ‘canina capita atque ipse latratus magis bestias quam homines confitetur’ (‘dog heads and barking

¹⁰⁸ Ian Wood, ‘Categorising the *Cynocephali*’, in *Ego Trouble: Authors and Their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Corradini, Matthew Gillis, Rosamond McKitterick, and Irene van Renswoude (Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), pp. 125–36 (p. 133). See also Nikolas Hoel, ‘Moving the North: Rimbert, the *Vita Anskarii*, and the *Cynocephali*’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 17 (2021), pp. 101–34.

¹⁰⁹ Isidore, *Etymologies*, p. 245.

admit to them being beasts rather than men'), and thus separate from 'homo, id est animal rationale mortale' ('man, who is a rational mortal animal').¹¹⁰ The absence of human speech is therefore a consistent attribute of cynocephali like those in *Sturlaugs saga*, complex communicative language supposedly being unique to humans. Thus, in the Old English *Life of St Christopher*, the dog-headed saint is only able to participate in human society and even receive baptism after God grants him 'monnes gesprec' ('human speech').¹¹¹ The thirteenth-century *Eiðsivabing* law-code from eastern Norway similarly prescribes that children with physical deformities may be baptised as long as 'hafa þau mannz hovuð oc manns raust' ('they have a man's head and a man's voice').¹¹² Yet the fact that so many writers felt the need to clarify the cynocephali's lack of humanity suggests that it was not an entirely foregone conclusion, and it has been demonstrated from the letters between Ratramnus and Rimbart that some did take the opposite stance. Very similar to Isidore, *Stjórn* adds that the cynocephali's 'gaud er þa synir litlu sidr hunda uera enn menn' ('barking shows them little less to be dogs than men'). However, it continues, 'eru þeir ok eigi sidr i suma stadi taldir medr skynlausum kuikendum enn medr monnum sem apyniur. þiat þeim eru þeir utan at hofdunum eigi uilikir' ('they are in some respects no less counted among irrational beasts like apes, but also among men because apart from their heads they are not unlike them').¹¹³ Even a text like *Stjórn*, then, is unable to take a firm stance on the cynocephali, providing arguments both for their inclusion among humans and among 'irrational beasts'.

Of all the characteristics discussed by Ratramnus and Rimbart, one of the most pertinent to *Sturlaugs saga* is the observation that the cynocephali live together in villages. In *Sturlaugs saga*, Sturlaugr encounters the barking men within a *borg*, a town or fortress: that is to say, an

¹¹⁰ *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi, De Civitate Dei. Libri XXII*, ed. by Bernhard Dombart, 2 vols (Teubner, 1877), II, p. 136.

¹¹¹ Christine Rauer, *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Brewer, 2013), p. 90.

¹¹² *Norges Gamle Love*, I, p. 376.

¹¹³ *Stjórn*, p. 68.

urban settlement. Whatever might be found inside, the built structure of the *borg* itself signifies civilisation rather than wilderness. And yet, when it comes to the large hall, the dog-men are neither fully inside nor outside, but standing in the doorways. Even in a hybrid state, the dog is fundamentally a threshold animal, on the border between civilisation and wilderness, between the fabulous and the familiar, and thus the perfect animal to use when defining a frontier.

Interestingly, once Sturlaugr's men deal with the canine guards, there is nothing overly supernatural or strange about the other inhabitants of Hundingjaland. As Katja Schulz says, the place 'wird als ein bekanntes fremdes Land beschrieben, das die Helden suchen und mit einer Schiffsreise erreichen' ('is described as a familiar foreign land that the heroes seek and reach by ship voyage').¹¹⁴ Though we might instinctively assume that the cynocephali are thoroughly fabulous and unfamiliar characters, there is nevertheless something very familiar about the sight of dogs guarding a threshold. This raises the question of whether cynocephali were perhaps understood by medieval Europeans to be real beings. Ratramnus' letter certainly suggests a serious engagement with the possibility by him and Rimbert. Nikolas Hoel argues that the 'dog-headed men were not a literary trope to demonstrate something about the human condition; rather, it was the degree to which these real creatures were human that was important to the hagiographer and the letter writer'.¹¹⁵ A medieval legal text from eastern Norway also suggests some possibility of a belief in natural hybrid beings. The *Borgaping* law-code begins with a description of children who are born with certain physical conditions and are not to be baptised. Such a child may have

¹¹⁴ Katja Schdeulz, 'Trollfrauen, Hundskopfige und heidnische Priesterinnen – Vom fantastischen Spiel mit literarischen Genres in der *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*', in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature*, ed. by McKinnell, Ashurst, and Kirk, II, pp. 894–903 (p. 900).

¹¹⁵ Hoel, 'Moving the North', p. 121.

hælar horfa i ta stað. en tær i hælstað. haka meðal hærða. nakke a brioste framme. kalfvar a bæinum framan. augu aftan i nakka. hæfir sæls væifar oc hundz hafuð.¹¹⁶

heels turned towards the place of the toes, and toes towards the place of the heel, the chin towards the shoulders, the nape of the neck forward on the breast, calves forward on the legs, the eyes back in the nape of the neck. They have a seal's paws and a dog's head.

The presence of a dog's head and seal's paws in this list is curious. Sean Lawing has suggested that a 'dog's head' (and a hairy body mentioned in *Eiðsivaping*) might be manifestations of real medical conditions like hypertrichosis ('werewolf syndrome' with excessive hair growth), hirsutism (excessive hair growth in women), or cleft palate (a split in the upper lip or roof of the mouth).¹¹⁷ It is possible that the existence of such conditions could have influenced a belief in cynocephali as well.

That being said, whether or not it was truly believed that cynocephali really existed might be somewhat irrelevant. Regarding the letter-writers, Hoel continues:

Monsters can be real, not because they are observed, but because of their impact. The Cynocephali existed for Rimbert and Ratramnus not because the men actually saw the monsters, but because the hybrids challenged their conceptions of salvation; their impact was thus of utmost importance and matter to the humans on a fundamental level.¹¹⁸

Within the constructed worlds of the *fornaldarsögur*, too, "impact" is arguably more important than purported reality. What matters is that the depiction of the cynocephali is consistent with the internal rules of the *Sturlaugs saga* world, allowing some suspension of disbelief, just like the dogs do in the *fornaldarsögur* discussed in the previous chapter. But whereas dogs primarily work to familiarise their supernatural companions in the giant episodes, the cynocephali here simultaneously achieve both purposes. As dogs guarding a hall they bring some sense of familiarity to its inhabitants, but having human bodies brings a sense of the fantastic as well.

¹¹⁶ *Norges Gamle Love*, I, p. 339.

¹¹⁷ Sean Lawing, 'The Place of the Evil: Infant Abandonment in Old Norse Society', *Scandinavian Studies*, 85.2 (2013), pp. 133–50 (pp. 145–46).

¹¹⁸ Hoel, 'Moving the North', pp. 121–22.

In fact, it is not the dog heads, but the human bodies that are actually the most jarring in this episode.

None of this would therefore be possible, or certainly not as convincing, had the dog's head been replaced with the head of any other animal, wild or domesticated. The question of what is a "monster" has always been a fraught one across medieval literary studies, but referring to the seventh-to-eighth-century *Cosmographia*, Wood succinctly states that while cynocephali 'are monstrous, they are quite explicitly not monsters', and this is very true of the dog-headed men of *Sturlaugs saga* and Ratramnus' letter.¹¹⁹ The use of any other animal's head would push the hybrid to much greater monstrosity, but the fact that dogs are already so close to humanity is precisely what allows human/canine hybrids to be used as the grounds for a complex interrogation of humanity and animality, and everything that goes along with both concepts. In *Sturlaugs saga*, at stake in this interrogation are the borders of familiar Scandinavian society. For Rimbert and Ratramnus and many others, what is at stake is the very salvation of the soul.

Hrólfs saga kraka 1: Names

One of the most useful *fornaldarsögur* in reflecting on human-animal hybridity is *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kapp hans*.¹²⁰ *Hrólfs saga* is a narrative about the Danish king Hrólfr kraki and his ancestors, several of whom undergo different forms of animal transformation. Much has, for instance, been written about bear transformations in this saga, some of which will be discussed below. However, much more underestimated in scholarship are elements of human/dog hybridity which are at work in perhaps subtler but important ways.

¹¹⁹ Wood, 'Categorising the *Cynocephali*', p. 129. *The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, ed. by Michael Herren (Brepols, 2011).

¹²⁰ *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kapp hans*, in *FornNorð*, II, pp. 1–93. The extant version of the text may have been composed around the fourteenth century.

Just a few lines into *Hrólfs saga*, we are introduced to a man named Vífill. Vífill lives alone on a heavily forested island with his livestock and two dogs named Hoppr and Hó, and it is said that he is ‘margkunnugr’ (literally ‘much-knowing’, often used in the sense of magical skill) and ‘kunni margt í fornum fræðum’ (‘knew much of ancient knowledge’, again often with sorcerous implications’).¹²¹ Although he is human, in his isolated forest setting, his pastoral responsibilities, and supernatural inclinations, Vífill is thus portrayed much like the giants of the previous chapter. His livestock-keeping role is emphasised in the name of at least one of his dogs; the verb ‘hóa’ means ‘to shout’, often specifically referring to the sound made by a shepherd to call animals together (while ‘hoppa’ simply means ‘to jump’).¹²² Unlike the previously-discussed giant episodes, however, the dogs themselves are not mentioned again. Their names, on the other hand, are soon assumed by two human brothers, Helgi and Hróarr. The young brothers are sent to the island to be hidden from their murderous uncle Fróði, where Vífill devises a cunning plan to keep the brothers safe. When Fróði comes to the island, Vífill says to him,

“Heilir svá, herra, haldið mér ekki, því at vargrinn vill rífa í sundr fé mitt.” Karl kallar þá hátt: “Hoppr ok Hó, hjálpið fenu, fyrst ek má ekki forða því.”¹²³

“Greetings to you too, lord, but do not keep me, because the wolf will tear apart my livestock.” The man then calls out loud, “Hoppr and Hó, help the livestock, as I cannot save them.”

Having been briefed earlier by Vífill, the brothers understand that the names Hoppr and Hó refer to them and the call is a warning for them to hide. Metaphorically, the warning works on two levels. On the one hand, the brothers are like Vífill’s livestock that he must protect from the vicious wolf that is their uncle. This is suggested by the use of the singular ‘vargrinn’ instead of a pack of multiple wolves. On the other hand, Helgi and Hróarr also assume the identities of Vífill’s dogs, animals that are the natural enemies of wolves. Gerard Breen has thus argued that

¹²¹ *Hrólfs saga*, pp. 3 and 5.

¹²² Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 281.

¹²³ *Hrólfs saga*, p. 6.

just as the name ‘vargr’ is adopted by outlaws and assassins, hound names might similarly be assumed by ‘young avengers’, and in so adopting these monikers the brothers are setting themselves up to eventually avenge the killing of their father by Fróði.¹²⁴

It was indeed a common practice in Viking Age and medieval Iceland and Scandinavia to incorporate animal elements into names, most commonly using wild animals like wolves, bears, and ravens.¹²⁵ Several scholars have proposed a special significance of animal names in medieval Scandinavia, Kristina Jennbert summarising:

Djuren i personnamnen antyder att namnen och namnleden en gång hade en djupt meningsfull betydelse. Måhända kunde förväntade överförda djuriska egenskaper såsom snabbhet, styrka, mod eller list förknippas med släktens självbild. Namnen kunde också knyta an till goda eller onda makter och ära, makt och redlighet. Användningen av personnamn hämtade från de vilda djuren kan möjligen kopplas till den sammansmältning av kultur och natur som finns i den nordkiska mytologin.¹²⁶

The animals in personal names suggest that the names and name-compounds once had a deeply significant meaning. Perhaps desired transferable animal characteristics such as speed, strength, courage, or cunning could be associated with the self-image of the family. The names could also connect to good or evil powers and to honour, power, and honesty. The use of personal names taken from wild animals can possibly be linked to the interplay between culture and nature found in Norse mythology.

The incorporation of wild animals like wolves and bears into human names is often thought to signify warrior characteristics, which Gunter Müller sees as characteristic of a martial worldview.¹²⁷ Dogs are not represented quite as frequently in human names, but they are not entirely excluded. Jennbert, for instance, notes one Proto-Norse name in the older futhark with a dog element (‘Widuhundaz’), carved on a fibula in Denmark.¹²⁸ In the sagas, dog lexemes occasionally appear in personal names like Hundigr of the *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* poems,

¹²⁴ Gerard Breen, “‘The Wolf is at the Door’: Outlaws, Assassins, and Avengers Who Cry “Wolf””, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 114 (1999), pp. 31–43 (p. 33).

¹²⁵ See, for instance, Gunter Müller, ‘Germanische Tiersymbolik und Namengebung’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 2.1 (1968), pp. 202–17; and Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, pp. 184–87.

¹²⁶ Kristina Jennbert, ‘Människor och djur: Kroppsmetaforik och kosmologiska perspektiv’, in *Ordning mot kaos: Studier av nordisk förkristen kosmologi*, ed. by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere (Nordic Academic Press, 2004), pp. 183–217 (p. 203).

¹²⁷ Müller, ‘Germanische Tiersymbolik und Namengebung’, p. 216.

¹²⁸ Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, p. 185.

or in epithets like Þorkell hvelpr of *Laxdæla saga*, Búi hund of *Kjalnesinga saga*, and Þórir hundr of *Óláfs saga helga*.¹²⁹

The case of Helgi and Hróarr assuming dog names in *Hrólfs saga*, even just as a disguise, stands out among all the above-discussed cases of theriophoric naming since they are not simply using lexemes for a general animal species but rather taking the *personal names* of *specific individual dogs*. There is thus a double layer to this act of naming. On one level, the fact that the real canines Hoppr and Hó are given personal names like so many other dogs in the sagas is extremely significant and highlights the special role of dogs in human society. Siv Kristoffersen explains that in ‘the Nordic, pre-Christian name tradition a child was, by being given its name, taken into family and society and became a social being’, and Jennbert thus notes that named animals ‘became individuals with a value of their own’ and possibly ‘had a special value for people or gods’.¹³⁰ By being named, these dogs hence take one step deeper into human society, complicating the question of what it means to be a human. Further complicating this question in *Hrólfs saga* on a second level, the dogs’ names are then transferred to humans. The consistent alliteration of the names and the fact that the actual dogs are not mentioned at all after this second act of naming makes it seem as if the animals are subsumed entirely by the two humans. Indeed, later in the saga, even after the boys have assumed different names (Hamr and Hrani), a *völva* still identifies them by their canine names, declaring,

“Þeir, er í Vífilsey
váru lengi
ok hétu þar
hunda nöfnum,

¹²⁹ *Eddk*, II, pp. 247–83. For a discussion of the name Hundigr, see Sophus Bugge, *The Home of the Eddic Poems, with Especial Reference to the Helgi-Lays*, trans. by William Henry Schofield (David Nutt, 1899), pp. 179–82. *Laxdæla saga*, p. 86. *Kjalnesinga saga*, pp. 9–10. *Óláfs saga helga*, p. 177.

¹³⁰ Kristoffersen, ‘Half Beast—Half Man’, p. 265. Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, p. 187.

Hoppr ok Hó.”¹³¹

“[It is] they who were on Vífill’s island for a long time and had there the names of dogs, Hoppr and Hó.”

While Helgi and Hróarr merely assume the dogs’ names for protection and do not appear to adopt much else from the canines, *Gesta Danorum* goes a step further in a similar story. In book seven of Saxo’s work, when the brothers Haraldus and Haldanus are similarly threatened by their uncle,

ab eorum tutoribus callidior seruandorum pupillorum ratio excogitata est. Nam truncos luporum ungues subtellibus annectentes contiguum penatibus suis lutum obfusamque niuibis humum crebris decursibus exarare coeperunt, ferini incessus speciem prebituri. Post hec trucidatis ancillarum liberis eorumque corporibus frustatim discerptis lacera passim membra disiiciunt. Itaque requisitis adolescentibus nec inuentis fusi reperiuntur artus, ferarum uestigia demonstrantur, tellus cruore delibuta conspicitur. Creditum est pueros lupina ingluuie consumptos [...]. Qui mox a tutoribus caua conclusi ilice, ne ullum uite eorum indicium ederetur, diu sub canum specie nutriebantur. Latrantum quoque eis uocabula indita, quo minus latentium opinio uulgaretur.¹³²

a smarter plan to protect the wards was devised by their guardians. For they cut off the claws of wolves, fastening them to their soles, and with frequent strides began to scour the ground covered with mud and snow with the claws, creating the appearance of a wild beast. After this, the children of some slave women were slaughtered and their bodies torn to pieces and their torn limbs scattered here and there. And when the young men were not found, the bodies were discovered, the tracks of the beasts were seen, and the earth was seen drenched in blood. It was believed that the children had been devoured by a wolf [...]. The boys were soon hidden in a cave by their guardians, to avoid producing any signs of them, and were fed for a long time under the guise of dogs. They were also given the names of dogs to lessen rumour of their hiding.

It isn’t entirely clear whether it is the boys or their guardians who wear the wolf claws, but either way this element adds another level of complexity to the thread of human/animal hybridity so prominent in this episode. Although the boys’ uncle is clearly villainised here as well, the brutal slaughter of the children betrays the wolfish nature and behaviour of the guardians too.¹³³ Meanwhile, not only are these brothers given the names of dogs, but they are

¹³¹ *Hrólfs saga*, p. 9.

¹³² *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 448.

¹³³ John McKinnell suggests that differences in Saxo’s version ‘can be explained by his political need to idealise King Frotho’ (‘Encounters with *Völur*’, in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross (University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), pp. 110–31 (p. 122)).

also fed as if they were canines. The text does not go into much detail about what exactly this entails, but it represents an even more significant blurring of the lines between human and animal. As Ratramnus' letter touched on earlier, diet is one criterion so often used to separate humans from other animals. In Old Norse-Icelandic literature, dogs in particular are portrayed at their most animalistic when they are feasting on carrion, sometimes human flesh. During a rowdy wedding feast, for instance, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* describes trolls and giants eating horsemeat and human flesh 'sem etjutíkur' ('like female hounds') and *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* even includes a saying, 'Ópt hefr hundr, þat hafna sessunautr' ('Often a dog gets what the benchmates reject').¹³⁴ Being fed like dogs makes the boys' disguise less superficial and moves them into the territory of more meaningful hybridity.

Helgi and Hróarr are not the only humans in the saga named after dogs. In fact, Helgi's own daughter carries on this tradition, but her theriophoric name is more permanent. Helgi's daughter was not born under pleasant circumstances, but was conceived through the rape of her mother, Queen Ólöf. The text describes the consequences of this act in characteristically straightforward language, stating that

er stundir liðu fram, fæðir Ólöf barn. Þat var mæ. Hún leggr á barn þat alla óstund. Hún átti hund þann, er Yrsa hét, ok þar eptir kallaði hún meyna, ok skyldi hún heita Yrsa. [...] Ok sem hún var tólf vetra gömul, skyldi hún gæta hjarðar ok aldri annat vitast en hún væri karls dóttir ok kerlingar [...].¹³⁵

when some time passed, Ólöf gave birth to a child. It was a girl. She had complete disregard for that child. She had a dog who was called Yrsa, and she named the girl after it, and she was thus called Yrsa. [...] And when she was twelve years old, she (Yrsa) had to watch the flocks and never knew that she was anything other than the daughter of a (common) man and woman.

Although it is quite possible that Ólöf was fond of her dog, naming her daughter after it, a daughter whom it is said she does not care for, cannot be read as complimentary.¹³⁶ It has been

¹³⁴ *Bárðar saga*, p. 153. *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, in *FornNorð*, III, pp. 229–82 (p. 266).

¹³⁵ *Hrólfs saga*, p. 18.

¹³⁶ There is no clear etymology of the name Yrsa. Axel Olrik (*The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, trans. by Lee Hollander (The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1919), pp. 268–76) suggested that the name could be ultimately derived from the Latin *ursus* ('bear'), which would thematically suit the saga as a whole but not so

noted that it is far more common to find animal elements in male names than female ones in this period, and part of the reason for this may be that being compared to a female animal was considered even more unambiguously insulting than being compared to a male one.¹³⁷ The Old Norwegian law-code of the *Gulaping*, for instance, demanded that full compensation, even in blood or outlawry, be paid by any man who compared another ‘við meri. æða kallar hann grey. æða portkono. æða iamnar hanom við berende eitthvert’ (‘to a mare, or calls him a bitch or a harlot, or compares him with any female animal (literally ‘birth-giver’)).¹³⁸ The equation of ‘bitch’ and ‘harlot’ here suggests that the offensiveness of comparing someone to a female dog may have been rooted in implications of sexual lasciviousness. A similar clause in the law-code of the *Frostaping* orders full atonement for comparing someone to a female animal, but only half for comparing him to male animals like horses or oxen.¹³⁹ While it is true that these clauses refer to insults directed at men, scholars have argued that insults like *ergi* and *argr* when directed at women imply that they are ‘generally immodest, perverted or lecherous.’¹⁴⁰

If this naming is an act of insult, it is aimed not so much at Yrsa but more at Helgi, now a king, and Ármann Jakobsson thus suggests that Queen Ólöf ‘uses a name as a symbol for dignity’.¹⁴¹ Another parallel is created between woman and dog as Yrsa is sent to live with peasants and watch their flocks, in much the same manner as a sheepdog. It is in this role, watching ‘við skóg einn marga hjörð’ (‘a large flock by a forest’) that Helgi first meets her

much Yrsa’s own lineage. Regardless, Olrik argues that the saga attributing the name to a dog ‘teaches us that the name Yrsa sounded strange and was considered unbecoming a queen’ (p. 269). The *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (ed. by Ásgeir Magnússon, p. 1168) additionally provides an eighteenth-century meaning of ‘fála, óhemja; stygg ær’ (‘foul, unrestrained; ugly ewe’), the latter sense of which would suit the way Yrsa is treated in the saga.

¹³⁷ Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, pp. 184–85.

¹³⁸ *Norges Gamle Love*, I, p. 70.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁴⁰ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. by Joan Turville-Petre (Odense University Press, 1983), p. 18. A similar argument is made by Folke Ström in *Níð, Ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes* (Viking Society for Northern Research, 1974), p. 2.

¹⁴¹ Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Le Roi Chevalier: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs saga kraka*’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 71.2 (1999), pp. 139–66 (p. 152). Indeed, once Ólöf considers herself sufficiently avenged, she offers to take Yrsa back in as her daughter and treat her with the honour and respect she is due (*Hrólfs saga*, p. 24).

(and, unfortunately, ends up marrying her).¹⁴² Even though Yrsa has always been Yrsa, the fact that neither she nor Helgi know her true identity means that ‘Yrsa’ is in a way an assumed form, just as ‘Hoppr’ and ‘Hó’ were for Helgi and his brother. Once again, we therefore have a double act of naming unique to dogs, blurring the boundaries between human and canine and setting up a theme of human/animal hybridity that becomes amplified throughout the rest of the saga.

Hrólfs saga kraka 2: Transformations

The disconcerting union of Helgi and his daughter Yrsa ends up producing the eponymous protagonist of the saga, Hrólfr kraki. Hrólfr eventually takes over as king when his father Helgi is killed by another king, Aðils. Although Hrólfr appears to be quite typically human, he surrounds himself throughout the saga with companions who are less so, including a company of twelve berserkers, the warrior Bǫðvarr bjarki, and a dog named Gramr. Gramr is only mentioned once in the saga, appearing quite out of the blue (like Busla’s hound in *Bósa saga*) to take on a supernatural enemy sent by King Aðils. It is merely said of the dog that he

var mjök frábærr at hreysti ok sterkleik. Því næst kemr þar inn tröll í galtar líki, ok lætr aumliga í því illa trölli. Bǫðvarr sigar hundinum á göltinn, ok lætr hann sér ekki bilt verða ok réðst í móti geltinum. Þar verðr nú atgangr harðfengr. Bǫðvarr veitir hundinum lið ok höggr til galta, en aldri bítr á hans hrygg. Svá er hundrinn Gramr harðr, at hann rífr hlustirnar af galtanum ok þar með alla kinnfilluna, ok er þat allt í senn, at göltrinn ferr þar niðr, sem hann er kominn [...].¹⁴³

was exceptional in valour and strength. Then a troll comes there in the shape of a boar, and makes terrible noises as an evil troll. Bǫðvarr sets the dog on the boar, and he doesn’t let himself hesitate, but goes at the boar. There is now a hard battle. Bǫðvarr gives the dog assistance and strikes at the boar, but his strikes never bite. The dog Gramr is so tough that he tears the ears off the boar and with them all its cheek-flesh, and all at once the boar went back down to whence it came.

¹⁴² *Hrólfs saga*, p. 18.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

The blurring of boundaries in this transformation is perhaps a little less significant, since the boar does begin as a supernatural creature, humanoid but not quite human. Nevertheless, it remains meaningful that it is a dog who is called upon to take on this supernatural enemy. The fact that Gramr is so suddenly introduced, with no mention either before or after, suggests that the saga composer may have believed this to be a role perfectly suited for a canine of all creatures. Indeed, much like Gramr of *Borsteins saga*, *Hrólfs saga*'s Gramr is able to achieve with his jaws what even a berserker cannot with his sword.

It is curious here that Bǫðvarr and not Hrólfr is the one who lets loose the king's hound and joins the battle himself. As Johanna Bradley observes, Hrólfr has actually 'yet to be shown doing anything brave or courageous' and 'seems lost in the background of the scene'.¹⁴⁴ Bradley reads this as one of many examples of Hrólfr's inaction throughout the saga, to be understood 'as a negative example of kingship in behavior and action', but it is also notable that inaction characterises one of the few humans in the saga without any animal influence.¹⁴⁵ In a saga and an episode characterised by its reflections on human/animal hybridity, the "pure human" ends up being rather ineffective. On the other hand, Bǫðvarr appears to overrule Hrólfr's connection to his dog and engage a supernatural hybrid enemy, which might be made possible by his own less-than-human nature.

Bǫðvarr's animalistic nature comes from his father Björn, the son of a Norwegian king Hringr. Björn is cursed by his stepmother, a Sámi woman named Hvít, for rejecting her advances. By striking him with an 'úlfhanzki' ('glove made of wolfskin'), Hvít curses Björn to transform into a bear by day and feed on nothing but his father's livestock.¹⁴⁶ It is in the form of a bear that Björn eventually runs into his paramour Bera, who recognises him because in

¹⁴⁴ Johanna Bradley, 'Heroes and Kings in the Legend of Hrolf Kraki' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois, 2006), pp. 185–86.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Hrólfs saga*, p. 42.

‘þessum birni þykkist hún kenna augu Björns konungssonar’ (‘this bear, she seemed to recognise the eyes of the king’s son Björn’).¹⁴⁷ Bera follows Björn to his cave where they spend some nights together, until one morning Björn gets hunted down by a large group of the king’s men and dogs, and is finally killed.¹⁴⁸

This episode pulls together many of the elements of hybridity discussed so far. Björn and Bera’s names, meaning a male and female bear, are obviously significant, foreshadowing their eventual fates. While wolf claws were used in *Gesta Danorum* to enable Haraldus and Haldanus’ eventual canine disguise, a similar wolfskin glove here is necessary for a complete human-animal transformation; according to Bourns, ‘animal clothing enables magic and supernatural experience.’¹⁴⁹ Like Saxo’s boys fed like dogs, Björn’s animality in bear form is defined primarily by his diet, as he is forced to prey uncontrollably on huge quantities of sheep. Even more than the specific food, it is the fact that Björn is unable to control his hunting habits that make him truly animal, at least according to Isidore of Seville’s definition: ‘beasts (*bestia*) are termed wild (*ferus*) because they enjoy a natural freedom and are driven (*ferre*) by their own desires’.¹⁵⁰ In this transformation, Björn thus loses some of the rationality that was meant to define humanity. Yet, his restraint when it comes to Bera and Bera’s ability to recognise him by his eyes implies that even in bear form there is some human within. As Bourns explains, ‘Björn’s transformation involves his exteriority rather than his interiority [...] and he has not lost his human essence.’¹⁵¹ The same is true of the troll-turned-boar in the previous episode who maintains some of its trollish identity even in its animal form, said to ‘lætr aumliga í því illa trölli’ (‘make terrible noises as an evil troll’).¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 43–44.

¹⁴⁹ Bourns, ‘Becoming-Animal’, p. 646.

¹⁵⁰ Isidore, *Etymologies*, p. 251.

¹⁵¹ Bourns, ‘Becoming-Animal’, p. 647.

¹⁵² *Hrólfs saga*, p. 75.

Most significant to this thesis is Björn's encounter with the king's dogs, 'margir hundar ok stórir fyrir liðinu' ('many large dogs before the host of men').¹⁵³ Although Björn manages to kill all the dogs and maim many of the men, he is ultimately surrounded by a ring of men and killed. The lead-up to this encounter is reminiscent of scenes of royal hunts and the final deadly ring of the practice of bear-baiting.¹⁵⁴ One major common thread throughout all these encounters is that dogs are so often placed in direct opposition to wild animals. The dogs Hoppr and Hó are to protect the flock from a wolf, and canine disguises protect the boys Helgi and Hróarr from the wolf that is their uncle. The dog Gramr is the natural combatant of a troll-turned-boar, and Björn as a bear is ambushed by a pack of dogs. Each of these encounters mirrors the real-world role of dogs in the hunt, as discussed in the first chapter. Though there are multiple human/animal hybrids in the saga, dogs consistently stand out from the others, representing "civilisation" against wilderness even in their hybrid states. *Hrólfs saga* might be constantly constructing and complicating boundaries, but the result is less a boundary between human and animal and more a boundary between human and *l'animot* as defined by Derrida, implicitly acknowledging the heterogeneity between different species and in particular the uniqueness of the dog.

Hrólfs saga kraka 3: Hybridity

The uniqueness of dogs among all other animals becomes even clearer in the case of Bǫðvarr Bjarki's brothers. Bera's time in the cave with Björn leads to her eventually giving birth to three children. However, because Bera was pressured by Hvít into eating a bite of Björn's bear meat while pregnant, her children are born somewhat unusual:

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁵⁴ Clive Tolley further reads the scene as 'a garbled form of a Sámi bear-hunt ritual and its associated tales' ('*Hrólfs saga kraka* and Sámi Bear Rites', *Saga-Book*, 31 (2007), pp. 5–21 (p. 13)).

tók hún sótt ok fæddi sveinbarn, þó nokkut með undarligum hætti. Þat var maðr upp, en elgr niðr frá nafla. Hann er nefndr Elg-Fróði. Annarr sveinn kemr þar til ok er kallaðr Þórir. Hundsfætr váru á honum frá rist ok því var hann kallaðr Þórir hundsfótr. Hann var maðr fríðastr sýnum fyrir annat. Inn þriði sveinn kom til, ok var sá allra vænstr. Sá er kallaðr Bøðvarr, ok var honum ekki neitt til lýta.¹⁵⁵

she went into labour and gave birth to a baby boy, though in a somewhat strange way. He was a man on top, but an elk below the navel. He is named Elg-Fróði. A second boy then appears and is called Þórir. He had the feet of a dog from the instep and so he was called Þórir hundsfótr. He was the most handsome man in appearance in other respects. The third boy appeared, and that one was the most beautiful of all. He is called Bøðvarr, and he had nothing to fault.

Much has been written about the bear-meat and its consequences, especially as a form of cannibalism and in the context of other human-animal transformations in the saga.¹⁵⁶ Most analyses of hybridity in *Hrólfs saga*, however, focus on Björn and Bøðvarr, and very little has been said about Þórir hundsfótr, but it is worth considering all three brothers together.

It would initially appear from this description of the brothers that there is a neat gradient of physical and social animality. Elg-Fróði, the most physically animal of the three, is also the wildest in personality. He soon proves to be a very aggressive child and ends up leaving home and becoming a robber. His own mother laments that ‘honum ekki hent í fjölmenni fyrir óvægi sína’ (‘he was not suitable for crowds of people (i.e. human society) because of his violent disposition’).¹⁵⁷ On the other end of the spectrum, Bøðvarr is said to be perfectly normal with no faults. As a child, he bears no physical evidence of his hybrid human/ursine paternity. It is, however, revealed towards the end of the saga that Bøðvarr actually has the most in common

¹⁵⁵ *Hrólfs saga*, pp. 45–46.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Bourns, ‘Becoming-Animal’, p. 648; Andrea Maraschi, ‘Taboo or Magic Practice? Cannibalism as Identity Marker for Giants and Human Heroes in Medieval Iceland’, *Parergon*, 37.1 (2020), pp. 1–25 (p. 18); Jonathan Hui, ‘Bad Beef and Mad Cow Disease in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 90.4 (2018), pp. 461–84 (pp. 470 and 478); and Michael McGlynn, ‘Bears, Boars, and Other Socially Constructed Bodies in *Hrólfs saga kraka*’, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 4.2 (2009), pp. 152–75 (p. 152).

¹⁵⁷ *Hrólfs saga*, p. 46.

with his father, as he is able to project the form of a bear to engage enemy forces on the battlefield.¹⁵⁸

In comparison, Þórir is actually the most “normal” of the three brothers. Despite his animal feet, it can be argued that he manages to integrate better into human society than even Bǫðvarr. Although Bǫðvarr succeeds his grandfather King Hringr to his kingdom, he is only able to rule ‘litla hríð’ (‘for a short time’), choosing to leave his kingdom in search of his own heroic adventures.¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, the dog-footed Þórir goes down exactly the opposite path and ends up finding his own kingdom to rule. The kingdom in question is Gautland where, following the death of the previous king, a new king is chosen by setting up such a large throne that ‘sitja mega í rúmliga tveir menn, en sá skal konungr vera, er þat rúm fyllir’ (‘two men might sit comfortably in it, and he who fills the space shall be king’).¹⁶⁰ It just so happens that, quite possibly due to his preternatural parentage, Þórir fits best on the throne and so

gefa landsmenn honum konungsnafn, ok er hann kallaðr Þórir konungr hundsfótr, ok eru miklar sögur frá honum. Hann var vinsæll ok háði margar orrostur ok hafði optast sigr.¹⁶¹

the inhabitants of the land give him the name of king and he is called King Þórir hundsfótr, and there are great stories about him. He was well-loved and fought many battles and most often had victory.

It is therefore not simply *despite* Þórir’s hybridity but precisely *because of* his hybrid nature that he is perfectly suited to be king. His dog feet are not hidden, but he is celebrated as ‘Þórir konungr hundsfótr’. This trajectory would likely not have been possible had he been associated with any other animal. His brothers’ connections to wild animals gives them each a certain

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 87–88. An in-depth analysis and review of scholarship of this much-discussed episode can be found in McGlynn, ‘Bears, Boars, and Other Socially Constructed Bodies’. See also O’Connor, ‘Monsters of the Tribe’, pp. 205–07.

¹⁵⁹ *Hrólfs saga*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 49–50.

wildness that sets them apart from human society in different ways.¹⁶² On the other hand, being associated with the most domesticated of animals means that Þórir may not just peacefully live alongside humans but even rule over them, playing on the connections between dogs and kingship, as well the trope of the dog-king discussed above.

Of all the sagas discussed in this chapter, *Hrólfs saga* is the most packed with human/animal hybridity, and also displays the most variety in its use and portrayal of dogs. Dogs in this saga are at once familiar and fabulous, king's companions and kings themselves, antagonists of trolls and transformed heroes, and inspiration for human names. The multiple human-animal transformations of all kinds in *Hrólfs saga* do indicate a blurring of the human-animal boundary throughout the text, yet dogs stand out, explicitly separated from all other non-human animals. In a truly limitrophic fashion, the multiple dogs in this saga do not efface the border between human and animal, but instead stretch the border and straddle it themselves. Just as Þórir hundsfótr's "normality" draws attention to the relative wildness of his hybrid brothers, by playing on dogs' connection to humanity, this saga and others emphasise the animality of other animals and thus the humanity of humans. Carl Phelpstead wrote of another text, *Eyrbyggja saga*, that the narrative inadvertently blurs the human-animal boundary 'or perhaps suggests that the significant distinction is not between humans and animals but between humans and domesticated animals on the one side and wild animals on the other.'¹⁶³ It might similarly be said that the distinction in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and many other *fornaldarsögur* is between humans and dogs on one side and the rest of animal-kind on the other.

¹⁶² On the choice of animals for the three brothers, Tolley ('Sámi Bear Rites', p. 17) notes that they 'seem to represent a more precise reflection of ancient Finnish/Sámi animal cosmography: the dog is the animal used for hunting, and the elk and the bear are the two great animals whose pursuit is celebrated in sacred rites and poems'.

¹⁶³ Phelpstead, 'Ecocriticism and *Eyrbyggja saga*', p. 14.

Conclusion

The question at the heart of this chapter, the question that preoccupied Rimbert and Ratramnus and so many saga composers, is a simple yet incredibly complex one: What is a human? In every text discussed above, dogs and human/dog hybrids make this question increasingly difficult to answer as they challenge every single marker that is conventionally used to separate humans from other animals. Rimbert's cynocephali practise agriculture, while Saxo's Haraldus and Haldanus are fed like dogs. The dog-headed men wear clothing and dogs of all kinds are dressed up in human clothes. Dogs very often understand the words of their human companions, Saurr of *Hákonar saga góða* possesses limited human speech himself, and human berserkers exchange human language for barking and howling. Numerous dogs are given personal names, display great intelligence and emotion, and are even shown to suffer. Some dogs (and one dog-footed man) even rule over humans, subverting the most essential rule of human superiority.

And yet, despite all this, each one of these texts continues to maintain a line between humans and other animals, some more tenuously than others. This is because of the dog's unique position always on the line between humanity and animality, allowing them to inhabit both categories in the ways just described without threatening the categories themselves. In none of the above cases is the transformation from dog to human or vice versa truly comprehensive, and we might therefore consider them all to be cases of hybridity as opposed to true 'metamorphosis'. Caroline Walker Bynum helpfully proposes the following distinction:

Hybrid reveals a world of difference, a world that *is* and is multiple; metamorphosis reveals a world of stories, of things under way. Metamorphosis breaks down categories by breaching them; hybrid forces contradictory or incompatible categories to coexist and serve as commentary each on the other.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 31.

The use of human/dog hybrids therefore allows sagas to interrogate questions of humanity and animality without irreversibly breaching the borders between the two categories. Deleuze and Guattari's sonorous circle of humanity is thus maintained, the forces of chaos are kept at bay. At the same time, these hybrids create opportunities for commentary that underlines the textual narratives. Stories about dog-kings are adapted for political commentary on the responsibilities and demands of rulership, and questions of independence and subjugation. As substitutes for humans, dogs become tools of power and protection, often along gendered lines. In the case of *Ragnars saga*, the dog is not simply a source of status and agency for Kráka, but also a pretext for the saga composer to subtly express disapproval. Cynocephali provide especially powerful opportunities for commentary on geographical, political, and religious borders and the limits of civilisation.

Through all this, the *fornaldarsögur* never make any attempt to explain what a dog actually is; this is knowledge assumed of all their readers, contemporary and modern. But the canines of the *fornaldarsögur* often do not resemble any animal we would then or now call a dog. Some are as big as trolls or the size of cows. A few speak and others sit on thrones. Yet, no matter their physical form or verbalisation or behaviour, every single one of the dogs and human/dog hybrids discussed in this chapter is instantly recognisable as a dog. Their humanity may be under question, but their caninity never is. This is precisely what makes them such valuable tools for *fornaldarsaga* authors to familiarise their worlds, and thus bridge the gap between their contemporary audiences and Iceland's legendary past. No matter how fabulous, dogs are always dogs and humans will always be able to find comfort in that knowledge.

CHAPTER 5. (ANTI-) CHRISTIAN DOGS

III. Finally, one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or goes out oneself, launches forth. One opens the circle not on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself. As though the circle tended on its own to open onto a future, as a function of the working forces sit shelters. This time, it is in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces. One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune. Along sonorous, gestural, motor lines that mark the customary path of a child and graft themselves onto or begin to bud “lines of drift” with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, and sonorities.¹

Introduction

In 999/1000 AD, Iceland accepted Christianity as its official religion, and in the 1100s, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden were each granted their own archdiocese.² On either side of these conversion ‘moments’ were periods of long, complex, fluid processes of conversion and ‘Christianisation’ that were born gradually out of increased contact with Christianised countries as early as the eighth century, were heightened by the sometimes politically-motivated conversion of kings and chieftains, and produced more often than not hybrid Christian and ‘heathen’ expressions of belief and tradition.³ The conversion to Christianity created a need to teach Icelanders and Scandinavians about their new religion and so a range of key Christian texts become translated into Old Norse-Icelandic. In fact, literary texts were themselves likely central to the process of conversion. Siân Grønlie has explained how

conversion narratives are not ‘retrospective’ so much as ‘prospective’: the text precedes and makes the experience of conversion, not the experience of conversion the text. The literary form

¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 311–12.

² Stefan Brink, ‘Christianisation and the Emergence of the Early Church in Scandinavia’, in *The Viking World*, ed. by Stefan Brink and Neil Price (Routledge, 2008), pp. 621–28. Peter Foote, ‘Historical Studies: Conversion Moment and Conversion Period’, in *Viking Revaluations: Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14–15 May 1992*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (Viking Society for Northern Research, 1993), pp. 137–44 (p. 137).

³ See Foote, ‘Historical Studies’ on the distinction between a ‘conversion moment’ and ‘conversion period’. For a more recent summary of the historiography around this process, see Sverre Bagge, ‘Christianization and State Formation in Early Medieval Norway’, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 30.2 (2005), pp. 107–34.

of the conversion narrative therefore deserves close attention: rather than coming second to the experience of conversion, it is through narrative that conversion takes place.⁴

This chapter explores the role of dogs in these conversion narratives and their place in the corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic Christian material. It begins by interrogating the seemingly negative depiction of dogs in Scripture, represented as unclean and wicked animals on Earth and as torturers in hell, somewhat at odds with their important roles in human society. These representations influence portrayals of dogs in hagiography, and it is demonstrated how dogs, often demonic, are placed in opposition to holy men and women in different ways throughout a number of saints' lives translated into Old Norse-Icelandic. However, a deeper examination of these sources reveals that as aggressive and demonic as these dogs might be, they are often employed by texts in the service of a greater divine purpose. Finally, this chapter looks at how Icelanders manage to adapt these tropes while also acknowledging the integral role of dogs in society when constructing their own hagiographies and other texts. It will be demonstrated how lives of King Óláfr Haraldsson, King Óláfr Tryggvason, and Bishop Guðmundr Arason all blend foreign hagiographic and local saga techniques to craft a holy image of their protagonists, an image that is either helped or hindered in interesting ways by their interactions with dogs. This chapter therefore demonstrates that even though the portrayal of dogs is more negative in these genres of texts, they still play important roles in constructing textual narratives in ways not unlike those discussed in other genres throughout this thesis.

The Old Norse-Icelandic Christian Corpus

As the canonical text of Christianity, the Bible naturally made its way into medieval Iceland and Scandinavia, although the earliest known translation of the entire Bible into Icelandic dates

⁴ Siân Grønlie, 'Conversion Narrative and Christian Identity: 'How Christianity Came to Iceland'', *Medium Ævum*, 86.1 (2017), pp. 123–46 (p. 124).

only from 1584.⁵ As early as the thirteenth century, clerics in Iceland began to translate parts of the Bible, often of the Vulgate, alongside other works like Petrus Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*.⁶ One of the most useful sources available to us is the collection of Old Norse-Icelandic translations of Old Testament historical material named *Stjórn*, surviving in three major manuscripts between c. 1300 and c. 1360.⁷ In addition to direct translations, quotations of Biblical passages can be found across medieval Icelandic homiletic, hagiographic, and other religious literature.⁸ Biblical quotations were particularly prevalent in saints' lives, from early translations of the Acts of the Apostles and acts of the martyrs to later attempts to venerate newer local saints. Hagiography, Grønlie explains, is the medieval genre with the longest continuous history and one of the few that 'all classes of society were exposed to'.⁹

Along with saints' lives, some of the most effective media available to bring Christian doctrine to the people were homilies and sermons. Two main collections of homilies (as well as sermons, commentaries, and services) exist in Old Norse from c. 1200: the Old Icelandic (or Stockholm) Homily Book, Stock. Perg. 4to no. 15, and the Old Norwegian Homily Book, AM 619 4to.¹⁰ Written in a simple and engaging style, these homily books drew from a wide variety of earlier writings.¹¹ One very influential early text was *Elucidarius*, written in the late eleventh

⁵ Ian Kirby, 'The Bible and Biblical Interpretation in Medieval Iceland', in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 287–301 (p. 287).

⁶ Ibid., pp. 292–93; Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'The Church and Written Culture', in *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Árni Magnússon Institute, 2004), pp. 13–23 (p. 20). When quoting from the Bible, this thesis uses Carolus Vercellone's 1861 edition of the Clementine Vulgate.

⁷ Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Prose of Christian Instruction', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Blackwell, 2005), pp. 338–53 (pp. 344–46). Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir mentions three manuscripts, AM 226 fol., AM 227 fol., and AM 228 fol., to which can be added AM 225 fol. (a copy of AM 226 fol.).

⁸ Kirby, 'The Bible and Biblical Interpretation', pp. 293–99. An attempt to compile Biblical quotations from across pre-Reformation Norwegian and Icelandic literature was attempted by Johannes Belsheim (*Af Bibelen paa norsk-islandsk (norrøna) i Middelalderen* (Malling, 1884)), but the comprehensiveness of this attempt has been critiqued by Kirby ('On Belsheim's *Af Bibelen*', *Saga-Book*, 18 (1970), pp. 195–99).

⁹ Siân Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero: Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature* (Brewer, 2017), p. 1.

¹⁰ *Homiliu-Bók: Isländska Homilier, efter en handskrift från tolfte århundradet*, ed. by Theodor Wisén (Gleerups, 1872). *Gamal Norsk Homilieboek: Codex AM 619 4to*, ed. by Gustav Indrebø (Kjeldeskriftfondet, 1931).

¹¹ David McDougall, 'Homilies (West Norse)', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Pulsiano and Wolf, pp. 290–92 (p. 290). See also Thomas Hall, 'Old Norse-Icelandic Sermons', in *The Sermon*, ed. by Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Brepols, 2000), pp. 661–709.

or early twelfth century by a monk named Honorius Augustodunensis, used ‘to teach elementary Christianity to medieval Christians.’¹² Of all the Church Fathers, however, perhaps most important to medieval Icelanders and Scandinavians was the pope and saint, Gregory the Great. Gregory’s homilies on the Gospels (*Homiliae in Evangelia*) and *Dialogues* (a collection of four books of holy signs and miracles), were widely translated into Old Norse, fragments extant in manuscripts dating to as early as 1150, as well as used as sources for several other religious works.¹³ According to Kirsten Wolf, Gregory’s influence can be explained by his ‘ability to present Christian doctrine not as detached speculative theology but as accessible within the framework of concrete human experience’ and he, like the newly-converted Norwegians and Icelanders, ‘formed a bridge linking the wisdom of a sixth-century past with the new directions of contemporary medieval society.’¹⁴

It is important to understand that none of the sources discussed above existed in a vacuum. They were all a part of wider scholarly and ecclesiastical networks, being frequently copied, translated, adapted, and reinterpreted alongside each other. Each of these texts echoes the others in some way, through direct quotation or indirect but discernible influence. The spread of Christianity throughout Iceland and Scandinavia also meant that most of the corpus of what we might consider “pre-Christian” poetry and sagas was written down in a Christian setting. Many texts that purportedly deal with older “pagan” material therefore have some Christian influence too and will be considered alongside more explicitly theological texts.

¹² *The Old Norse Elucidarius: Original Text and English Translation*, ed. by Evelyn Scherabon Firchow (Camden House, 1992), pp. x–xi. Old Icelandic translations of *Elucidarius* are preserved in eight fragments written between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the earliest (AM 674a 4to) from c. 1200.

¹³ See Kirsten Wolf, ‘Gregory’s Influence in Old Norse-Icelandic Religious Literature’, in *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, ed. by Rolf Bremmer Jr, Kees Dekker, and David Johnson (Peeters, 2001), pp. 255–74; Siân Grønlie, ‘Translating (and Translocating) Miracles: Gregory’s Dialogues and the Icelandic Sagas’, in *Lost in Translation?*, ed. by Denis Renevey and Christiana Whitehead (Brepols, 2009), pp. 45–56; and Regis Boyer, ‘The Influence of Pope Gregory’s Dialogues on Old Icelandic Literature’, in *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference: University of Edinburgh, 1971*, ed. by Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson, and Desmond Slay (Viking Society for Northern Research, 1973), pp. 1–27.

¹⁴ Wolf, ‘Gregory’s Influence’, p. 255.

The question of humanity's place in relation to other animals recurs throughout this diverse corpus. The Old Testament is often read as containing a very anthropocentric worldview, beginning, as has already been discussed, with God giving man mastery over all other living beings in Genesis 1. This anthropocentric model of Creation is picked up in several Old Norse-Icelandic Christian texts, including *Elucidarius*, where a master explains to his disciple:

Mikils es vert of alla scep-no Gops þar es sum heuer fegrþ sem blomar. enn sum læcning sem gros. en sum fœtzlo sem acrar. en sum takn enna meire hluta sem foglar eþa dýr. Aller hluter ero goþer. oc aller til manna þurfta scapaþer.¹⁵

Great is the worth of all creatures of God. There are some that have beauty like flowers, and some healing like herbs. And some provide food like crops, and some signify even more things like birds and animals. All things are good and all are created for the needs of man.

Some Biblical passages, however, might be read through a model of environmental egalitarianism, especially when discussing death. The Epistle to the Ephesians expresses the hope that God will 'instaurare omnia in Christo, quæ in cælis et quæ in terra sunt, in ipso' ('establish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and on earth, in him') and Ecclesiastes 3.19 further claims that 'unus interitus est hominis, et iumentorum, et aequa utriusque conditio: sicut moritur homo, sic et illa moriuntur: similiter spirant omnia, et nihil habet homo iumento amplius' ('the death of man, and of beasts is one, and the condition of them both is equal: as man dies, so they also die: all things breathe alike, and man has nothing more than beast').¹⁶ According to Joyce Salisbury, these passages, though somewhat vague, could allow people to see 'God's creation as a unity, a great web in which all are linked together in this world, and transformed into the next'.¹⁷

¹⁵ Firchow, *Old Norse Elucidarius*, p. 18.

¹⁶ Ephesians 1.10 (Vulgate, p. 769). Ecclesiastes 3.19 (Vulgate, p. 405); cf. *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings*, ed. by Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Wipf & Stock, 2007), pp. 85–86.

¹⁷ Joyce Salisbury, 'Do Animals Go to Heaven?', *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts*, 1.1 (2014), pp. 79–86 (p. 84).

In this context, some Christian theologians thought it especially important to emphasise the difference between humans and other animals interrogated in the previous chapter. Gregory the Great, for instance, felt the need to directly address Ecclesiastes' statement that 'man hath nothing more than beast', reflecting in his *Dialogues* (as translated into Old Icelandic):

I því atqveþi svnde hann, at eigi es her lif manna, er hann qvad þat annars staþar [ver]a. Þat hevir maþr framar en smali, at smali livir eigi eptir dauða, en maþr tæcr þa at lifa, [er] hann lver svnilict lif meþ licams dauða.¹⁸

In these words he showed that men's life is not here, when he said that it is in another place. Man has this more than animals, that animals do not live after death, but man begins to live when he ends visible life with the death of the body.

To Gregory, then, there were three types of living beings: humans, animals (translated here as 'smali' and elsewhere as 'kvikvendi'), and angels. Humans are clearly set apart as 'lęgre en eng[lar] oc ópri en cvcqvende [...]; odapleie andar hevir [hann] sem englar en dapleie holde sem cvcqvende' ('lower than angels and higher than animals [...]; they have immortal souls like angels and mortal flesh like animals').¹⁹ Gregory's thoughts on this follow St Augustine of Hippo, who several centuries earlier considered there to be three kinds of beings with 'rational souls': gods, men, and demons.²⁰ Augustine rooted his argument in the account of Creation, and his exegesis on Genesis 1 is referenced and explained in *Stjórn*, where it is said that 'eru oll kuikendi manningum under lagi. eigi fyrir likamsins skyld utan helldr fyrir þa skynsemd ok skilning sem uęr hófum ok þau hafa eigi.' ('all animals are placed under men, not because of the body, but rather for the reason and understanding that we have but they do not.')²¹ The soul to Augustine and other medieval writers was thus 'the interior man, where reason and intellect reside'.²² Animals have no souls and are therefore inferior to rational humans.

¹⁸ *HeilSögur*, I, p. 237.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 235. Also in *Homiliu-Bók: Isländska Homilier*, p. 209.

²⁰ St Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, ed. by John O'Meara, trans. by Henry Bettenson (Penguin, 2003), p. 161.

²¹ *Stjórn*, pp. 21–22.

²² *St. Augustine on Genesis. Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, ed. and trans. by Roland Teske (The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), p. 76.

However Christian theologians and texts viewed other animals, though, dogs sometimes stand out as among the most villainised of all creatures.

Biblical Dogs

Dogs in the Old Testament are frequently depicted as unclean creatures, particularly in their diet. Proverbs 26.11 references the very common idea that dogs eat their own vomit, while Exodus 22.31 orders that ‘carnem, quae a bestiis fuerit praegustata’ (‘flesh that beasts have tasted of before’) should be thrown to the dogs.²³ As an extension of this, dogs are also said to consume human flesh, sometimes as a punishment for the wicked, a theme recurring throughout the first Book of Kings.²⁴ Such themes of unclean dogs from the Hebrew Bible may very well be based on the lived reality of sanitary problems caused by packs of stray dogs in cities.²⁵ Very much related, dogs appear to also be used as markers of wickedness. In Psalm 21, for instance, a person cries out to God to save them from their enemies, declaring, ‘Quoniam circumdederunt me canes multi: concilium malignantium obsedit me’ (‘For many dogs have encompassed me: the council of the malignant has besieged me’) and, later, ‘Erue a framea Deus animam meam: et de manu canis unicam meam’ (‘Deliver, God, my soul from the sword: my only one from the hand of the dog’).²⁶ The illogicality of the phrase ‘hand of the dog’ indicates that the animal is being used metaphorically here, but all these metaphors must be based upon the dog’s low estimation as a wicked aggressive tormentor. As a result of all these characteristics, the dog becomes painted as the antithesis to holiness, Ecclesiasticus asking, ‘Quae communicatio

²³ Proverbs 26.11 (Vulgate, p. 400). Exodus 22.31 (Vulgate, p. 47).

²⁴ I Kings 14.11, 21.19, 21.23, 21.24 (Vulgate, pp. 213 and 219).

²⁵ See Sophia Menache, ‘Dogs: God’s Worst Enemies?’, *Society and Animals*, 5.1 (1997), pp. 23–44 (p. 35).

²⁶ Psalm 21.17 and 21.21 (Vulgate, p. 346).

sancto homini ad canem? aut quae pars diviti ad pauperem?’ (‘What fellowship has a holy man with a dog, or what part have the rich with the poor?’)²⁷

Although not as frequent, these themes recur throughout the New Testament. The Second Epistle of Peter references the same proverb of a dog returning to its vomit, and Paul and Timothy’s Epistle to the Philippians warns readers to ‘Videte canes’ (‘Beware of dogs’).²⁸ Continuing to cast canines as unholy, the Gospel of Matthew describes Christ saying in his Sermon on the Mount, ‘Nolite dare sanctum canibus: neque mittatis margaritas vestras ante porcos’ (‘Give not that which is holy to dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine’), an exhortation repeated in the hagiographical *Thomas saga erkibyskups*.²⁹ Even more damningly, the Book of Revelation keeps dogs out of heaven itself, declaring, ‘Foris canes, et venefici, et impudici, et homicidae, et idolis servientes, et omnis, qui amat, et facit mendacium’ (‘Outside are dogs, and sorcerers, and the unchaste, and murderers, and servers of idols, and everyone that loves and makes a lie’).³⁰ Once again, dogs may be employed metaphorically here to represent a certain kind of sinful human but listed as they are among the worst company in Christian theology, the impression given of dogs is certainly not a positive one.

This view of dogs as unclean is further supported in an Old Norse-Icelandic translation of the *Vitae Patrum* (*Lives of the Fathers*), which describes bread gnawed by mice and dogs as ‘hit saurgazta’ (‘the most dirty/defiled’), as well as in an order by Archbishop Eilífr of Niðarós and Bishop Jón of Skálholt admonishing priests for allowing mice and dogs to defile holy Church spaces.³¹ The latter order, extant in at least three documents, is remarkable evidence

²⁷ Ecclesiasticus 13.22 (Vulgate, p. 428).

²⁸ II Peter 2.22 (Vulgate, p. 800). Philippians 3.2 (Vulgate, p. 774). This is also referenced metaphorically in *Malcus saga*, compared to a man who returns to the world after forsaking it (*HeilSögur*, I, p. 439).

²⁹ Matthew 7.6 (Vulgate, p. 645). *Thomas saga erkibyskups*, p. 38.

³⁰ Apocalypse of St. John the Apostle 22.15 (Vulgate, p. 815).

³¹ *HeilSögur*, II, p. 367. ‘Skipan þeirra Eilífs erkibiskups í Niðarósi og Jóns Skálholtsbiskups, eða skipan Eilífs hin mikla (1323–48)’, in *Diplomatarium Islandicum. Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn, sem hefir inni að halda bréf og*

both of the prevalence of dogs in Icelandic and Norwegian settlements at the time and of the official clerical position that dogs could be unclean pests.

Perhaps the greatest testament to the negative view of canines is the curious absence of normal dogs from Scripture. Although dogs have historically always been closely connected to humans in a variety of different roles, real dogs are rare in the Bible. That being said, there are a few hints of their ubiquity in human society in both the Old and New Testament. In its musings on corpses being eaten, the first Book of Kings elaborates that ‘Qui mortui fuerint de Ieroboam in civitate, comedent eos canes: qui autem mortui fuerint in agro, vorabunt eos aves caeli’ (‘Those who die of Jeroboam in the city, the dogs shall eat: and those who die in the field, the birds of the air shall devour’).³² This line confirms that whatever their role or representation might be, the place of dogs is within the human city. Somewhat less unpleasantly, the Gospel of Matthew describes a conversation between Jesus and a woman from Canaan where dogs are imagined within the house, the woman saying that ‘catelli edunt de micis quæ cadunt de mensa dominorum suorum’ (‘whelps eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table’).³³ Although this situation is a metaphor for Jesus healing the woman’s daughter, referencing a perceived hierarchy between Jews and Canaanites, it is also an acknowledgement of a close relationship between some humans and dogs despite their depiction in Scripture.

There are some kinder portrayals of dogs in apocryphal literature. In the Book of Tobit, Tobias appears to be accompanied on his journey by a dog who, on their return home, ‘praecucurrit [...]: et quasi nuncius adveniens, blandimento suae caudae gaudebat’ (‘ran before, [...] and coming as if it were a messenger, showed its joy by its wagging tail’).³⁴ Tobias and

gjörninga, dóma og máldaga, og aðrar skrár, er snerta Ísland eða Íslenska menn, vol. II, 1253–1350, ed. by Jón Þorkelsson (Møller, 1893), pp. 510–74 (pp. 518–19, 545, and 557).

³² I Kings 14.11 (Vulgate, p. 213). This is repeated in I Kings 21.24 (Vulgate, p. 219).

³³ Matthew 15.27 (Vulgate, pp. 631). This is repeated in Mark 7.28 (Vulgate, p. 668).

³⁴ Tobias 11.9 (Vulgate, p. 303).

his dog do not appear much in Old Norse-Icelandic material, but far more common is the parable of the beggar Lazarus. The Gospel of Luke describes how outside the hall of a rich man

erat quidam mendicus, nomine Lazarus, qui iacebat ad ianuam eius, ulceribus plenus, Cupiens saturari de micis, quae cadebant de mensa divitis, et nemo illi dabat: sed et canes veniebant, et lingeabant ulcera eius.

Factum est autem ut moreretur mendicus, et portaretur ab Angelis in sinum Abrahae.³⁵

there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who lay at his gate, full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one gave him anything; moreover the dogs came, and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

This was a popular parable in the Middle Ages, present in *Jóns saga postola*, in Old Norse-Icelandic translations of the Gospel of Luke, Gregory's *Homiliae in Evangelia*, Gregory's *Dialogues*, and in *Stjórn* (the latter two sources, however, not mentioning the dogs).³⁶ It was also a fairly popular artistic subject depicted in at least one Swedish and two Danish church paintings (Figures 4–6), as well as in several manuscripts across medieval Europe.

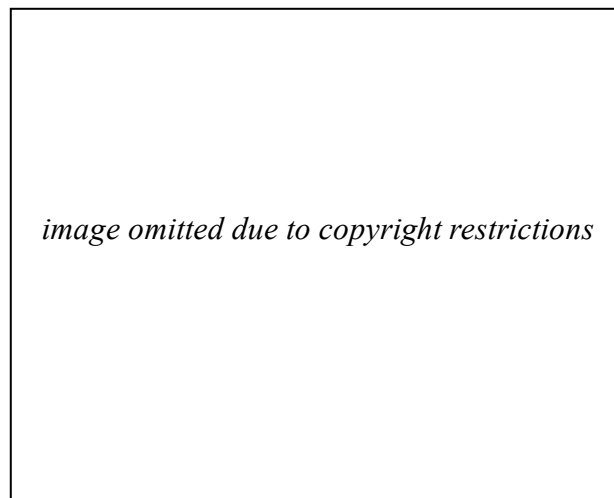


Figure 4: Dog licking Lazarus' sores, from Everlöf Kyrka, Lund, Sweden (image from kalkmalerier.dk)

³⁵ Gospel of Luke 16.20–22 (Vulgate, p. 693).

³⁶ *PostSögur*, p. 423; only the first redaction of *Jóns saga postola* in Unger's edition includes dogs. *Leifar*, pp. 36–47. *HeilSögur*, I, pp. 246–47. *Stjórn*, pp. 155–57.

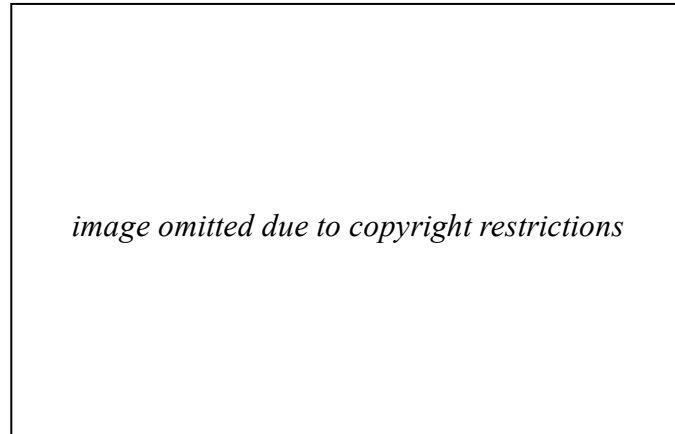


Figure 5: Dogs licking Lazarus' sores, from Hyllestad Kirke, Aarhus, Denmark (image from kalkmalerier.dk)



Figure 6: Dog licking Lazarus' sores, from Helsingør Karmeliterkloster Kirke, Roskilde, Denmark (image from kalkmalerier.dk)

The role of the dogs in this parable is not entirely clear. Justin Strong has pointed out two opposing strands of interpretation of the licking of the sores, as an act of mercy and relief, or as a means of humiliation and further suffering.³⁷ Whatever its original meaning may have been, it is likely that medieval audiences would have agreed with the former interpretation of the dogs. Although not mentioned in some early foundational texts like Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, later medieval European bestiaries consistently mention the curative power of a dog's tongue as one of its natural characteristics.

³⁷ Justin David Strong, 'Lazarus and the Dogs: The Diagnosis and Treatment', *New Testament Studies*, 64 (2018), pp. 178–93 (p. 183).

The twelfth-century Aberdeen Bestiary, for example, states that '[l]ingua canis dum lingit vulnus, sanat illud' ('a dog's tongue, while licking a wound, heals it'), accompanied by an illustration of the phenomenon.³⁸ Saxo Grammaticus even mentions in *Gesta Danorum* that a man named Ole sustained a wound in battle but 'sedulo a cane perlinctus recuperate corporis firmitate' ('recovered his physical strength after being diligently licked by [his] dog').³⁹

This is the interpretation approved by Gregory as well, an Old Norse translation of his homily on this parable explaining:

I helgom ritningom mercia opt hunda kenimen. Hundf tunga grøpir sör þat er hon fleicer. En kenimen snerta með tungu sinni svnþa for or þa er þeir fvfa of scripta gongo [...]. Hvndar mercia oc af því cenimen. at fva sem hundar gøia i gegn þioþom. fva eigo oc kenimen mēla i gegn ofiþom. því at fva m(ēlir) lfaýaf of orøþ kenimana. þeir ero dumbir (hun)dar oc mego eigi gøia. [...] Hunda flecing ma oc mercia viðmēla tungu hólbera. þeira ef flecia for or. þa ef þeir lofa omacliga þer svnþer ef ver ettim at scamafc.⁴⁰

In holy writings dogs often signify priests. A dog's tongue heals the wounds that it licks. And priests remove our sores of sins with their tongues when they urge us to go to confession. [...] Dogs also signify priests in this way, that just as dogs bark at thieves, so do priests speak against wickedness. So says Isaiah about negligent priests, they are dumb dogs and cannot bark. [...] Licking of dogs can also signify the agreeing tongue of those flatterers who lick our sores, when they unworthily praise those sins that we ought to be ashamed of.

Gregory's interpretation thus draws on both beliefs about the curative powers of a dog's tongue and the important role of guard dogs discussed in chapters 1 and 2. These positive roles are placed alongside a negative canine trait in the final sentence, the dual allegory playing on the dual facets of the figure of the dog. Overall, however, this is a fairly positive interpretation of the dogs in the parable. The theme of purification from sin moreover takes on extra significance considering the end of the parable where Lazarus is carried up to heaven. Are we meant to understand Gregory's metaphor more literally? Are the dogs licking away not just the beggar's physical sores but also his metaphysical 'synðasör' ('sin-sores' or 'sores of sins') as cleansing

³⁸ Aberdeen Univ Lib. MS 24, fol. 19^v, illustrated on fol. 19^r.

³⁹ *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 525.

⁴⁰ *Leifar*, pp. 38–39.

in preparation for his ascent into heaven? It is, it will be demonstrated, not uncommon to depict dogs being dangerous or harmful to humans but also playing a role in bringing humans closer to God despite the danger they pose—or, perhaps, precisely because of that danger.

Dogs in Hell

The Biblical parable of the beggar Lazarus does not end with Lazarus going to heaven but goes on to describe the rich man dying and going to hell. While in hell, the parable narrates his desperate pleas for Abraham to have mercy and save him from the infernal flames and, failing that, to send Lazarus to his brethren as witness to save their souls. As Matthew Hauge notes in his monograph on the parable, this is an unusually explicit Biblical reflection on the fate of the wicked dead before the Last Judgement, and as such the hell scene was frequently included in artistic depictions of the parable.⁴¹ One of the most striking of these illuminations is in the Golden Munich Psalter, probably produced in Oxford around 1200 (Figure 7). This representation of the parable is especially interesting because it depicts two dogs not just licking Lazarus' sores but also, in the lower panel, torturing the rich man alongside other demons in hell. The artist uses these dogs to very effectively link the two panels as well as link actions in life to consequences in the afterlife. In doing so, the dogs take on a greater cosmological role, positioned as spiritual agents in life and beyond. Their role here as healers in the top panel and torturers in the bottom panel is perfectly emblematic of dogs' ambiguous position in medieval Christendom.

⁴¹ Matthew Ryan Hauge, *The Biblical Tour of Hell* (Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 1.



Figure 7: Parable of Lazarus, from the Golden Munich Psalter (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Clm 835),

fol. 70^v

Images of hell were crucial to Christianity's mission in the Middle Ages. In order to convince people to shift from former beliefs about gods and giants and a warriors' paradise waiting for them after death, it was especially important for these texts to present their own version of the afterlife. 'Christianity as practised by the Norse,' explains Arnved Nedkvitne, was therefore 'a religion of salvation'.⁴² But 'salvation' needed to first be defined, which was done through images of the rewards of heaven and the torments of hell, as well as strict (if not always consistent) rules on how to end up in each place.

⁴² Arnved Nedkvitne, *Lay Belief in Norse Society, 1000–1350* (Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009), p. 158.

It is certainly true that early Christianity never did manage to create a single universally accepted model of the universe or the afterlife. As Christian Carlsen explains, ‘people were able to find meaning in different aspects of Christian teaching and devotion, and [...] religion was in essential ways democratic within the larger authoritative framework’.⁴³ Nevertheless, most Christians did agree on certain fundamentals concerning life after death, helpfully summarised by Haki Antonsson:

For medieval Icelanders, like their Catholic contemporaries, death did not signify the end of the self but a metamorphosis to a different state of existence. It was accepted, at least by the better informed, that only a few would reach Heaven — namely the saints and those exceptional others whose sins had been fully purged. These blessed few would return instantly to humankind’s natural homeland following the abnormal, even harrowing, exile of earthly life. But everyone knew, or was expected to know, that the rest would suffer in Hell or, far more likely, undergo a purgatorial condition of some kind.⁴⁴

While depictions and definitions of hell and purgatory vary in different texts and traditions, it was generally agreed that in every version, human souls would be tortured in some way. The actual torments are numerous, often creatively personalised according to the sin of the tormented, but common torments include fire, frost, foul stench, darkness, and disease. Souls are tortured by demons with a variety of tools and a range of different animals, most frequently snakes and sometimes also including dogs.

We can find infernal dogs in a wide range of sources, from the two hounds tormenting the rich man in the Golden Munich Psalter image discussed above, to numerous references to dogs throughout Dante’s *Divine Comedy* including black dogs pursuing and tormenting sinners, demons in the form of dogs, and both demons and sinners described with canine metaphors.⁴⁵ In Old Norse-Icelandic literature, we have already observed, for instance, the witch Busla’s threat in the legendary *Bósa saga* that dogs will gnaw King Hringr’s soul in hel(l). In the

⁴³ Christian Carlsen, *Visions of the Afterlife in Old Norse Literature* (Novus Forlag, 2015), p. 20.

⁴⁴ Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and Salvation in Old Norse Literature* (Brewer, 2018), p. 1.

⁴⁵ See Alberto Manguel, ‘Dante’s Dog’, *PN Review*, 36.4 (2010), pp. 14–18 and 84.

hagiographical account of St Agatha, it is further said that the saint's tormentor will experience 'eilifan sárleik ok [...] elldligar kvalar ok endalaust frost, þar sem eitormar munu bita ok slita med helvitis hundum' ('eternal pain and fiery torments and endless frost, where poisonous snakes will bite and tear him apart with hellish dogs').⁴⁶ In the *Flateyjarbók* version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the eponymous king predicts a similar fate for his enemy: 'munu þa sidan haduligir höggormar ok heluitzkir hundar þat eru daligir dioflar draga ydr ok drekkia j diup heluitis ok bæiskliga bita særa ok slita salir ydrar' ('then scornful striking serpents and infernal hounds that are evil demons shall drag you and submerge you in the depths of hell and bitterly bite, wound, and tear your souls').⁴⁷ Tormenting hounds continue to feature heavily in the infernal landscape of several variants of the late-medieval or early modern Norwegian ballad *Draumkvedet*.⁴⁸

Many of these descriptions of hell are likely influenced by the *visio* genre, visions of the afterlife describing men or women, often saints, being led on journeys down to hell and/or up to heaven. Eileen Gardiner in 1993 was able to identify at least 60 distinct medieval visions, translated into nearly every medieval European language and stretching from the third century to well beyond the Middle Ages.⁴⁹ As Carolyne Larrington notes, *visiones* can be used to trace the evolution of infernal imagery as they were 'instrumental in forming early medieval ideas about the afterlife.'⁵⁰ There are six known visions extant in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus

⁴⁶ *HeilSögur*, I, p. 9.

⁴⁷ *Flateyjarbók*, pp. 323–24.

⁴⁸ Michael Barnes, *Draumkvæde: An Edition and Study* (Oslo Universitetsforlaget, 1974).

⁴⁹ Eileen Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook* (Garland, 1993), p. xv. On medieval visions and their modern resonances, see Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁵⁰ Carolyne Larrington, 'Leizla Rannveigar: Gender and Politics in the Otherworld Vision', *Medium Ævum*, 64.2 (1995), pp. 232–49 (p. 240).

called *leizlar*, each providing a unique insight into Christian Norse conceptions of the afterlife.⁵¹

One of these, *Duggals leizla*, is extant in four Icelandic vellum manuscripts, all from around the fifteenth century, as well as three eighteenth-century paper manuscripts.⁵² The prologue of the *leizla*, copied in two manuscripts, attributes the translation of the text to ‘Hakon konungr’. If taken at face value, this would date the original translation from Latin to either before 1263 (if Hákon the Old) or before 1319 (if Hákon Magnússon), making it one of the earliest vernacular translations of the vision.⁵³ *Duggals leizla* is a largely straightforward translation of the Latin *Visio Tnugdali*, telling the story of a proud Irish knight Duggal (alternatively Tnugdalus, Tondal or Tundale) who falls unconscious and is made to experience some of the torments of hell and riches of heaven.⁵⁴

One of the torments experienced by the poor soul, a torment ‘er yfer geingur allar þær er þu meiger augum sia e(d)a hugleida’ (‘which is above all those that you can see with eyes or imagine’) is in a large house that looks like an oven.⁵⁵ Standing outside the house, the angel commands Duggal to go inside, saying, ‘þar eru bit hundar ok bida þin’ (‘there are biting dogs that await you’).⁵⁶ It is unclear if ‘bit hundar’ (written elsewhere as a single word), ‘biting dogs’, is being used metaphorically here, as the actual torment involves a number of nondescript demons torturing the soul with cruel words, tools and fire. The Latin text appears

⁵¹ Eldar Heide, ‘The Term *leizla* in Old Norse Vision Literature – Contrasting Imported and Indigenous Genres?’, *Scripta Islandica*, 67 (2016), pp. 37–63 (pp. 38–39). The six Old Norse visions are *Páls leizla* (a translation of the Latin *Visio Pauli*), *Drythelms leizla* (*Visio Drythelmi*), *Duggals leizla* (*Visio Tnugdali*), *Gundelinus leizla* (*Visio Gunthelmi*), *Furseus leizla* (*Vita Prima Fursei*), and *Rannveigar leizla* (possibly native to Iceland).

⁵² *Duggals Leiðsla*, ed. by Peter Cahill (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1983), p. ix.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. xlix–l. Cahill judges the former date to be more likely.

⁵⁴ An edition of a thirteenth-century prose Latin text (Cod. Vatic. 5977. fol. 155 Bll.) is found in *Visio Tnugdali: Lateinisch und Altdeutsch*, ed. by Albrecht Wagner (Andreas Deichert, 1882), pp. 1–56.

⁵⁵ *Duggals Leiðsla*, p. 49. Unless otherwise specified, quotations from *Duggals Leiðsla* will use the version in Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 624 4to.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

similarly unclear.⁵⁷ This could be an inconsistency in the Latin text, to which its author was somewhat prone, translated unchallenged into the Old Norse-Icelandic.⁵⁸ However, the use of rabid dogs to represent the cruelty of humans is not uncommon, particularly in Christian sources. Indeed, an Italian translation of the *Visio* uses the simile ‘come cani arrabbiati’ (‘like angry dogs’) to refer to demons three times over the course of the text (and once more literally).⁵⁹ If metaphorical, it is certainly significant that one of the worst tortures imaginable in hell is described as akin to the biting of dogs.

Another passage in *Duggals leizla* depicts dogs in a more clearly literal sense. Earlier in the text, Duggal is made to enter the belly of a terrifying beast where

polde sw enn auma sæl. hunda bit ok wargá slit. barnijngar ok biarnar bit ok leona ok fleiri annara dyra. orma haugg ok eitir naudror ok margra annara grimligra ok ogurligra dyra.⁶⁰

the miserable soul suffered bite of dogs and tearing of wolves, thrashing and bite of bears and lions, and many other animals, strike of snakes and poison of adders, and many other fearful and terrible animals.

This list, a straightforward translation from the Latin source, is quite a good summary of the animals that appear in medieval depictions of hell and is replicated almost exactly in most translations of the *Visio*, as demonstrated in the table below.

	Dogs	Wolves	Bears	Lions	Serpents /Dragons	Toads
Old Norse-Icelandic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Latin ⁶¹	✓		✓	✓	✓	

⁵⁷ *Visio Tnugdali*, p. 24. ‘quia canes rabidi tuum intus expectant adventum’ (‘because rabid dogs are awaiting your arrival inside’).

⁵⁸ Cahill notes that the Latin author ‘does not always have a completely sure hold on his own creation’ (*Duggals Leiðsla*, p. lxxiii).

⁵⁹ *Visione di Tugdalo*, ed. by Francesco Corazzini (Gaetano Romagnoli, 1872), pp. 30, 31, 34, and 44.

⁶⁰ *Duggals Leiðsla*, pp. 36–37.

⁶¹ *Visio Tnugdali*, p. 18.

Old Swedish ⁶²	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Middle High German ⁶³	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Old French ⁶⁴	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Anglo-Norman ⁶⁵	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Old Irish ⁶⁶	✓			✓	✓	
Old Spanish ⁶⁷	✓					
Old Catalan ⁶⁸	✓		✓	✓		
(Tuscan) Italian ⁶⁹	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Middle English ⁷⁰	✓				✓	

Table 1: List of animals in different translations of the *Vision of Tnugdalus*

The list of animals is fairly consistent in all the above texts, with bears, lions, and serpents mentioned in most. The Old Swedish text alone adds toads to its list. Even more significantly, only the Old Norse-Icelandic and German texts include wolves in this infernal menagerie, suggesting that the *warga* might have been a rare interpolation by the Old Norse-Icelandic translator, possibly as an animal central to medieval Scandinavian depictions of death.⁷¹ Every

⁶² *Tundalus och Hans Syn*, in *Skifter till läsning för klosterfolk efter gamla handskrifter utgifna*, ed. by Fredrik August Dahlgren (Norstedts, 1875), pp. 213–52 (p. 223).

⁶³ *Tondalus der Ritter: Die von J. und C. Hist gedruckte Fassung*, ed. by Nigel Palmer (Fink, 1980), p. 55.

⁶⁴ *La Vision de Tondale (Tnugdäl): Textes français, anglo-normand et irlandais*, ed. by V.-H. Friedel and Kuno Meyer (Librairie Honoré Champion, 1907), p. 16.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶⁷ *Historia del virtuoso cavellero don Túngano (Toledo 1526)*, ed. by J. K. Walsh and B. Bussell Thompson (Clemente, 1985), p. 15.

⁶⁸ G. Baist, 'Eine catalanische Version der Visio Tundali', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 4 (1880), pp. 318–29 (p. 323).

⁶⁹ *Visione di Tugdalo*, p. 31.

⁷⁰ *The Vision of Tundale, ed. from B. L. MS Cotton Caligula A II*, ed. by Rodney Mearns (Universitätsverlag Winter, 1985), p. 99.

⁷¹ It is, however, difficult to draw any definite conclusions without a comprehensive examination of the different Latin redactions from which the Old Norse-Icelandic might have been translated, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

single text nevertheless includes hounds. In fact, in ‘el vientre de aquella mala bestia’ (‘the belly of that evil beast’), the Spanish text solely mentions ‘los diablos assí como canes ravidos’ (‘the demons like rabid dogs’), depicting the demons as dogs and omitting all other animals.⁷² A similar list of animals is contained in the Old Norse-Icelandic *Páls leizla*, a translation of the Latin *Visio Pauli* (*Vision of Paul*):

Peir menn voru brendir á báli ok sindranda grjóti ok aumliga veldir ok barðir með sleggjum.
En suma rifu vargar ok hundar í sundr. En suma hjoggu ormar ok nǫðrur ok svá illa kvaldar.⁷³

Those men were burned in a fire and on sparking stone and wretchedly boiled and beaten with sledgehammers. And wolves and hounds tore some apart. And snakes and adders struck some and thus tortured them badly.

These lines are unique to the Old Norse-Icelandic vision, not appearing in any of the extant Latin texts in the *Visio Pauli* tradition.⁷⁴ Dario Bullitta has thus argued that the lines were drawn from *Duggals leizla*, as the two extant texts of *Páls leizla* are copied in their respective manuscripts right next to *Duggals leizla*, the former following the latter in AM 681 c 4to and preceding it in AM 624 4to.⁷⁵

If *Páls leizla* did borrow from *Duggals leizla*, however, it did so thoughtfully and selectively. Though dogs are included in Paul’s vision of hell, it is important to also note which animals are excluded. *Duggals leizla* lists among its tormentors hounds, wolves, bears, lions, and snakes. From this list, *Páls leizla* only adopts hounds, wolves, and snakes (which includes adders). Bears and lions do not make the cut. So why this choice of animals? The most logical reason is that specific animals were chosen that would make sense in a local Scandinavian context. That would explain why lions, which are of course not native to Iceland or Scandinavia

⁷² *Historia del virtuoso cavellero*, p. 15.

⁷³ *Páls Leizla: The Vision of St Paul*, ed. and trans. by Dario Bullitta (Viking Society for Northern Research, 2017), p. 16. *Páls leizla* is contained in two extant manuscripts, the fifteenth-century AM 681 c 4to and the sixteenth-century AM 624 4to.

⁷⁴ As comprehensively collated by Lenka Jiroušková in *Die Visio Pauli: Wege und Wandlungen einer orientalischen Apokryphe im lateinischen Mittelalter unter Einschluss der alttschechischen und deutschsprachigen Textzeugen* (Brill, 2006).

⁷⁵ *Páls leizla*, pp. xxiv–xxvi.

and did not feature in early Norse myths, were excluded from this picture. Although lions did begin appearing in late medieval Icelandic texts either from chivalric romances or the bestiary tradition, they never became associated with the afterlife in this region.⁷⁶ Bears are a little more complicated, playing an important role in medieval Scandinavian trade and folklore.⁷⁷ While bear phalanges have been found in select Scandinavian graves from the Iron and Viking Ages, these have been linked to the use of bear skins as symbols of wealth or warrior status, and bears appear nowhere in Old Norse-Icelandic literature in connection to the afterlife.⁷⁸ On the other hand, dogs, wolves, and serpents are closely tied to death and the afterlife, as exemplified in a text like *Völuspá* with the wolf Fenrir, the serpents Níðhöggr and Jörmungandr, and the hound Garmr discussed in chapter 2.

It is extremely significant that the dog is the one animal consistently appearing in every single translation of the *Visio Tnugdali* and sources inspired by it. The presence of dogs in *Duggals leizla* shows clear continuity from the Latin to vernacular translations and beyond. In an Old Norse-Icelandic context, Christian Carlsen suggests that the ‘subdued’ role of the *Duggals leizla* translator

suggests that native audiences, at the time these translations were produced, did not require supporting structures to understand and accept the stories told. This may indicate familiarity with the genre itself previous to the earliest surviving text witnesses, or familiarity with the

⁷⁶ Bourns, ‘Between Nature and Culture’, pp. 181–84. See also Kalinke, ‘The Cowherd and the Saint’. On the influences of a unique lion *fylgja* in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, see also William Friesen, ‘Family Resemblances: Textual Sources of Animal *Fylgjur* in Icelandic Saga’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 87.2 (2015), pp. 255–80 (pp. 261–62).

⁷⁷ See Aleksander Pluskowski, ‘Harnessing the Hunger: Religious Appropriations of Animal Predation in Early Medieval Scandinavia’, in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives*, ed. by Andrén, Jennbert, and Raudvere, pp. 119–23; and Gräslund, ‘Wolves, Serpents, and Birds’.

⁷⁸ See Bo Petré, ‘Björnfallen i begravningsritualen – statusobjekt speglade regional skinnhandel?’, *Fornvännen*, 75 (1980), pp. 5–14; and Tuija Kirkinen, ‘“Burning Pelts” – Brown Bear Skins in the Iron Age and Early Medieval (1–1300 AD) Burials in South-Eastern Fennoscandia’, *Estonian Journal of Archaeology*, 21.1 (2017), pp. 3–29. Bears did have a special place in the Sámi worldview—see, for example, Tiina Äikäs, Anna-Kaisa Puputti, Milton Núñez, Jouni Aspi, and Jari Okkonen, ‘Sacred and Profane Livelihood: Animal Bones from Sieidi Sites in Northern Finland’, *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 42.2 (2009), pp. 109–22 (p. 119); Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, pp. 111–12; and Tolley, ‘*Hrólfs saga kraka* and Sámi Bear Rites’.

larger motif of the journey to the world of the dead through other narrative traditions, including folklore and mythical material.’⁷⁹

Texts like *Duggals leizla* and their hellish motifs must therefore be considered within the context of a greater European scholarly community containing a multitude of texts drawing on and influencing each other. At the same time, differences in the list of animals above indicate that individual authors adapted their texts and translations according to local context as well, constructing complex imagined figures of animals born out of multiple different real experiences. Such a multifaceted canine construct, at once real and imagined, local and foreign, becomes even more significant in the case of hagiographies.

Translated Hagiographies

Martin

The tradition of dogs licking wounds found in the Lazarus parable recurs in hagiography as well, such as in the story of St Roch who, when suffering from the plague, was cared for by a dog who brought him bread and licked his wounds.⁸⁰ In the early-sixteenth-century Reykjahólabók version of the life of St Roch, the dog doesn’t lick the saint’s wounds, but does provide comfort as ‘leggr hann nidr braudit og skridr in j hreyset og liggr þar kyr. þangat til ath Rochus klappade honum’ (‘he sets the bread down and crawls into the cave and lies there quietly until Roch pets him’).⁸¹ Another saint closely associated with dogs is a dog himself, Guinefort, the folk saint of Lyon. In a tale with counterparts around the world, Guinefort was said to be a greyhound who saved a child from a snake but was then killed by the child’s father who mistakenly thought the dog had attacked his child. From the thirteenth century, the

⁷⁹ Carlsen, *Visions of the Afterlife*, p. 39.

⁸⁰ See Sophie Oosterwijk, ‘From Biblical Beast to Faithful Friend: A Short Note on the Iconography of Footrests on Tomb Monuments’, in *Our Dogs, Our Selves*, ed. by Gelfand, pp. 243–60 (p. 245).

⁸¹ *Rokúss saga*, in *Reykjahólabók: Íslandske Helgenlegender*, ed. by Agnete Loth, 2 vols (Munksgaard, 1969–70), I, pp. 133–51 (p. 142).

greyhound became venerated locally as a martyred saint, despite attempts to suppress it by representatives of the Church, including the preacher Stephen of Bourbon.⁸² Guinefort is a good example of a discrepancy between scripture, hagiography, and personal belief and reception of dogs. Most of the sources discussed above do refer to official scriptural and clerical writings and may not have much changed people's personal opinions about their canine companions, in the Norse world or in the rest of Europe. Different people responded to different parts of theological teaching in different ways. Alexa Sand, for instance, has pointed out that lapdogs were even inserted into Biblical stories by artists of the c. 1250 Morgan Old Testament Picture Book.⁸³ Despite official church teachings, it is clear that individuals continued to maintain very close connections with their canine companions.

It is possible, in fact, that individuals' personal attachment to their dogs was one factor that drove their vilification by higher authorities. Sophia Menache has suggested that

historically, the hostility to dogs resulted, rather, from the clergy's apprehension that human attachment to dogs — which bestows a sense of complete mastery and, in consequence, may bring about higher self-esteem — had detrimental consequences for the submission of the faithful to God. No less important, the emotional link between person and dog might weaken the former's dependence on the clergy, God's earthly representatives.⁸⁴

The suggestion that dogs threatened peoples' dependence on the clergy might be behind the hagiographic trope that Dominic Alexander has named 'the hermit and the hunter', involving a saint saving an innocent animal from a hunter and his vicious hounds.⁸⁵ One of the most

⁸² Dominic Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages* (Boydell, 2008), p. 179. Also see Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century*, trans. by Martin Thom (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁸³ Alexa Sand, 'And Your Little Dog, Too: Michael's Lapdog and the Romance of the Old Testament', in *Our Dogs, Our Selves*, ed. by Gelfand, pp. 165–86.

⁸⁴ Menache, 'Dogs: God's Worst Enemies?', p. 25.

⁸⁵ Alexander, *Saints and Animals*, pp. 113–31.

popular examples of this trope was St Martin of Tours saving a hare from a pack of hunting dogs, a scene represented on a beautiful c. 1440 stained-glass window in York.⁸⁶

This scene has been translated into multiple recensions of the Old Norse *Martinus saga byskups*, the first recension relating that

møte Martinus veiðemonnom of dag. Hundar helto hera a viðom velle, oc var heranom at comet, at hann mondi tekinn verða, oc dvalþe hann dauþann i vecvingom. Martinus sa ærmo a heranom, þviat hann var harmvitegr, oc bauþ hann hundom at standa oc lata hera braút fara. Hundar namo stað þegar, sem þeir være bunner eða en heldr iarþfaster. En here forþapesc.⁸⁷

Martin met some hunters one day. Hounds were chasing a hare on wide fields, and the hare was about to be taken, but it delayed death [by jumping] to the side. Martin took pity upon the hare, because he was compassionate, and he ordered the hounds to stand still and let the hare leave. The hounds immediately stopped as if they were bound or rather fixed in the earth. And the hare escaped.

Alexander suggests that saints like Martin protecting wild animals from aristocratic hunters ‘would place the church symbolically in a mediating position between commoners of various ranks and secular lords’.⁸⁸ Grønlie does indeed highlight that this particular hagiography ‘features several such dramatic encounters between the saint and the secular authorities’, a good example of early ascetic saints who ‘deny and oppose the authority of secular rulers’.⁸⁹ Significantly, while the wild animal in these stories varies widely across different saints’ lives, from hares to boars, does to stags, and even a saint himself, it is always dogs they must be rescued from.⁹⁰ The dog, as the animal closest to humans, is used to represent the cruelty of the aristocracy and of humanity itself that stands against both innocent wild animals and

⁸⁶ Church paintings of St Martin in Denmark and Sweden focus instead on the saint sharing his cloak with a beggar.

⁸⁷ *HeilSögur*, I, p. 568. This version is preserved in the c. 1225–50 manuscript AM 645 4to. The second presented by Unger is in AM 235 fol. (c. 1400) and the third in Stock. Perg. fol. no. 2 (c. 1425–45). Kirsten Wolf lists a fourth recension not transcribed by Unger (*The Legends of the Saints in Old Norse-Icelandic Prose* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 230).

⁸⁸ Alexander, *Saints and Animals*, p. 128.

⁸⁹ Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, pp. 87–88.

⁹⁰ The saint chased by dogs is John Chrysostom, the so-called ‘Hairy Anchorite’ (*Jóhannes saga gullmanns*: The Icelandic Legend of the Hairy Anchorite’, ed. and trans. by Marianne Kalinke, in *Beatus Vir: Studies in Early English and Norse Manuscripts in Memory of Phillip Pulsiano*, ed. by A. N. Doane and Kirsten Wolf (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp. 175–228 (pp. 214–16).

‘armvitugir’ (‘compassionate’) saints. In this example and others, it is clear that saints have great authority over hounds, all three recensions of the saga describing the dogs immediately halting as if they were fixed to the earth, the later second recension stressing that they did so ‘at hinu fysta ordi hans’ (‘at his first word’), as soon as he had spoken.⁹¹ Grønlie further notes that the second recension uses the simile ‘sva sem þeir veri grafnir nidr’ (‘as if they were dug down’) to describe the dogs’ reaction, an expression ‘most often used of corpses in the Christian laws’, giving the encounter between saint and dog a more supernatural (if still holy) colouring.⁹²

Similar themes are picked up in an episode later in the saga, this time concerning some disciples of Martin who

foro of bœ næcvern of dag, oc hliop at þeim hundr olmr oc go. Þa mælte einn þeira: “I nafne Martini byð ec þer at þegia!” Þa ðagna(ðe hundr), sva sem tunga være scoren or hœfði honom.⁹³

were walking on a certain farm one day, when a savage dog jumped at them and barked. Then one of them said, “In the name of Martin, I order you to be silent!” Then the hound became silent, as if its tongue was cut from its head.

The holiness of Martin is once again invoked, this time by others, to counter a dog, silencing it in a manner evoking rather violent vocabulary.⁹⁴ As far as miracles go, this one appears to be rather mundane, merely stopping an aggressive dog from barking.⁹⁵ Roughton does point out that the detail about the disciples walking by a farm is an addition to the Icelandic translation, making it more like a regular domestic animal, ‘olmr’ (‘savage’) though it may be.⁹⁶ The

⁹¹ *HeilSögur*, I, p. 591.

⁹² Ibid. Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, pp. 105–06.

⁹³ *HeilSögur*, I, p. 570.

⁹⁴ Cutting out someone’s tongue is a not uncommon form of violent torture. See, for instance, *Páls leizla* (p. 10) and *Óláfs saga helga* (p. 105); the *Grágás* law-codes (I, p. 147) describe it as a ‘meire sár’ (‘major wound’).

⁹⁵ Joanna Skórzewska reads this as an example of ‘the popular motif of the devil disguised as a dog’ (*Constructing a Cult: The Life and Veneration of Guðmundr Arason (1161-1237) in the Icelandic Written Sources* (Brill, 2011), p. 91). Although this is a common motif in Old Norse hagiographies, as will be demonstrated below, there is nothing in this text to explicitly suggest such a reading.

⁹⁶ Philip Roughton, ‘AM 645 4to and AM 652/630 4to: Study and Translation of Two Thirteenth-Century Icelandic Collections of Apostles’ and Saints’ Lives’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Colorado, 2002), p. 413.

implication, however, is that there is something not just unpleasant but actually unholy about the barking of dogs, an implication that is reinforced by another hagiography, *Matheus saga postola*, which describes paradise as a place where ‘þær er eigi hunda gauþ ne ulfa þytr, ne grunion enna oorgo dyra; þar er aller hluter bliþer oc aller cyrrer oc hogværer’ (‘there is neither barking of dogs nor howling of wolves, nor the bellowing of the fierce animal (i.e. the lion); there all things are gentle and everything peaceful and calm’).⁹⁷ The barking of dogs is thus described here as the antithesis of gentleness, peace, and calm, a characteristic innate to dogs but one that has no place in the holiest of spaces and therefore one that holy men on earth have the power to cut off.

Peter

Dogs are set against saints in a similar fashion in the hagiography of the Apostle Peter, translated into Old Norse-Icelandic as *Pétrs saga postola*. Wolf identifies two main recensions of the saga, the second of which produced three further sub-recensions, plus another text combining the lives of saints Peter and Paul.⁹⁸ In most recensions, Peter’s encounters with dogs are part of his dispute with an anti-Christian sorcerer, Simon magus or Simon hinn illa (‘Simon the Evil’), described by Roughton as ‘one of the most popular legends of the middle ages’ and by Nicholas Meylan as ‘Christianity’s archetypal magician’.⁹⁹ Simon uses deceitful magic to feign divine power, but is consistently countered by Peter through real miracles. At one point in the saga, the sorcerer is so humiliated by Peter that, in the second recension according to Unger,

⁹⁷ *PostSögur*, p. 816.

⁹⁸ Wolf, *Legends of the Saints*, pp. 309–18.

⁹⁹ Roughton, ‘Study and Translation’, p. 63. Nicholas Meylan, ‘Magic and Discourses of Magic in the Old Norse Sagas of the Apostles’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 7 (2011), pp. 107–24 (p. 109).

tok hann hund mikinn ok batt i dyrum fyrir Petro, at hundrinn biti hann. En Petrus leysti hundinn, er hann kom at honum, en hundrinn lagði þegar eptir Simoni ok villdi bita hann ok bra honum undir sik.¹⁰⁰

he took a large dog and bound it before Peter's door, so that the dog would bite him. But Peter loosed the dog when he came to it, and the dog immediately leapt at Simon and wished to bite him and tear him under itself.

Simon's choice of animal is an unsurprising one, the dog being domesticated enough to be handled by Simon in the first place but with the animal instincts to attack when threatened, as well as seemingly being the natural enemy of holy men. Unger's first recension is nearly identical to this one, merely adding the classic adjective 'olmr' ('savage') to its description of the dangerous dog.¹⁰¹ Yet this dog does not actually attack Peter. It is possible that like Selsnautr of the legendary *Hálfðanar saga* who was relieved of a stick in its jaw, the dog's decision is in gratitude for the saint releasing him. One abridged variant of the text in AM 235 fol. (Unger's recension 3, c. 1400) does, however, say that Simon is the one to loose the dog upon Peter's approach, yet the dog nevertheless immediately turns around to attack the sorcerer.¹⁰² The implication therefore seems to be that it is the Apostle's holiness that repels the dog's attack. There are hints here that although dogs are consistently violent creatures in this genre, their violence can be employed not just against saints but also sometimes on their behalf, an aspect that will be clearer later in this chapter. Peter's power, though, actually minimises the dog's violence here for, on seeing the dog attack Simon,

Petrus rann eptir honum ok kallaði a hundinn ok mællti: "Ek byð þer i nafni drottins Jesu Kristz, at þu bitir eigi horund hans." Þa tok hundrinn at rífa af honum klæði oll, en siðan greip hann sialfan hann ok dro ok kastaði honum niðr fyrir borgarvegg.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *PostSögur*, p. 182. Unger bases this edition on AM 630 4to (c. 1650–1700), with emendations from AM 650a 4to and variants from AM 655 4to XV.

¹⁰¹ *PostSögur*, p. 87. Unger's edition of this recension is based on AM 631 4to (c. 1700–25), with variants from six other manuscripts with dates ranging from c. 1350–1500. On the possible sources for this episode, see Roughton, 'Study and Translation', pp. 153–54.

¹⁰² *PostSögur*, pp. 181–82.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Peter ran after it and called to the dog and said: “I order you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to not bite his flesh.” Then the dog began to tear all his clothes, and then gripped him and dragged him and cast him down before the city wall.

There is a clear repetition here of the themes from *Martinus saga*. In both texts, a saint’s compassion saves someone from a dog and the name of a holy figure is invoked to counteract the animal’s violent instincts. In both cases, it is remarkable that the dogs understand the saints’ words, especially in *Pétrs saga* where the outcome is even more complex than simply halting or silencing a dog. The dog’s restraint in attacking Simon but not tearing his flesh is thus a testament to the power of Peter and the name of Christ.

This is not the end of Simon, who soon returns to the text with more attempts to trick the people into believing in his sorcery. A real dog having failed him, he now resorts to creating magical dogs of his own. It is said that he ‘gerði orm or eiri, þann er hrørdiz, ok hunda or steini, þa er go, ok likneski or malmi, þau er hlogu ok hrørduz, en hann syndiz sialfr fliuga i lopti i elldz liki’ (‘made a serpent that moved from bronze, and dogs that barked from stones, and idols that laughed and moved from metal, and he appeared to fly in the air himself in the form of fire’).¹⁰⁴ Peter, however, claims that the sorcerous dogs and Simon’s other creations are ‘vel[ar] diofuls’ (‘tricks of the devil’), contrasting them against his own miracles.¹⁰⁵ With these and other incidents, Simon gets progressively more enraged until finally, upon being challenged in front of the emperor Nero, he declares,

“Fari fram hundar olmir ok svelgi Petrum i augliti konungs.” Þa synduz þar hundar miklir ok gerðu for at Petro. En Petrus retti hendr sinar a moti þeim ok syndi þeim brauð þat, er hann hafði blezat, ok hurfu hundamir allir þegar, er þeir sa brauðit. Þa mællti Petrus við Neronem konung: “Nu synda ek þer i verki þat helldr en i orði, at ek vissá, hvat Simon hugði, þviat sa er het at senda engla a moti mer, nu syndi hann þat, at hann hefir eigi guðliga engla, helldr hundliga.”¹⁰⁶

“Let savage dogs come forth and swallow Peter in the sight of the emperor.” Then great dogs appeared there and made their way to Peter. But Peter extended his hands towards them and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 188.

showed them the bread that he had blessed, and the dogs all disappeared immediately when they saw the bread. Then Peter said to the emperor Nero: “Now I have shown you in works rather than in words that I knew what Simon was thinking, because the one who promised to send angels against me has now shown that he does not have god-like but rather dog-like angels.”

It is significant that Simon, who is able to fashion all sorts of animals and other beings with his magic, once again chooses dogs specifically, not perhaps the fiercest of animals but among the most demonic in these types of texts. In fact, Peter’s clever wordplay explicitly juxtaposes ‘guðliga’ (‘god-like’) and ‘hundliga’ (‘dog-like’), implying that dogs are the beings furthest from God. Although these dogs aren’t true flesh-and-blood, incorporeal enough to disappear into thin air, the effect of the saint’s holiness on them is the same and they are immediately repelled. Throughout this saga, then, dogs are consistently the animal of choice for a pagan magician, ineffective though they may be against holy men. In other hagiographies, however, dogs are the animals of choice for actual demons, as in *Andreas saga postola*.

Andrew

Peter’s claim that Simon’s sorcerous dogs are ‘tricks of the devil’ is playing upon a very common medieval motif of the devil and his demons appearing in the form of hounds.¹⁰⁷ This motif is much more explicit in the life of the Apostle Andrew, translated into Old Norse-Icelandic in several recensions.¹⁰⁸ Three of these recensions relate the plight of a certain town where seven demons were occupying graves along a street, throwing stones at travellers and killing many of them.¹⁰⁹ In their desperation, the people turn to Andrew, who promises to help

¹⁰⁷ See, for instance, Walter Gibson, ‘Metaphorical Dogs in the Later Middle Ages: The Dogs of God and the Hounds of Hell’, in *Our Dogs, Our Selves*, ed. by Gelfand, pp. 363–86 on the Later Middle Ages; and Barbara Allen Woods, *The Devil in Dog Form: A Partial Type-Index of Devil Legends* (University of California Press, 1959) on wider folklore.

¹⁰⁸ Wolf has identified four Old Norse recensions of the saga translated from Latin, plus one translated from Low German and one miracle story (*Legends of the Saints*, pp. 29–35).

¹⁰⁹ It is very common in folklore to find demonic ‘black dogs’ on or along the side of roads—see, for instance, Theo Brown, ‘The Black Dog’, *Folklore*, 69.3 (1958), pp. 175–92 (p. 182).

them if they accept the Christian faith, then ‘bauð hann dioflunum at standa i augliti allz lyðs. Þa synduz fiandr i hunda likium’ (‘he commanded the demons to stand in the sight of all the people. Then the fiends appeared in the form of dogs’).¹¹⁰ The second and third recensions are very similar, the second describing the demons appearing ‘i liking storra hunda’ (‘in the form of large dogs’) and the third ‘in hunda æseonum’ (‘with the appearance of dogs’).¹¹¹ The inclusion of the terms ‘líki’, ‘líking’ and ‘ásjona’ implies that these are temporary forms for the demons, and that they choose to appear as dogs. Indeed, the fact that they are said to be throwing stones at the beginning of this episode suggests that it is only later that they assume their canine forms. Dogs, then, appear to be the customary form for demons when on earth.

True to his word, Andrew banishes these demons to the desert, causing them to disappear as they ‘yldu’ (‘howled’) in the first recension and ‘með mikilli ylingu ok grenian’ (‘with great howling and screaming’) in the second, especially appropriate sounds for dogs and demons.¹¹² Unfortunately, these demons do reappear to cause more harm. On his arrival at another town, Andrew finds parents grieving over the corpse of their young son and it is explained to him that the boy ‘hafði verit staddr i husi nokkuru einnsaman, ok hofðu siðan hundar siau olmir komit at honum ok bitit til bana.’ (‘had been in a certain house alone and then seven savage dogs had come at him and bitten him to death.’)¹¹³ With seven dogs killing a young child alone at home, this attack is even more violent than the last. The second recension adds yet more detail, saying that the dogs ‘rifu hann i sundr og bitu til bana, og do hann af

¹¹⁰ *PostSögur*, p. 324. Unger bases this edition on AM 630 4to (c. 1650–1700) with variants from AM 239 fol. (c. 1350–1400). There is a similar episode in the translated *riddarasaga*, *Beyvers saga*, where a demon expelled from a body by a bishop takes the form of a dog (*Beyvers saga: with the Text of the Anglo-Normal Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. by Christopher Sanders (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2001), p. 347).

¹¹¹ *PostSögur*, pp. 361 and 394. Unger’s second recension is based on AM 646 4to (c. 1350–75) and AM 647 4to (c. 1400–1500), and his third on AM 628 4to (1711–12).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 324 and 361.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

þessum harmkvælum' ('tore him apart and bit him to death, and he died of these torments').¹¹⁴

Hearing this tale, Andrew realises the dogs must be the same demons he earlier banished and is caused great sorrow. He prays to God for assistance and resurrects the child.

The first miracle is, as Roughton puts it, a 'rather pedestrian' one 'comprised only of the sensational violence (and appearance, when they appear as dogs) of the demons, and the threat of continued violence if the people do not accept the faith of Christ.'¹¹⁵ The violence of the demon-dogs is indeed sensational, with no real motivation or purpose other than giving Andrew the opportunity to prove his holiness and convert the people. The second appearance of the dogs curiously undermines that holiness, making Andrew's first miracle rather ineffective.¹¹⁶ The saint doesn't even encounter the demonic dogs himself this second time, but is given further opportunity for humility and the even greater miracle of resurrection. The demons thus play a *deus ex machina* (or rather a *diabolus ex machina*) role in this text, appearing out of nowhere with unclear motivations simply to help the text make a certain point about Andrew. And dogs conveniently allow the demons to take physical forms that Andrew can recognise in both incidents.

The corporeality of these demonic forms is especially interesting, falling into a much-debated issue in medieval theology. Demons, Victoria Burns-Price writes, were traditionally 'considered to be fallen angels which shared an aerial, incorporeal nature with their divine

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 371. This level of detail is comparable to one Latin source, Gregory of Tours' *Liber de miraculis s. Andreae apostoli* ('Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Liber de Miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli', ed. by Maximilien Bonnet, in *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Miracula et Opera Minora*, ed. by Bruno Krusch (Hahn, 1885, repr. 1969), pp. 821–46 (p. 831)).

¹¹⁵ Roughton, 'Study and Translation', p. 208.

¹¹⁶ Interestingly, while the narrative of the Latin source (and the third Old Norse recension) places both demonic dog incidents together, the first two Old Norse recensions separate them by 8–11 chapters. Perhaps this choice was to ensure that Andrew's first miracle has some power to it, banishing the demons for a while before they return.

counterparts. They were able to take on the appearance of form but never had true bodies.’¹¹⁷ Allowing the demons to inflict physical violence upon humans in their canine forms could therefore potentially be considered theologically problematic, which might also be a factor explaining the off-stage nature of the second incident. It might be argued that the limitrophic nature of dogs, always already on the borders between the natural and supernatural, life and death, allows their forms to more easily cross between the two worlds, although this text does not give any indication of being particularly concerned with this theological debate. In any case, when faced with a choice about what animal or other form to bestow the demons, it is dogs that are selected as the natural adversaries of saints.

Dunstan

Demonic hounds make an appearance in the story of another bishop, St Dunstan, originally Abbot of Glastonbury. In the fourteenth century, the Icelandic monk Árni Lárentíusson compiled an Old Norse-Icelandic life of St Dunstan that is extant in a single manuscript, AM 180b fol. (c. 1500), which has a much later paper copy, NKS 267 fol.¹¹⁸ Once, as a child at Glastonbury, Dunstan falls ill and begins walking towards the monastery in his delirium. Unfortunately, the twenty lines preceding this episode are missing from the manuscript but it is said that someone, presumably the devil, sends

mikinn flokk helvískra anda ok kumpana í hunda líki. Sem þeir sjá hvar þeirra hinn mesti óvin ferr, hlaupa þeir allir at hónum í senn með gapanda gini ok greypiligri gnauð, grimmari en leonis eðr tigris, ætlandi at þegar at grípa hann kvikan ok slíta, ok svá með sér heim til helvítis hafa. Enn guðlig myskunn skipar því á annan veg; því at þegar er Dunstanus sér á djöfla flokk, er sik hafði hulit ok skreytt með sjónhverfiligum ok hunda yfir-brögðum, kenna þeir mikinn hita hans heilagleiks, ok svipazt hann at þeim. Ok þó óvitugr hvat um leið, sve[i]flar hann fram fyrir sik

¹¹⁷ Victoria Burns-Price, ‘The Hybridity of Demons: Perceptions of Demons in Medieval Theology and Iconography’, *Reading Medieval Studies*, 47 (2021), pp. 57–75 (p. 70); cf. Jocelyn Price, ‘The Virgin and the Dragon: The Demonology of *Seinte Margarete*’, *Leeds Studies in English*, 16 (1985), pp. 337–57 (pp. 340–41).

¹¹⁸ Wolf, *Legends of the Saints*, p. 92.

limanum sem hann hélt á; fleyandi þeir ok ýlandi með afskræmeligum látum, ok niðr drekkjast gegnum jörðina til helvítis hylja ok brennesteinsliga pytti.¹¹⁹

a great host of infernal souls and companions in the form of dogs. When they see where their greatest enemy is going, they all jump at him at once with gaping jaws and fearful din, fiercer than a lion or a tiger, intending to immediately seize him alive and tear him apart, and so take him to hell with them. But divine mercy arranged it a different way; because as soon as Dunstan sees the devilish host who had covered and adorned themselves with eye-deceiving illusions and the appearance of dogs, they feel the great heat of his holiness, and he moves swiftly towards them. And even without thinking what his plan was, he swings in front of himself a branch he is holding; flying and howling with hideous noises, they are pulled down into the earth to the darkness of hell and the pool of brimstone.

Finally we have a text that is explicit about the true nature of its spectral hounds, a host of ‘helvískra anda ok kumpana’ (‘infernal souls and companions’), demons straight from hell who merely assume the ‘yfirbragð’ (‘external appearance’) of dogs. Like Simon’s dogs, the text is clear that they are not real dogs but merely ‘sjónhverfiligum’ (‘eye-deceiving illusions’). As always, dogs are the animals singled out over all others for this role and, to add to their unnaturalness, they are even said to be fiercer than the fiercest of animals, lions and tigers. Not fierce enough, however, to overcome a young ill child waving around a stick. Yet again, this text makes the implied explicit, attributing Dunstan’s victory to ‘mikinn hita hans heilagleiks’ (‘the great heat of his holiness’).

The length and great detail of this passage is itself evidence of the ubiquity of dogs in this role, as the Old Norse-Icelandic text is more elaborate here than any other version. In fact, an examination of the Latin texts about the life of Dunstan, as compiled by William Stubbs, points to a rather neat evolution of this trope.¹²⁰ In the earliest text according to Stubbs, composed in the early eleventh century by an anonymous author ‘B’, it is merely said of Dunstan that in his delirium he walked ‘percutiens ambabus partibus auras, a canibus rabidis

¹¹⁹ *Dunstanus saga*, p. 389.

¹²⁰ *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. by William Stubbs (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

quasi se defenderet' ('beating the air on both sides as if to defend himself from rabid dogs').¹²¹ The eleventh-century Adelard of Ghent's very popular biography of Dunstan turns these imaginary dogs into minions of 'callidus temptor' ('the cunning tempter'), i.e. of the devil.¹²² While Adelard's dogs might be interpreted as hellhounds in and of themselves, later texts stress that they are merely demons assuming the form of dogs. An early-twelfth-century text by the historian Eadmer claims that the hounds are 'figmenta' ('fictitious'), only 'simulato tetricorum canum globo' ('pretending to be a pack of most fearful dogs'), and William of Malmesbury's hagiography around the same time similarly states that the fiercest demon 'esse interpretatus quam canem' ('is to be interpreted as a dog', i.e. 'is pretending to be a dog').¹²³ Both sources thus appear to be more theologically cautious and sophisticated in their approach to corporeality than in *Andreas saga*. While Lenore Harty argues that Árni Lárentíusson's chief sources were Adelard of Ghent and William of Malmesbury, she remarks that Árni 'inflates [Adelard]'s account to get all the drama he can out of the story of Dunstan's adventures when delirious'.¹²⁴ This is an ideal episode for Árni to entertainingly expand upon, having access to so many models of spectral dog attacks from other hagiographies. Corporeal, demonic, or magical, dogs are able to play whatever role hagiographers need them to in order to magnify the power and holiness of a saint, even when the saint is a mere child.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 8. Later in this text, there is an episode where the devil appears to Dunstan successively in the form of a bear, a dog, and a fox (pp. 26–27). However, the texts that are considered to be Árni's sources only mention a bear (p. 59) and a wolf and fox (p. 183) respectively, and the episode is omitted entirely in the Icelandic text. One might wonder whether Árni would have chosen to include the episode if his sources had included a dog here.

¹²² Ibid., p. 55.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 167 and 256.

¹²⁴ Lenore Harty, 'The Icelandic Life of St Dunstan', *Saga-Book*, 15 (1957–61), pp. 263–93 (pp. 277–78). Harty's conclusions about the sources of the Icelandic text are supported by Helen Carron in 'Dunstanus saga', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Pulsiano and Wolf, pp. 144–45.

Mary

The most popular of all hagiographies in Iceland appears to be have been that of the Virgin Mary, extant in fragments in at least thirty-seven manuscripts.¹²⁵ Dominating the Marian tradition in Iceland are numerous collections of miracles (*jarteiknir*) transmitted both alongside and separate from the saga, and several of these miracles involve dogs.¹²⁶ The first notable incident is similar to *Dunstanus saga*, involving a monk who is delirious with wine rather than fever. On his way back to the church, he is attacked by three demons (or perhaps a single demon) successively taking the form of a bull, a dog, and a lion. The dog is said to be ‘mikill ok illiligr’ (‘large and hideous’) in the B-text, ‘svartr’ (‘black’) in A, and ‘stors og hrædiligs’ (‘large and frightening’) in D.¹²⁷ In B, it wishes to ‘bíta þenna munk’ (‘bite this monk’) and, even more fearsomely, ‘gleypa hann eda rida kvikann i sundr’ (‘devour him alive and tear him apart’) in D.¹²⁸ Each time, however, Mary appears before the poor monk, driving the demonic animal away and clearing his path to church and to bed.

Less-than-holy monks are a common feature of the miracles, another one sneaking away from church to a house at a remote location to succumb to the temptation of ‘lostasemi’ (‘lust’).¹²⁹ Startled by the sound of other people and of matins nearby, he rushes back towards the church but soon finds that ‘sækia hann hundar med mikilli gnollran ok gaud, sem þeir ellti þiof’ (‘dogs are pursuing him with great howling and barking, as if they are pursuing a thief’).¹³⁰ Terrified, he recites an Ave Maria to himself but ends up falling off a bridge and

¹²⁵ Margaret Cormack, ‘Sagas of Saints’, in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Clunies Ross, pp. 302–25 (p. 303).

¹²⁶ Unger brings together miracles from several different sources in *Mariu saga*. He divides the miracles into two broader collections: an older collection with three main manuscripts A (AM 234 fol.), B (AM 232 fol.), and C (AM 633 4to), and a younger collection with manuscripts D (AM 634/635 4to), E (Stock. Perg. 4to no. 1), and St (Stock. Perg. 4to no. 11).

¹²⁷ Unger, *Mariu saga*, pp. 116 and 843.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 859. This is the D version, with variants included from E.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

drowning.¹³¹ Invoking the Virgin Mary does eventually ensure an honourable burial for the sinful monk, but the role of the dogs in the story is more cryptic. Although it is earlier stated that ‘þessa brodur kueiktist illzka með diofuligri æggian’ (‘evil was badly aroused in this brother by devilish inciting’), there is not much evidence in the text that these dogs are demons in disguise like in so many other hagiographic incidents.¹³² Indeed, these dogs lack any of the standard descriptors (large, black, frightening) that are usually attached to their demonic counterparts, and it is quite possible that they are merely guard dogs whose suspicions were aroused by the monk rushing away. Nevertheless, it is certainly reasonable to read their attack as punishment for the monk’s sins and it remains significant that he chose to invoke the holy woman to escape the animals, even if escape was achieved by him drowning.

Although many of the dogs discussed above are demonic adversaries of saints, there are some instances where dogs appear to be instruments of saints’ holiness. This is the case in a third miraculous episode about Peter Monoculus, abbot of Clairvaux. Before he first joined a monastic order, it is said in the D-text that Peter has a dream vision in which

hann gengi inn í hina fegrstv holl, ok í þeiri holl var hasæti, ok þar sat í ein drottning. Hennar fegrd ok aasíona var biort ok virðulig. Enn sem hann villdi inn ganga í hollina, runnv í mot honum suartir ok hræðiligir hundar. Þeir hlupu akafliga at honum ok villdu bita hann. Þessi virðuliga frv rak hundana í brvtt í stad með sinu bði.¹³³

he enters the most beautiful hall, and in this hall was a high-seat, and in it sat a queen. Her beauty and countenance were bright and magnificent. But when he wished to go inside the hall, black and fearsome dogs ran towards him. They jumped fervently at him and wished to bite him. This magnificent woman drove the dogs away from the place with her bidding.

¹³¹ This encounter being on a bridge may be theologically connected to bridges being important motifs in the infernal landscape of medieval visionary literature, often serving as passages between life and death; see Carlsen, *Visions of the Afterlife*, pp. 162–63. Occasionally, such bridges bear dangerous dogs, as in some variants of the Norwegian ballad *Draumkvædet* (see, for instance, stanza 14 of variant M6 in Barnes, *Draumkvæde*, p. 159). Furthermore, Theo Brown has observed that bridges are a common site of ‘black dog’ apparitions in English and other folklore (Brown, ‘The Black Dog’, pp. 182 and 192).

¹³² Ibid., p. 857.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 1152–53.

Sitting on a high-seat in a magnificent hall, Mary is styled here very much like a classic Germanic queen, and the black dogs might thus be playing protective roles like the dogs in chapter 2 guarding the homes of Gerðr in *Skirnismál* and Menglǫð in *Fjolsvinnsmál*. Whatever their role may be, Mary like all other saints is able to easily make them stand down with just her bidding. Interestingly, the E-text version of this miracle makes the vision and its dogs even more didactic. This version begins by narrating that Peter was a ‘veralldar maðr’ (‘worldly/secular man’), whose desire to enter a monastic life was hindered by ‘bliðv veralldarinnar’ (‘the comforts of the world’).¹³⁴ Once Peter has this vision, however, because of Mary’s words of support for him and because ‘næst lypv at honvm svartir rakkar með miklvm gny ok nogvm grimleika, skilr hann vera þarflasar hvgsanir ok vinarins talmanir’ (‘black dogs then jumped at him with great din and abundant savageness, he understands them to be useless thoughts and hindrances of enemies’) and finally joins the monastery.¹³⁵ Although attacking the saint like the other demonic dogs of this chapter, these ones could be framed in a more positive light, providing protection to the saint and, perhaps like the dogs who licked Lazarus’ sores, even clearing the monk’s way to a holier life.

There is a similar episode in a saga of Gregory the Great, titled *Gregorius saga* by Unger and *Gregors saga páfa* by Wolf.¹³⁶ Whereas Peter Monoculus experiences a vision before joining a monastery, *Gregorius saga* describes a monk experiencing great illness and a vision when he plans to escape from his monastery. In this vision, the monk sees a man (possibly Andrew) ‘er visadi at honum hundi svortum’ (‘who set a black dog against him’).¹³⁷ It is only when the monk begs for mercy and, it is implied, agrees to stay in the monastery, that

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 493.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 494.

¹³⁶ Wolf (*Legends of the Saints*, pp. 118–22) identifies four full versions of the saga, the second of which (found in the thirteenth-century AM 921 4to IV 2 and the fifteenth-century Stock. Perg. fol. no. 2) is used by Unger.

¹³⁷ *HeilSögur*, I, p. 383.

the man ‘visadi [...] hundinum a brott’ (‘directed the dog to leave’).¹³⁸ Like in *Dunstanus saga*, this dog could be read as a hallucination or a manifestation of the monk’s illness, but it is in any case another agent of a divine objective.

The didactic dogs of Peter Monoculus’ dream might also be usefully compared to some in the Old Norse-Icelandic *Vitae Patrum* (*Lives of the Fathers*), a collection of hagiographies known for their ‘emphasis on instructive tales’.¹³⁹ One tale in the text concerning the saint Anthony begins with a brother just like Peter Monoculus who wishes to become a monk but is unwilling to make the appropriate sacrifice of giving up all his possessions. Anthony tells this brother that in order to become a monk, he must buy some meat at a farm and return with it on his naked back. When he does this,

sottu alla vega at honum til bradarinnar hundar ok fuglar, særdu ok slitu allan hans likam með tönnum ok klóm, ok er hann kom framm til heilags fodur, fretti guds madr, ef hann hefði gert þat er hann baud honum. Brodirinn syndi honum bukinn a ser særdan ok slitinn. Þá sagði hinn helgi Antonius: “Þannig særðaz af ohreinum öndum þeir, er heiminum hafna ok vilja þó hafa iardlig audæfi hia framm.”¹⁴⁰

dogs and birds attacked him from all sides for the food, wounded and tore his whole body with teeth and claws, and when he came before the holy father, God’s man asked if he had done as he had bid him. The brother showed him his body wounded and torn. Then the holy Anthony said, “Thus unclean spirits wound those who abandon the world but wish to still have earthly wealth.”

Dogs and birds here are both real scavenging animals and metaphors for ‘unclean spirits’, more explicitly identified as ‘dæmonibus’ (‘demons’) in the otherwise identical Latin source.¹⁴¹ They may also represent unholy thoughts and impulses like the ones in Peter Monoculus’ vision, according to the theology of the monk Evagrius Ponticus who equated demons with ‘tempting-thoughts, *logismoi*’.¹⁴² Like the dogs chasing the lustful monk in the Marian miracle, these ones

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, ‘Prose of Christian Instruction’, p. 341.

¹⁴⁰ *HeilSögur*, II, p. 568.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² *Evagrius of Pontus, The Gnostic Trilogy*, ed. and trans. by Robin Darling Young, Joel Kalvesmaki, Columba Stewart, Charles M. Stang, and Fr. Luke Dysinger (Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 6.

are aggressive and dangerous to humans, but their aggression is used in the service of a greater holy purpose, allowing Anthony to deliver moral instruction. Nowhere, however, do dogs act more clearly in service of a divine plan than in the life of the Apostle Thomas.

Thomas

There are two main recensions of *Thomas saga postola* (not including a translation of the Biblical John 20) and it is the first that fully details the apostle's time in the city Andropolis, in disguise as a servant and carpenter. Thomas finds himself in the middle of a bridal feast, where he is hit in the face by a drink-bearer for refusing to drink. In response, Thomas warns the drink-bearer:

“Betra er þér at taka hefnd her i heimi en i öðrum heimi, þar er eilífar kvalir eru, en þér mun i þessum heimi golddit vera þat, er þú laust mik saklausan, en hond þína munu hundar hingat bera þenna aptan.” [...] En byrlarinn, er i andlit postolanum hafði drepit, gekk til brunnz at taka vatn, en hit oarga dyr drap hann ok saug bloð hans, en hundar atu hræ hans, ok einn mikill hundr svartr bar hond hans hina høgri i munni ser eptir höllinni endilangri, ok undruðuz menn, er þetta sa, ok þögnuðu.¹⁴³

“It is better for you to face retribution here in this world than in the other world where there is eternal suffering, and you will be repaid in this world for striking me without reason, and dogs will bear your hand here this evening.” [...] And the drink-bearer who had struck the apostle in the face went to the well to fetch water, and a lion killed him and sucked his blood, and dogs ate his corpse, and a large black dog carried his right hand in the mouth along the length of the hall, and men who saw this were astonished and fell silent.

Dogs eating the drink-bearer's corpse do reflect many of the same anxieties about unclean animals scavenging in cities discussed earlier, but they are included alongside a lion, an animal that not only does not usually belong inside the city but is also often used as a symbol for either Christ or the devil.¹⁴⁴ In this case, the animals do certainly appear to be ‘figuration[s] of divine

¹⁴³ *PostSögur*, pp. 713–14.

¹⁴⁴ See Nigel Harris, ‘The Lion in Medieval Western Europe: Toward an Interpretive History’, *Traditio*, 76 (2021), pp. 185–213 (pp. 191–96). It is true, however, that this episode takes place in a city in Egypt, a location that could be more exoticised by medieval European writers as having lions roaming freely.

retribution' and 'sign[s] of sanctity', avenging Thomas for being struck.¹⁴⁵ Of all the animals, however, it is the single large black dog that is the true fulfilment of the saint's prophetic declaration. Even if the other dogs eating the corpse are mere earthly scavengers, this particular hound does appear to be more unnatural. Its colour alone is a signifier of something demonic as in so many of the texts discussed in this chapter and the image of it walking through the hall with a hand in its mouth does fit Thomas' reputation as having 'one of the more fantastic' hagiographies.¹⁴⁶ The fantastic nature of this image is crucial, making Thomas' foretelling of it all the more amazing and thus convincing a number of the inhabitants of Andropolis to convert to Christianity.

It is indicative of the ambiguous and limitrophic status of dogs in Christianity, negative on paper but more positive in reality, that they can be controlled both by saints and by saints' worst adversaries. It is this ambiguity that makes them perfect narrative and didactic devices so frequently used in hagiographies, and a focus on the dogs can therefore help reveal the intended function of such narratives. The above texts, though, were all translated into Old Norse-Icelandic from different pre-existing sources, some more loosely than others but none entirely original. Iceland did, however, have its own native hagiography tradition. Venerating local saints in addition to adopting foreign ones was critical to the transition to Christianity, establishing Iceland, according to Grønlie, 'despite its peripheral location, as a new centre within the Christian world'.¹⁴⁷ It is therefore important to look at how dogs were represented in this original Icelandic genre.

¹⁴⁵ Roughton, 'Study and Translation', p. 275. Lucy Grace Collings, 'The Codex Scardensis: Studies in Icelandic Hagiography' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 1969), p. 169.

¹⁴⁶ Collings, 'The Codex Scardensis', p. 168.

¹⁴⁷ Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, p. 16.

Original Old Norse-Icelandic Hagiographies

Óláfr Haraldsson

Although the first chapter of this thesis outlined important, often positive roles of dogs in some *konungasögur*, many of these sagas narrate the lives of Christian kings and the reservations towards dogs characteristic of Christian hagiographies do influence this genre as well. One such text, *Haraldssona saga* of *Heimskringla*, ends with the martyrdom of King Eysteinn Haraldsson of Norway. The saga relates that after his death, Eysteinn was locally venerated as a saint, and many men claimed to have been cured by water from two miraculous springs at the site of his execution and his tomb. However, these miracles come to an end when ‘óvinir hans steypði á leiðit hundssöði’ (‘his enemies poured dog-broth over the tomb’).¹⁴⁸ Dogs, then, continue to be depicted as unholy beings in this saga composed in Iceland, their flesh having the power of de-consecration.

The longest saga in *Heimskringla* revolves around the life of King Óláfr (II) Haraldsson. Just a year after his death, King Óláfr became St Óláfr, ‘the first and perhaps the most important of a number of canonised Scandinavian rulers.’¹⁴⁹ Óláfr II does not interact with any real dogs in his saga (outside *Vqlsa þátttr*), but dogs nevertheless leave their mark in the epithet of one of the king’s greatest enemies, Þórir hundr. Þórir was a great chieftain of Hálogaland and a leader of the peasant faction opposing Óláfr II. Þórir is notable in the saga for his trading ventures with the Sámi, with whom he spent a long time in the mountains and from whom he received ‘tölf hreinbjálba með svá mikilli fjölkynngi, at ekki vápn festi á ok síðr miklu en á hringabrynju’ (‘twelve reindeer-skin coats with such powerful magic that no weapon

¹⁴⁸ *Haraldssona saga*, p. 345. See the Chapter 1 section on dog products for a brief discussion of ‘hundssöð’.

¹⁴⁹ *A History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, ed. by Carl Phelpstead, trans. by Devra Kunin (Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001), p. xliii.

could penetrate them, and much less than a coat of mail’).¹⁵⁰ These reindeer skins prove invaluable to Þórir when he faces off against Óláfr II and his men in the Battle of Stiklarstaðir (1030). A key figure in the king’s army is a man named Björn digri (‘the Stout’), also known as Björn stallari (‘the Marshal’). Björn engages in direct combat with Þórir at Stiklarstaðir, his blows unable to penetrate the reindeer skins, prompting the king to declare, ‘Ber þú hundinn, er eigi bíta járn’ (‘You strike the dog, whom iron does not bite’).¹⁵¹ Björn manages to land an axe blow on Þórir’s shoulder, but Þórir drives his spear through the Marshal and then through the king himself. The battle between Þórir and Björn is thus appropriately framed as a battle between dog and bear, symbolising once again the hunt that is so often evoked in canine encounters throughout this thesis.

Although there are more complex motivations at play in this opposition, including political disagreements over taxation and personal sentiments around avenging a family member, this saga does also position Óláfr II here as a Christian king battling heathen enemies. This aspect is suggested by Þórir’s association with the Sámi and by Óláfr II’s battle cry, ‘Fram, fram, Kristsmenn, krossmenn, konungsmenn’ (‘Forward, forward, men of Christ, men of the cross, men of the King’).¹⁵² It is therefore especially suitable that a dog, the most heathen of animals, is the one to help bring down the Christian king.

Following the battle, though, Þórir is actually the first to bear witness to Óláfr II’s sanctity, when the dead king’s blood heals a wound on his hand. And so, ‘[v]áttaði Þórir sjálfr þenna atburð, þá er helgi Óláfs konungs kom upp, fyrir alþýðu’ (‘Þórir himself bore witness to this occurrence when King Óláfr’s sanctity became known, before all the people’) and it is said in Snorri’s *Separate Óláfs saga helga* that Þórir himself eventually leaves the country on a

¹⁵⁰ *Óláfs saga helga*, p. 345.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 384.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 378.

pilgrimage to Jerusalem, never to return.¹⁵³ The king being killed by this dog-like man and his body immediately becoming a miraculous agent turns this classic saga battle into an episode of martyrdom and sanctity. And the fact that the first object of and witness to his sanctity is this most heathen hound only makes the miracle more wondrous.

This is not the final appearance of Óláfr II, who returns in other texts to miraculously prove his sanctity. A chapter in *Magnússona saga* tells of a young Danish man captured and imprisoned in Vinöland by heathen men. This Dane manages to escape a first time but as soon as his captors realise he is missing, ‘fara eptir honum með hundum tveimr, er því váru vanir at spyrja þá upp, er undan hljópusk, finna hann í skógi’ (‘they go after him with two dogs who were used to tracking those who ran away, and find him in the forest’).¹⁵⁴ This text very closely follows other earlier versions of this tale, including in the *Old Norwegian Homily Book* and the Latin *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*.¹⁵⁵ Interestingly, the Latin *Passio* adds that these dogs ‘ad inuestigandum fugituous christianos mirabiliter edocti’ (‘were excellently trained to track down fugitive Christians’), thus even more explicitly setting these animals against Christianity.¹⁵⁶ The *Passio* further elaborates their role, emphasising that ‘latratus prodit latentem’ (‘their barking revealed his hiding[-place]’).¹⁵⁷

Back to being imprisoned and chained, the Dane is dejected, but is encouraged by his fellow prisoners to pray to St Óláfr for help. When he does so, the Saint appears to him, releases him from his shackles, and aids a second escape attempt. Once again, dogs are released in search of him but, this time, ‘villask hundar þegar farsins, er þeir liðu at honum’ (‘the dogs

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 387 and 443.

¹⁵⁴ *Magnússona saga*, p. 273.

¹⁵⁵ *Gamal Norsk Homiliebok*, pp. 120–21. *Passio et Miracula Beati Olavi, from a Twelfth-Century Manuscript in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford*, ed. by Frederick Metcalfe (Clarendon Press, 1881), p. 85. As his title suggests, Metcalfe bases his edition upon the c. 1200 manuscript formerly at Fountains Abbey, now Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 209.

¹⁵⁶ *Passio et Miracula Beati Olavi*, p. 85.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

immediately lost their track when they approached him’) and the men’s eyes were likewise deceived so that they could not find the Dane even when he was lying at their feet.¹⁵⁸

A similar episode can be found in the saga of Magnús Erlendsson, an Earl of Orkney who was canonised in 1898. On the run from a dangerous king, Magnús hides at the top of a large tree, where he is found by the king’s ‘sporhundar’ (‘tracking-dogs’):

Þá rann einn hundrinn í hring um tréit ok gó. Magnús hafði trékefli í hendi sér ok kastaði til hundsins, ok kom á síðuna; en hundrinn lagði halann millum fóta sér ok hljóp til skipa ok þar aðrir eptir. Fundu konungsmenn eigi Magnús.¹⁵⁹

Then one dog ran in a ring around the tree and barked. Magnús had a tree-branch in his hand and threw it at the dog, and it hit it on the side; and the dog put its tail between its legs and ran (back) to the ships, and the others after it. The king’s men did not find Magnús.

The dog running away with its tail between its legs is another very good example of a text drawing on realistic canine behaviour to anchor its narrative. This incident and Óláfr II saving the Dane from skilled dogs also bear resemblance to the ‘hermit and hunter’ trope discussed in other hagiographies, except the innocent parties saved here are human. In these scenarios, the dogs become representatives of the cruel masters they serve, secular or heathen, but they are no match for a good Christian saint. By having Óláfr II save an innocent being from vicious hounds, his saga in particular thus draws on established hagiographic tropes in order to make a strong case for his canonisation.

Óláfr Tryggvason

A couple of decades before Óláfr Haraldsson was another important Christian king, Óláfr Tryggvason. Although *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* was discussed earlier as a *konungasaga*, Oddr Snorrason’s work has also been described by Margaret Cormack as ‘the first Icelandic attempt

¹⁵⁸ *Magnússona saga*, p. 274.

¹⁵⁹ *Magnúss saga skemmri*, p. 314.

at original hagiography'.¹⁶⁰ Unlike his namesake, this Óláfr may not have been successfully canonised, but he did play an important role in the spread of Christianity throughout Scandinavia and his saga bears many of the hallmarks of a saint's life. His relationship with his dog Vígi, however, fits uneasily into the hagiographic genre and in some cases, it will be seen, might be read as actively undermining the king's sanctity.

The first sense of Vígi's difficult relationship with Christianity comes with his and Óláfr's battle against a man named Þórir hjótr ('the hart'). The fight takes on a supernatural aspect in Oddr's version, as a great demonic hart emerges from Þórir's corpse to be hunted down by Vígi, displaying a corporeality that Grønlie describes as 'theologically problematic'.¹⁶¹ Just like with the demonic dogs of *Andreas saga* and *Dunstanus saga*, it is possible that the limitrophic nature of dogs allows Vígi to engage in this battle on the borders of the natural and supernatural. It is, however, the aftermath of the battle that is even more significant. Badly injured in this battle, Vígi is carefully carried off the field by Óláfr, who sends the dog away to be healed. Vígi is healed by a Sámi man in fulfilment of a striking deal made several pages earlier in the saga. On their first meeting, the Sámi man predicted Óláfr's future, ending by foreseeing the king's role in the conversion of Scandinavia to Christianity. Completing his prediction, he says this:

Ok ef þér reynisk þetta sem ek segi, boða mér ekki þann sið, því at ekki má ek at öðru verða en nú em ek. Ok ekki má ek þér til sóma gera eða yðarri tígn, nema svá verði at hundr þinn verði sárr, Vígi, send hann til mín, ok mun ek græða hann [...].¹⁶²

And if it turns out for you as I say, do not preach your faith to me because I cannot have another self than what I am. And I cannot honour you or your highness unless it so happens that your dog Vígi becomes wounded, send him to me and I shall heal him.

¹⁶⁰ Cormack, 'Sagas of Saints', p. 306.

¹⁶¹ OddsÓl, p. 258. Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, p. 54.

¹⁶² OddsÓl, p. 189.

This agreement reflects some of the anxieties Sophia Menache suspected clerics may have had regarding dogs. Óláfr's personal connection to his dog is so great that he is willing to refrain from converting or harming a heathen man if it means his companion might be saved in the future. As Solveig Marie Wang points out, the king 'is not portrayed as actively seeking out the Saami' during their first encounter, but 'does actively seek out the same Saami man for healing the royal dog.'¹⁶³ Vígi thus jeopardises Óláfr's divine mission to spread Christianity in Scandinavia and, in doing so, undermines his role as, in Sverre Bagge's words, a 'missionary king'.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, Vígi's healing by an unconverted Sámi man reinforces the dog's association with heathenism that is set up in his corporeal fight with the demonic hart. Although the demonic nature of the hart encourages the reader to support Óláfr in this situation, framing the battle as a hunt may somewhat undermine this in the context of the 'hermit and hunter trope', especially considering the wider Christian trope of representing Christ as a stag. It is therefore possible to read several layers of moral ambiguity in this incident introduced by the choice of animals.

Vígi's (perhaps inadvertent) opposition to Christianity reaches its zenith later in the saga when Óláfr learns about the death of one of his retainers at the hands of a man named Sigurðr. Although Sigurðr is outlawed according to Icelandic law, Óláfr considers it his duty to properly avenge his retainer. He therefore has Sigurðr bound and placed in the middle of a ring of men where dogs will be set upon him. Óláfr, however, is strongly advised against this course of action, first by one of his retainers and then by a bishop, but Óláfr ignores their intercessions, saying, 'Ekki kann byskup glöggligar at sjá mann á velli en ek' ('The bishop cannot judge this man as clearly as I').¹⁶⁵ The dogs are loosed but repelled by Sigurðr's piercing eyes, and so

¹⁶³ Solveig Marie Wang, 'Finnvitka: The Cultural Interface, Identity Negotiation, and Saami Ritual in Medieval Fennoscandia', *Ceræ*, 9 (2022), pp. 4–31 (p. 24).

¹⁶⁴ Sverre Bagge, 'The Making of a Missionary King: The Medieval Accounts of Olaf Tryggvason and the Conversion of Norway', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 105.4 (2006), pp. 473–513.

¹⁶⁵ *OddsÓl*, p. 285.

Óláfr turns to Vígi, petting and sternly directing his companion against Sigurðr. This is a very rare example of a dog not being immediately obedient (and one of the few depictions of a dog being petted in the sagas), but Vígi does eventually comply and Sigurðr is killed. The saga does not look well upon this incident and, in the aftermath of the killing, it is said that ‘byskup ávítaði konung um sinn misgerning af þessu grimma verki, ok konungr gerði þá iðran bera fyrir Guði ok monnum.’ (‘the bishop reprimanded the king for his transgression in this severe act, and the king then did penance before God and men.’)¹⁶⁶

This episode, Grønlie argues, does not belong ‘to the sphere of the Christian mission’ and shifts the saga ‘from the apparently justifiable killing of recalcitrant pagans to personal acts of revenge: it raises the question of where the line is to be drawn.’¹⁶⁷ Rohrbach furthermore writes that the repeated emphasis on Óláfr forcing his dogs to act in this way makes it clear that ‘diese Gewalthandlungen textintern als grausam charakterisiert werden und daher durchaus ein negatives Bild des Königs als eines kalten, berechnenden und skrupellosen Herrschers zeichnen’ (‘these acts of violence are characterised as cruel within the text and therefore create a negative image of the king as a cold, calculating, and unscrupulous ruler’).¹⁶⁸ Nor is this Óláfr’s only use of such methods. It is said later in the *Heimskringla* version of the saga that Óláfr ‘kvalði óvini sína mjök, suma brenndi hann í eldi, suma lét hann ólma hunda rífa í sundr, suma lemja eða kasta fyrir hábjörg’ (‘tortured his enemies greatly, some he burned in fire, some he let dogs tear apart, some he maimed and cast from high cliffs’).¹⁶⁹

Óláfr’s initial rebuke of the bishop was, moreover, a blatant attack on the bishop’s ecclesiastical authority and enabled, though perhaps reluctantly, by Vígi alone, affirming Menache’s suggestion that the human-dog connection could interfere with dependence on the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁶⁷ Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, pp. 60–61.

¹⁶⁸ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 198.

¹⁶⁹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, p. 333.

clergy. Óláfr's disagreement with the bishop might be read as representing the same 'power struggle between secular and ecclesiastical authorities' that was noted earlier with the 'hermit and hunter' trope. Such a struggle has indeed been noticed at Þingeyrar, where Oddr composed his saga of Óláfr Tryggvason.¹⁷⁰ Whether Oddr leaned more in favour of the secular or the ecclesiastical has been debated, and this thesis does not attempt to intervene in the debate. Wherever Oddr's sympathies may have lain, Óláfr's dog Vígi might be read as an emblem of the secular and, indeed, of the heathen. While Óláfr's penance restores an uneasy balance between secular and ecclesiastical authority at the end of the episode, it is noteworthy that Vígi himself faces no consequences for the killing. As an animal, Vígi stands outside the human moral order and has no need to repent, demonstrating the real danger of dogs to Christianity.

Heathen Dogs & Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss

Menache elaborates that a further root of Christianity's antipathy to dogs might be 'the Bible's opposition to remnants of polytheism, especially Egyptian cults and rites.'¹⁷¹ Christianity's association of dogs with polytheism is evident in the Old Norse-Icelandic translation of the *Vitae Patrum*, which disapprovingly relates (twice in the same paragraph) that Egyptians 'dyrkudu fyrrmeirr hunda ok apyniur' ('formerly glorified dogs and she-monkeys'), deriding the practice as 'uhreinn' ('unclean').¹⁷² This is reinforced by the existence and frequent use of the Old Norse-Icelandic compound 'hundheiðinn', 'heathen as a dog', appearing at least 14 unique times in the corpus (in manuscripts ranging from c. 1250–1300 to c. 1700), along with some further appearances of phrases like 'heiðinn sem hundr' ('heathen like a dog') and

¹⁷⁰ Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, p. 43.

¹⁷¹ Menache, 'Dogs: God's Worst Enemies?', p. 29.

¹⁷² *HeilSögur*, II, pp. 390–91.

‘heiðinn hundr’ (‘heathen dog’) (see Appendix D). In these sources, dogs and heathenism are explicitly linked through the use of ‘hundheiðinn’.

A particularly good example of a dog representing heathenism against Christianity in the sagas is Snati of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*. This text may not be a hagiography but Snati’s companion Gestr, whose story makes up the second half of the saga, does become a ‘conversion hero’ and the focus of a struggle between Iceland’s heathen past and Christian present, as mentioned in chapter 3.¹⁷³ This struggle is dramatised in two key oppositions. The first opposition is between Bárðr and King Óláfr Tryggvason (who makes an appearance here as Gestr’s patron), coming to a head near the end of the saga when Gestr must fight the undead king Raknarr inside his grave mound. Gestr is unable to overcome Raknarr himself, so he calls upon the help of his father Bárðr. Bárðr has elsewhere in the saga been described as such a powerful figure that

var því lengt nafn hans ok kallaðr Bárðr Snjófellsáss, því at þeir trúðu á hann nálíga þar um nesit ok höfðu hann fyrir heitguð sinn; varð hann ok mörgum in mesta bjargvættur.¹⁷⁴

his name was lengthened and he was called Bárðr ‘the Snæfell god’, because they believed in him nearby there around the ness and held him as their sworn god; he became to many the greatest guardian spirit.

Yet this ‘heitguð’ (‘sworn god’) and ‘bjargvættur’ (‘guardian spirit’) is no match for Raknarr and his undead companions. Gestr must therefore appeal to King Óláfr, who sent him on this mission, vowing ‘á þann, er skapat hafði himin ok jörð, at taka við trú þeiri, er Óláfr konungr boðaði’ (‘to the one who had shaped heaven and earth, that he would accept the (Christian) faith that King Óláfr preached’) if he survived.¹⁷⁵ Gestr’s prayer is answered. Óláfr mysteriously appears in the mound in a burst of light that distracts Raknarr long enough for Gestr to slay him. As promised, Gestr is later baptised, but this angers Bárðr, who kills his son

¹⁷³ Barraclough, ‘Following the Trollish *Baton Sinister*’, p. 27.

¹⁷⁴ *Bárðar saga*, p. 119.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

in his baptismal clothes. Ralph O'Connor notes that the 'visual contrast between this vengeful spirit and the neophyte in his white baptismal gown is loaded with theological polarity: [Gestr] is a martyr and will go to heaven, but his grim father is already halfway to Hell.'¹⁷⁶

The other representative of Christianity in the saga is a priest named Jósteinn, whom Óláfr sends with Gestr to the grave mound. Armed with just a crucifix, Jósteinn soon demonstrates his Christian power, incapacitating a terrible bull and banishing a one-eyed man named Rauðgrani who 'taldi heiðni ok forneskju fyrir mönnum Gestis ok taldi þat bezt at blóta til heilla sér' ('preached heathenism and ancient lore to Gestr's men and proclaimed that it was best to make sacrifices for one's fortune') and whom the saga identifies as possibly being the god Óðinn himself.¹⁷⁷ Another one of Jósteinn's foils in the saga is Gestr's canine companion Snati. Just as Jósteinn was sent to help Gestr by Óláfr, chapter 3 discussed how Snati was earlier given to Gestr by the troll-woman Hít. Snati's introduction into the saga is therefore deeply rooted in the ancient legendary pre-Christian landscape of Iceland.

Like Jósteinn, Snati helps Gestr defeat a number of enemies and waits with Jósteinn outside Raknarr's mound. When Gestr defeats Raknarr, the causeway that is their route back is flooded and Snati is sent forward into the water to find a way out. Unfortunately, the dog 'stóðst eigi kynngi Raknars, ok druknaði hundrinn þar í bárunni' ('could not withstand the magical power of Raknarr, and the dog drowned there in the waves').¹⁷⁸ Where Snati's natural talents fail, Jósteinn with a crucifix and holy water succeeds, parting the water like Moses and leading Gestr out. The contrast between the two attempts places Snati in direct contrast with the priest, prompting an equation of the dog with the heathenism implicit in Jósteinn's other adversaries including Óðinn, and ensuring the triumph of Christianity through his death. It is curious that

¹⁷⁶ Ralph O'Connor, *Icelandic Histories and Romances* (Tempus, 2002), p. 39.

¹⁷⁷ *Bárðar saga*, p. 163.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

Snati's untimely demise should be attributed to the magic of king Raknarr so soon after he was defeated and beheaded by Gestr, but the result is that Gestr loses his last remaining link to the legendary heathen past before he is baptised.

To construct the figure of Snati, *Bárðar saga* thus draws on two different traditions, the Icelandic legendary tradition of heroic companions and the Continental hagiographical tradition of heathen antagonists. As Rebecca Merkelbach writes in the context of the creation of Icelandic aristocratic identity, 'the mere existence of *Bárðar saga* shows that medieval Icelanders were interested in the ambiguities of human existence as much as in the binary oppositions.'¹⁷⁹ Through Snati, the text is thus able to create a fairly sophisticated protagonist and conversion narrative that reflect the complex interplay between Iceland's heathen past and Christian present. Playing closer attention to the dog and its influences is therefore key to better understanding Gestr, the saga, and the historical moment they both represent.

Guðmundr Arason

Real and spectral dogs are included in sagas of the Icelandic bishop Guðmundr Arason (1161–1237), another man whom Iceland unsuccessfully campaigned to have canonised. There are six known versions of Guðmundr's *vita*, the earliest of which (*Guðmundar saga A*, or the so-called *Oldest Saga*) includes two incidents involving dogs.¹⁸⁰ The first takes place at the funeral of the victims of a snowstorm. It is said that once the burial was over,

laupast at hundar, er fylgt höfðo mönnum þangat, ok bitust svá ákaft, at menn máttu eige skilea þá, ok var hellt vatne á þá, ok togapir i sundr ok barðir, ok létu eige laust at heldr. Þá gengr Guðmundr prestr at hundunum, ok blezar þá, ok melte við þá, at þeir late laust ok þege, í nafne

¹⁷⁹ Merkelbach, *Story, World and Character*, p. 222.

¹⁸⁰ This saga was written in the early fourteenth century, perhaps around 1320–30, the chief manuscript being AM 300 4to (c. 1330–50).

föður ok sonar ok anda heilags. Þá láta hundarnir laust þegar ok þagna, ok gengr síns vegar hvárr.¹⁸¹

dogs that had followed the men there jumped at each other and bit each other so fiercely, that men were not able to separate them, and water was thrown at them, and they were pulled apart and beaten, but they would not let go. Then the priest Guðmundr goes to the dogs, and blesses them and says to them that they should let go and be silent, in the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit. Then the dogs immediately let go and are silent, and each goes on its way.

Although these dogs are attacking each other and not the priest or other humans, once again holy words are invoked to silence the animals. This is another clear miracle meant to prove the sanctity of Guðmundr though a well-established model of saint versus dog, but the saga composer's motives for including this miracle at this particular point in the text, in the middle of a funeral, are puzzling. As with most of the previous sources, no import is given to where the dogs might have come from, as they merely appear out of nowhere to follow people to the funeral. It is therefore unclear whether they are real dogs attracted as they often are by crowds and the atmosphere of death, or whether perhaps their mad rage is meant to symbolise the atmosphere of grief for the victims, two of them being Guðmundr's foster-sons. Or maybe, as Joanna Skórzewska has tentatively suggested, they are instead 'dog-like apparitions' that could 'symbolize the souls of two people who have just been buried.'¹⁸² This interpretation has some merit in the fact that a woman soon dreams that the deceased foster-sons are playfully wrestling each other in heaven, the implication possibly being that the boys are as inseparable as the two dogs. It is still not at all clear, however, what the more violent dogfight and its termination by Guðmundr would symbolise in this scenario, and dogs being used to represent souls in heaven does contradict the more common theological position of dogs being barred from paradise. Whatever the case might be, this scene highlights not only a holy man's power over dogs, but also dogs' natural connection to death that is demonstrated in different ways throughout this thesis.

¹⁸¹ *Biskupa sögur*, I, p. 444.

¹⁸² Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cult*, p. 91.

There is a much more obviously incorporeal dog later in the saga, this time appearing while Guðmundr is bedridden with a terrible illness. The saga relates that while Guðmundr is ill, some of his pupils are playing on the beach when

[þ]eim sýndist sem hundr mikill keme at þeim með gapanda munninn, ok vilde bíta þá; en þeir urðu hreddir mjök ok felmsfullir, ok héto á heilaga menn sér til fulltíngs með hrezlo mikille. Þá hvarf hundrinn þegar á bröt [...].¹⁸³

it seemed to them that a large dog was coming at them with gaping jaws and wanted to bite them; and they became very afraid and frightened, and called upon the holy man's aid with great fear. Then the dog immediately went away.

Like the funeral dogs, it is unspecified where exactly this one comes from. 'Hverfa á brott' could mean going away in the sense of disappearing or in the sense of physically turning in another direction, but the former interpretation would seem to be suggested by Guðmundr's statement when he hears of this incident that 'þetta var freistne fjanda við þá' ('this was the devil testing them'), perhaps taking advantage of the holy man's incapacity.¹⁸⁴ The function of these dogs, then, is not to convert characters in the story to Christianity but to test the faith of the already-Christian. By invoking Guðmundr's name to banish the animal as has been done with Martin, Jesus, and Mary, the saga elevates the bishop to the status of these other holy figures in order to promote the case for his sanctity.

Guðmundar saga D, a later text written by the monk Arngrímr, omits these episodes with spectral hounds but does include another rather curious scene in which Guðmundr proves his holiness much like Thomas did earlier. Guðmundr at this time is confined to his quarters, watched day and night by two men of the householder Kolbeinn. One day, Guðmundr is reading when he has a vision, which he conveys to the two men, saying that he saw

at þeir Kolbeinn bóndi ok prestr hans settu rakkavíg uppi í garðonum, ok varð sá munr harðfengi, at rakki Kolbeins braut fremstu tönn ór þeim er prestr átti, ok svá fljótt sem hún féll

¹⁸³ *Biskupa sögur*, I, p. 446.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

til jarðar, brá prestur hana blóðuga í munn sér, at eigi kaldaði, þvíat hann hugsar at græða tönnina aprtr í hundinn ok í sinn fyrra stað: þótti mēr þetta ókennimannliga gert.¹⁸⁵

that the householder Kolbeinn and his priest set up a dogfight in the yard, and there was such a hard battle that Kolbeinn's dog struck the front tooth of the priest's one and as soon as it fell to the ground, the priest put the bloody [tooth] into his own mouth so that it wouldn't become cold, because he thought he would reattach the tooth back into the dog and in its former place: I thought this was done in an unpriestly manner.

Guðmundr's guards express doubt that this could be possible but are convinced to go investigate and 'reyna þeir svá hvert orð satt sem biskupinn hafði sagt' ('they find every word the bishop said to be true').¹⁸⁶ Like Thomas, Guðmundr therefore proves his holiness by a prophetic vision. His vision is even more absurd than Thomas' was but, as with Thomas, this is precisely the point. The more absurd the vision, the greater the admiration when it comes true.

Where this incident diverges from the previous two of *Guðmundar saga A* is in the nature of the dogs. Although they are participating in even more fantastical circumstances, these two dogs are simultaneously more real than their counterparts at the funeral or on the beach. While the previous dogs came out of nowhere and are depicted as either wild or spectral, these two dogs appear to be some kind of companions to the humans. As violent as a dogfight may be, it is certainly significant that these dogs battle on behalf of humans, one of whom displays a remarkable amount of concern when his dog loses its tooth, going to extraordinary lengths in the hope of having it healed. Even more significant is the fact that this man is a priest. As much as dogs might be demonised in Christian Scripture and hagiographies, they appear to nevertheless be suitable companions for priests in Iceland, even though the full incident is described as 'unpriestly'. While the earlier A-text of *Guðmundar saga* draws upon classic

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., II, p. 148.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

hagiographic tropes of demonic dogs, this later iteration of the saga also acknowledges their integration within human society.

This is true to some extent of the A-text as well, which mentions a man named Hafr who, as mentioned previously, ‘átte varðhund góðan, ok lá hann fire rekkju hans jafnan’ (‘had a good watchdog who always lay in front of his bed’).¹⁸⁷ The animal lying by the man’s bed every night is indicative of a very close relationship between human and dog somewhat contrary to the other demonic hounds attacking innocent people. Its importance as a guard dog is further highlighted by the fact that it goes missing one night, never to be seen again, and Hafr is soon after killed in his bed. Nevertheless, it is a second episode in Arngrímur’s *D* text that truly highlights the human-dog attachment in Icelandic society. This episode concerns a certain unnamed farmer who had a large dog. It is said that this dog

var svá vitr, at hann skildi meðr vana hvað maðr bauð honum, svá af fjöllum ok ór haga rak hann heim sauð ok naut einn samt, sem mælt var; berr heim til bæjar hvat hann fann fëmætt í haga; varði völl ok veitur með svá vökru varðhaldi nótt ok dag, at bóndanum þótti engi kýr svá góð sem hundrinn.¹⁸⁸

was so intelligent that he understood by habit what the man bade him, so he drove home sheep and oxen together from mountains and out of pastures, as was said; he brings home to the farm anything of value he found in the pastures; he guarded the fields and meadows with such alert watch night and day, that the farmer thought that no cow was as good as the dog.

The image we get from this passage is a very normal, functional relationship between human and dog, the dog performing important roles of shepherding and guarding as would be expected in most other genres of Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Like many saga dogs discussed in this thesis, this dog is said to be very intelligent. However, its intelligence is somewhat tempered in this hagiography by the phrase ‘meðr vana’ (‘by habit’), which implies that the dog is able to follow its owner’s commands not necessarily because it understands human speech (as is often implied of exceptional dogs in the sagas), but rather because it has simply gotten into the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., I, p. 523.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., II, p. 138.

habit of following certain orders. We might read in this a type of dog training similar to the way pet dogs are trained today to follow simple commands. Crucially, this short phrase allows the dog an intelligence befitting its role in the story without granting it the power of human language that, as was demonstrated in chapter 4, was a significant characteristic employed in attempts to separate humans from other animals. It enables the text to employ the classic Icelandic saga trope of the intelligent dog without compromising its Christian principles.

The saga goes on to relate how a group of *þingmenn* occupy the farmer's fields with their horses one day. The hardworking dog unsuccessfully attempts to drive the horses away, prompting a fight between the intruders and the locals, which ends when one of the former 'slæmir [...] brugðnu sverði á hrygg rakkanum, svá at náliga tvískiptir skrokkinn' ('strikes a drawn sword at the dog's back, so that it almost cuts the body in two').¹⁸⁹ Seeing this, the farmer moves the dog's body to the side of a field, where it is said that there

var brunnr hins signaða Guðmundar biskups þar mjök nærri stöðu, sem rakkinn lá, ok þat fëll í brjóst bóndanum, án heiti nökkuru, at hann tekr horn fullt ór brunninum ok slær niðr í sárit, gengr síðan inn, ok hugsar at heygja hundinn þá er hann hefði tóm til, sem þá gjörðu menn mjök í því landi, ef þeir vóru nátturugripir í nokkuru lagi. Annan myrgin, sem hann kemr í sama stað, er rakkinn allr í bröttu, ok svá líða þrjár nætr; ætlar bóndi þá, at ernir muni hafa brott borit.¹⁹⁰

was a well of the blessed bishop Guðmundr very near the place where the dog lay, and it comes to the mind of the farmer, without making any vow that he should take a full horn from the well and pour [water] down into the wound. He then goes inside and intends to bury the dog when he has the time, as men often did in that land, if they were *nátturugripir* in some way. The next morning, when he comes to the same place, the dog has disappeared, and so three nights pass; the farmer thus thinks that the eagles must have carried it away.

There is great significance to the fact that the farmer intends to arrange a proper burial for his dog. The text explicitly explains that it is local custom to bury 'nátturugripir' in this way. This is a very rare term in the medieval corpus, translated by Cleasby-Vigfússon and Zoëga as 'an object possessed of virtue', but 'náttura' often has supernatural or extraordinary qualities or

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., II, p. 139.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

connotations.¹⁹¹ There is some precedent to dogs being described in a similar manner. *Njáls saga*, for instance, describes the dog Sámur as a ‘gripr’, a valuable possession of some kind, and Vígi of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* is a ‘gersimi’, a treasure.¹⁹² These terms are all objectifying in a way, treating dogs as material possessions, but burying the animal nevertheless affords it a uniquely high status among all other possessions, treating it in death like one would a human. The verb ‘heygja’, which refers to burying someone in a mound, does additionally often appear in a compound with ‘at/eftir fornum sið’ with the meaning of exalting someone according to old custom.

Of course, the farmer never gets the opportunity to bury the dog because, by divine inspiration, he decides to first pour water blessed by Guðmundr into the dog’s wound. Consecrated water is central to Guðmundr’s cult, forming an important part of his miracles, and his power is certainly proved here.¹⁹³ Just like Christ, the dog is assumed dead for three nights, before one of the farmer’s men hears him up at the house. When he is informed of this, the farmer reacts by saying,

engi lutr er guði um megn, þvíat hann hjálpar alla sína skepnu. Þetta þarf ei lengra, en þegar er bóndi kemr út farandi, rennr rakki hans ofan af húsum, ok fagnar honum eptir vana. En svá sem bóndi hefir hendr til ok greiðir hárit, finnr hann liggja grætt ör um þveran búkinn, þar er áðr var eggbitið. Ok þó at þessi lutr fremdist á óskynsamlegri skepnu, má þat hverr maðr skilja því framarr, hversu dýrlegar vóru þess manns vígslur, er heitir herra Guðmundr, fimti Hólabiskup.¹⁹⁴

“Nothing is beyond God’s power because he helps all his creation.” This doesn’t last any longer, because as soon as the farmer comes walking out, his dog runs down from the house and greets him as usual. And when the farmer reaches out his hand and strokes its fur, he finds a scar lying across the body where it had earlier been wounded by a sword. And although this honour is given to an irrational creature, every man can better understand how glorious were the consecrations of this man who is named Guðmundr, fifth Bishop of Hólar.

¹⁹¹ Cleasby-Vigfússon, p. 449. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary*, p. 310.

¹⁹² *Njáls saga*, p. 186. *OddsÓl*, p. 177.

¹⁹³ See Skórzeska, *Constructing a Cult*, pp. 88–90 and 97–100.

¹⁹⁴ *Biskupa sögur*, II, p. 139.

The dog running out to greet its human is a very natural interaction, and the farmer stroking its fur represents one of the few instances of petting a dog in the sagas, in an explicitly Christian text no less. The text goes as far as to stress that the dog is part of God's creation and deserving of his aid. Lest that be too contentious, however, it does pull back a little by clarifying that the dog is, of course, an 'óskynsamligri skepnu' ('irrational creature') and therefore still lacking crucial human rationality. Nevertheless, it is precisely this irrationality, this lowliness, that makes Guðmundr's miracle all the more glorious.

The above episodes from *Guðmundar sögur* are prime examples of adapting foreign hagiographic tropes to a local Icelandic context. Guðmundr silencing dogs at the funeral and his students banishing a hound at the beach implies that dogs had by then become established as the stock adversary for saints. The sagas therefore introduce such dogs in his story in order to reinforce Guðmundr's case for sanctity along the lines of all the other dog-silencing holy men and women of hagiography. At the same time, however, these sagas must acknowledge the reality of dogs in medieval Icelandic society as guards, shepherds, and generally close companions. This duality has created a group of sagas where dogs are both vanquished and healed by the holy man, both feared and revered by humanity.

Conclusion

Despite the seemingly negative depiction of dogs in Christian Scripture, a far more complex picture emerges of the animal throughout the different hagiographies of this chapter. Dogs are forever oscillating across borders, at once demonised and esteemed, oppressors of the holy and agents of holiness. In the translated saints' lives, some dogs that are encountered by saints are real animals, others are demons in disguise, and a few are spectral apparitions. While many attack and are subsequently silenced or banished by the saints, some appear to work on behalf

of saints. In some cases, dogs attacking saints is in fact in fulfilment of some divine purpose, delivering moral instruction or cleansing through punishment. In most cases, however, the dogs are aggressive and violent; what differs is whom that violence is directed at. The previous chapter discussed how dogs could be used as markers around which to construct models of humanity; the texts in this chapter similarly use dogs as markers to construct models of Christian sanctity.

Even in those translated texts where dogs aren't quite so demonised, it remains significant that they usually appear out of nowhere and disappear equally mysteriously. Dogs in translated hagiographies do not seem to be considered important enough to be anchored within the text, unlike in other sagas discussed throughout the rest of this thesis where dogs are usually connected to specific people and often to specific places, given backgrounds and personalities, and made true characters even if their appearance is only fleeting. Rohrbach has argued that the Icelandic bishops' sagas are more anthropocentric in their narrative perspective, and that '[d]ie in den weltlichen Sagas greifbare Omnipräsenz der Tierwelt im isländischen Gesellschaftsleben mit igrer – unterschiedlich ausgeformten – Relevanz für den Aufbau der erzählenswerten Geschichten besteht in den Bischofssagas nicht' ('the omnipresence of the animal world in Icelandic social life, which is tangible in the secular sagas and has a greater—albeit different—relevance for the structure of the stories worth telling, does not exist in the bishops' sagas').¹⁹⁵ While this may be true of animals in general, it has become evident that the canine narratives of Óláfr Tryggvason and Guðmundr Arason more closely resemble the 'secular' Icelandic sagas, and are thus well suited to a narrative ethology that centres the animals in the texts. Even if Vígi, Snati, and other dogs are depicted as dangerous or ineffective

¹⁹⁵ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, p. 120.

or antithetical to the values of Christianity, there is no doubt of their significance within the narrative.

Dogs are especially useful symbols for these texts as they contain within them multiple significations that work in both pre-Christian and Christian contexts, and both secular and religious ones. We might consider the use of these animal symbols as a kind of ‘religious accommodation’, a term used by Lilla Kópar to approach mixed iconography in Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture, which describes how ‘elements of one narrative tradition become integrated, or accommodated, in the intellectual framework of a dominant world view, while the receptive system of thought remains the dominant one.’¹⁹⁶ In the case of Icelandic hagiographies, or even of Icelandic translations of visionary literature like *Páls leizla*, Christianity appears to be the ‘dominant’ framework that accommodates older Norse religious and literary frameworks by its use of familiar animal symbols like dogs. Discussing the poem *Merlínussþá*, Philip Lavender similarly describes its animal symbolism as meaningful ‘as it drew upon symbols with strong valencies within both pagan and Christian discourses. [...] These symbols are so suffused with meaning that they became highly ambivalent as well as tantalizingly decipherable.’¹⁹⁷ When one launches forth from the circle of home, one does not leave unaided but ‘ventures from home on the thread of a tune’ and so the recognisable refrain of the dog carries through different texts and traditions.¹⁹⁸ If the purpose behind some of these texts was to encourage or validate conversion, incorporating dogs is a useful strategy to make Christian narratives more familiar and the process of conversion thus more comfortable. A narrative ethological focus on dogs and how they are treated by texts can thus be a useful tool

¹⁹⁶ Lilla Kópar, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Brepols, 2012), p. xxv.

¹⁹⁷ Lavender, ‘Merlin and the *Völva*’, p. 124.

¹⁹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 311.

in tracing the influences that shape these texts and their place within larger Icelandic and European literary, historical, and theological traditions.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated that dogs are deeply embedded in Old Norse-Icelandic storytelling processes and are actively used across different genres to shape textual narratives. Structurally, the barking of Garmr in *Völuspá* is used as a refrain to order both the poem itself and the events of Ragnarøk, becoming a transtemporal marker for the *völva* to anchor her vision. The sound simultaneously adds to the chaotic soundscape of the apocalypse and cuts through this chaos to orient the seeress. A comparison with ominous dogs across the rest of the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus demonstrates the prophetic significance of Garmr's bark, acting as a portent of the end of the world. Guard dogs are furthermore stock figures employed in *Gesta Danorum*, *Fjölsvinnsmál*, *Skírnismál*, and *Baldrs draumar* as challenges to be overcome by protagonists and as indicators that something dangerous or supernatural might lie ahead. In the *fornaldarsögur* of chapter 3, dogs are used as transuniverse anchors to familiarise gigantic companions and their environments and therefore enable secondary belief for saga audiences. In this and in their ability to cross the borders between the inset natural and supernatural storyworlds, they better assimilate these worlds to strengthen the structural and thematic cohesion of their sagas.

The *fornaldarsögur* of chapter 4 demonstrate an even wider range of uses of dogs, but the dogs in all these cases in some way cross or challenge traditional boundaries between human and animal. Through their human/canine hybrids, these texts interrogate philosophical or theological questions about definitions of humanity, or engage in sophisticated social and political commentary. *Hrólfs saga kraka* in particular is organised by numerous episodes of human/dog hybridity and human/animal hybridity more generally to create an extraordinarily imaginative storyworld where boundaries of all kinds are blurred. In both translated and original Icelandic hagiographies, dogs are consistently used to construct models of sanctity. In the former, they are typically cast as the adversaries of saints, just as they are cast as infernal

torturers in visionary texts. This is often the case in the latter as well, but original Icelandic hagiographies also adapt local saga generic techniques in their depiction of dogs, making Christian narratives more familiar and easing the process of conversion.

Not only do dogs help structure individual texts, but their ubiquity means that they can also be used to establish links between different texts and textual traditions. The practical canine roles of guarding, hunting, tracking, herding, fighting, entertainment, and companionship outlined in the first chapter resonate across all the texts discussed throughout this thesis. Chapter 2 demonstrated that an analysis of Garmr should not merely be limited to *Völuspá*, but both the hound and the poem can be productively placed in the context of other mythological and mundane guard dogs, as well as animal dreams and visions in other texts. Garmr is also comparable to Cerberus and to other dogs in the Christian visionary tradition. The motif of dogs as giant-companions in chapter 3 helps structure individual texts, but also links the giant episodes of a number of different texts employing *fornaldarsaga* techniques. *Ásmundar saga Flagðagæfu* is a particularly good example of dog episodes being evidence of direct or indirect influence or borrowing.

Chapter 4 demonstrated how a diverse range of Old Norse-Icelandic texts can be made to speak to each other through common canine motifs. Dog-kings and cynocephali are motifs shared across a number of different countries, the latter with clear links to antiquity and to Biblical tradition. Individual substitution stories like that of Óðinn finding a dog in bed or a barking dog dressed as a scarecrow might on the surface seem like purely simplistic moments of humour, but when considered together form a complex tradition that draws on and adds to wider fairytale tropes. The dog riddle of *Ragnars saga* represents both the extraordinary creativity of this specific text and a knowledge of wider folktale and riddling techniques. An awareness of these wider traditions can therefore not only demonstrate how these texts directly or indirectly influence or play on one another, but also demonstrate the creativity and priorities

of authors when they adapt or deviate from these traditions in interesting ways. This is very much also true of Icelandic hagiographies, whose blending of traditions has been discussed in detail in chapter 5. In the Christian corpus and beyond, Biblical proverbs about dogs resonate across saga literature. A focus on the figure of the hellhound can be used to trace lines of influence across the visionary tradition in numerous languages and might even be used to speculate about the specific sources of texts and manuscripts. Significantly, the wide symbolic signification of dogs in both pre-Christian and Christian contexts allows connections to be drawn between heathen and Christian afterlives and apocalypses.

Through a canine narrative ethology, new insights have been revealed not just into the structure and content of texts, but also into the society they are a part of. As Rohrbach writes, ‘die Erwähnung von Tieren von den Schöpfern der Erzählungen [...] genutzt wurde, um Besonderheiten der nordischen Gesellschaften in verschiedenen historischen und sozialen Zusammenhängen zu veranschaulichen’ (‘the mention of animals was used by the creators of the stories [...] to illustrate particularities of Nordic societies in various historical and social contexts’).¹ Such historical and social particularities have been in evidence throughout this thesis. Evidence and narratives of humans consuming dogs, for instance, reflect attitudes towards animals, religious prohibitions, and historical spells of hardship and necessity. The integration of dogs into all levels of human society means that a canine narrative ethology offers insight about how this society is structured. The move from hunting as a form of subsistence to a form of entertainment described in chapter 1 reflects changing class structures, and chapter 4 revealed how the figure of the dog-king was used as a starting-point for conversations about good and bad kingship. On another end of the social scale, narratives about guarding and herding dogs demonstrate the importance of livestock to medieval Icelanders and

¹ Rohrbach, *Der tierische Blick*, pp. 1–2.

Scandinavians and their consequent concerns about thieves and predators. Analysing where guard dogs were stationed is one indicator of whom or what was most valued in society. The inclusion of dogs in practices of naming, feasting, and gifting (as gift receivers and gifts themselves) are useful case-studies towards better understanding the significance of these practices among humans too at different levels.

The depictions of Garmr and other mythological hounds are informed by the ways in which texts and cultures imagined the end of the world and the afterlife in both pre-Christian and Christian contexts, and reveals mutual influences between the two literary and cosmological traditions. Fears about death and the apocalypse are tied to smaller scale concerns about rabies and other diseases. On the other hand, these concerns also reflect a scientific curiosity and interest in disease and medicine. Dogs like Snati, Gramr, and Selsnautr are emblematic of how medieval Iceland imagined its legendary past, and Naddarnautr goes a step further in revealing how this medieval imagination was mediated through a possibly post-medieval text. Narratives about these dogs also play out social issues like ethical warfare, familial loyalties, and the expectations of hospitality. Dog ownership can be tied to the balance of power in texts, which can sometimes be interrogated along gender lines. Cynocephali provide opportunities for commentary on geographical, political, and religious borders and the margins of civilisation, and the limitrophy of dogs in general is fruitful ground for philosophical and religious debates about definitions and limits of humanity and the soul. Such debates are taken further in Christian scriptural, homiletic, visionary, and hagiographic literature, where dogs are also used for conversion narratives and in attempts to have saints canonised. And, of course, all these texts reveal new details about the role of dogs in human society and their extraordinary relationship with humans.

Susan McHugh's narrative ethology thus encourages relating literary representations to specific social-historical shifts, but a key assertion of hers is that literary animals don't just

reflect such shifts but can sometimes even become catalysts for them. In recovering specific animal narrative histories, McHugh demonstrates that ‘integrations of forms and ideas about species in turn inform current and pervasive ideas about how people live with animals’ and that ‘story forms serve as spawning grounds for forms of species and social agency’.² Not only do the Old Norse-Icelandic texts discussed throughout this thesis use dogs to shape their narratives, but these narratives at the same time subtly or actively create an image of the dog. How, then, does Old Norse-Icelandic literature define the dog?

One characteristic of dogs that has been emphasised throughout this thesis is their position as extraordinarily liminal and limitrophic beings. It has been made especially clear that dogs stand on the border between human and animal, and consequently between nature and culture. This has been a historical reality since the origins of the evolution of *Canis familiaris*, and has not only been adopted by texts in their portrayal of dogs within and on the fringes of human society but has been taken even further through the creation of literary human/dog hybrids. Such literary representations only reinforce the limitrophic image of the dog as a being that stands not just between human and animal, but also between the natural and the supernatural, between heathenism and Christianity, between life and death.

Returning to the very basics, dogs in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus are quadrupeds of varying sizes. They are covered in fur but little significance appears to be given to colour, with the notable exceptions of the numerous demonic black dogs of the Christian corpus (and a marvellously colourful dog in *Tristrams saga*).³ Prominent features mentioned on occasion are their snouts and tails, and especially important are their jaws and teeth that are often the focus of narratives of canine fights and attacks. These are all characteristics that tend to be visible in the various artistic depictions mentioned throughout this thesis. One feature prominent in

² McHugh, *Animal Stories*, pp. 4 and 19.

³ *Tristrams saga*, p. 152.

artistic sources but curiously lacking in the literary corpus are dog ears, only mentioned in the verse in *Fagrskinna* about a jester fondling an earless dog. In general, poetry and sagas tend to provide very little detail about the physical appearance of their canine characters except where they deviate from the norm, like the colourful fur of Tristram's dog or Selsnautr being as large as a cow. It might therefore be inferred that medieval Icelanders and Scandinavians had enough basic knowledge about dogs to be able to picture the animal without requiring much detail from the texts.

As discussed in detail in chapter 2, sound is a key feature of the literary dog, the verb 'geyja' in particular setting the animal apart. This literary emphasis on barking may have strengthened its protective, dangerous, or ominous associations in the medieval Icelandic and Scandinavian imagination. When not kept leashed by humans or sitting at their feet, dogs in the middle of narratives are most often depicted running or leaping, often with great speed and/or strength. They fight predominantly with their teeth and claws, and have a keen sense of smell. Other canine behaviours may be pieced together from individual texts. *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, for instance, depicts a dog's propensity to roll over and display its belly as a sign of trust and submission, while *Magnúss saga* depicts it with its tail between its legs when scared. A few texts observe grieving behaviours in dogs and while some of these behaviours like shedding tears may be read as anthropomorphic, they nevertheless contribute to a picture of animal interiority and emotionality that could shape the way medieval Icelanders and Scandinavians understood their canine companions.

More than by their appearance or behaviour, dogs are usually set apart by the practical functions they play in human society. A dog is an animal that protects humans, that hunts for them, herds for them, fights for them, and offers them companionship. Christian writings may have attempted to push back against these positive human-dog connections, using textual narratives to push forward a new image of the dog as an unclean and dangerous animal tied to

the heathen past. As chapter 5 demonstrated with the original Icelandic hagiographies, however, this attempt was not entirely successful and dogs appear to have maintained their positions within human society.

This thesis has therefore argued, drawing on the concept of the refrain, that human society may be defined by the presence of dogs. In the same way, Old Norse-Icelandic literature seems to define dogs by their proximity to humans. Other than some of the demonic dogs of Christian texts, nearly all the dogs in this thesis and in the literary corpus are in some way integrated into society, usually as companions of humans (or humanoids, humanising them in the process). In fact, with very few exceptions, all dogs in the corpus are domesticated; there are no truly wild dogs in these worlds. Through its canine narratives, Old Norse-Icelandic literature thus turns dogs and humans into mutually defining categories, such that we may define dogs as the animals closest to humans and humans as the animals closest to dogs.

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APPENDIX A: DOGS WITH ACTIVE ROLES IN PLOT

Text(s)	Edition, first page occurrence	Dog(s)
<i>Völuspá</i> ; also <i>Gylfaginning</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 302	Garmr barks before Gnipahellir
<i>Hávamál</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 339	A grey is bound to Billingsr's <i>mær</i> 's bed
<i>Grimnismál</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 368	Geirrðör's <i>hundar</i> do not attack Óðinn
<i>Skírnismál</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 382	<i>Hundar</i> /Greyja guard Gerðr outside Gymir's hall
<i>Þrymskviða</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 423	Þrymr twists gold bands for his <i>greyja</i>
<i>Baldrs draumar</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 446	Óðinn meets a <i>hvelpr</i> on the way to Hel
<i>Rígsþula</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 455	Jarl learns to hunt with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Fjolsvinnsnámál</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 444	The <i>garma</i> / <i>hundar</i> Gífr and Geri guard Menglōð's hall
<i>Atlakviða</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 381	Guðrún releases the <i>hvelpar</i> before burning down Atli's hall
<i>Skaufhala bálkr</i>	Gade (2017), 969	A shepherd's <i>hundr</i> chases after a fox who has killed a sheep
<i>Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss</i>	Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsen (1991), 145	Snati is a loyal companion to Gestr
<i>Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss</i>	Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsen (1991), 161	All of King Óláfr's <i>varðhundar</i> are killed by Raknarr's scent, except Vígi
<i>Bjarnar saga Híttdælakappa</i>	Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (1938), 136	'V' is a loyal companion to Björn
<i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1954), 123	Otkell's <i>hundr</i> is killed while guarding his storehouse
<i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1954), 173	Sámr is a loyal companion to Gunnarr
<i>Egils saga</i>	Nordal (1933), 167	Young men have <i>hjarðtikur</i> / <i>hundar</i> to protect them from a bear
<i>Eyrbyggja saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (1935), 115	Egill's <i>dýrhundr</i> is carried away by an eagle
<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1936), 74	<i>Hundar</i> cannot stop a dangerous bear
<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1936), 115	A <i>draugr</i> kills <i>hundar</i> and horses
<i>Ljósvetninga saga</i>	Björn Sigfússon (1940), 51	The barking of a <i>hundr</i> alerts Þorkell to attackers approaching
<i>Ljósvetninga saga</i>	Björn Sigfússon (1940), 96	Úlfr stallara's <i>hundar</i> and <i>hundarsveinar</i> are rescued from a sinking boat
<i>Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu</i>	Björn Sigfússon (1940), 180	Konáll's <i>sporhundar</i> track down stolen oxen
<i>Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu</i>	Björn Sigfússon (1940), 225	Gautr's <i>hundr</i> Flóki alerts him to enemies approaching
<i>Svarfdæla saga</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson (1956), 184	A <i>tík</i> 's head is cut off and the body disguised as a human

<i>Sturlunga saga</i> ; also in <i>Guðmundar saga biskups A</i>	Guðrun Grímsdóttir (2021), II, 137	Hafr's <i>varðhundr</i> disappears
<i>Sturlunga saga</i>	Guðrun Grímsdóttir (2021), II, 144	Þorvaldr's <i>hundr</i> Buski marks his presence at home
<i>Sturlunga saga</i>	Guðrun Grímsdóttir (2021), II, 280	Jón's <i>etjuhundr</i> marks his presence in a chapel
<i>Sturlunga saga</i>	Guðrun Grímsdóttir (2021), II, 524	A <i>rakki/hundr</i> barks at the approach of men
<i>Sturlunga saga</i>	Guðrun Grímsdóttir (2021), III, 69	The <i>hundar</i> of Reykjaholt bark at the approach of men
<i>Hemings þáttir</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1887), 366	King Sveinn's <i>hjarðhundr</i> drops bread when seeing its reflection in the water
<i>Hrafn's þáttir</i> <i>Guðrúnarsonar</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1939), 327	King Magnús hunts with hawks and <i>hundar</i>
<i>Svaða þáttir ok Arnórs kerlingarnefs</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 436	Svadi's <i>hundr</i> and horse are killed and buried with him
<i>Vqlsa þáttir</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1862), 332	St Óláfr feeds the heathens' holy horse phallus to their <i>etjutik/hundr</i> Lærir
<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar</i>	Ólafur Halldórsson (2006), 176	Vígi is a loyal companion to King Óláfr
<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar</i>	Ólafur Halldórsson (2006), 284	King Óláfr looses dogs on an encircled man
<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar</i>	Ólafur Halldórsson (2006), 355	King Óláfr's dog Vígi does not let any other <i>hundar</i> , birds, or animals near his uneaten food
<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 392	Finnr burns a statue of Þórr and feeds the ashes to <i>greyhundar/bikkjur</i>
<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 436	A man is buried with <i>hundr</i> and horse
<i>Sverris saga</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson (2007), 271	Invaders kill the old and young, <i>hundar</i> and cats in Þelamörk
<i>Sverris saga (Mána þáttir Íslendinga)</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson (2007), 130	<i>Smárakkar/bikkjur</i> are trained by a court juggler to jump over a stick
<i>Orkneyinga saga</i>	Finnbogi Guðmundsson (1965), 74	Earl Rögnvaldr's <i>skikkjurakki</i> gives away his hiding-place by barking
<i>Magnúss saga skemmri/lengri</i>	Finnbogi Guðmundsson (1965), 314	King Magnús sends <i>sporhundar</i> after an escaped prisoner
<i>Jómsvíkingasaga</i> ; also in <i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson and Marteinn Sigurðsson (2018), 11	<i>Greyhundar</i> accompanying Earl Haraldr are silent but their unborn <i>hvelpar</i> bark
<i>Hákonar saga góða</i> ; also in <i>Óláfs saga helga, Hversu Noregr byggðist</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941), 164	King Eysteinn makes the <i>hundr</i> Saurr king over the people of Þrándheimr
<i>Óláfs saga helga</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1945), 131	King Óláfr Eriksson used hawks and <i>hundar</i> to hunt birds
<i>Óláfs saga helga</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1945), 257	Þóroddr is pursued by <i>sporhundar</i> when escaping from Jamtaland
<i>Magnússona saga</i> ; also in <i>Óláfs saga</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1951), 273	A Christian is pursued by <i>hundar</i> when escaping from Vinðland

<i>helga (Flateyjarbók)</i> and <i>Gammel norsk</i> <i>homiliebog</i>		
<i>Magnúss saga blinda</i> <i>ok Haralds gilla</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1951), 289	The <i>hundar</i> of Konungahellir go mad
<i>Hákonar saga</i> <i>Hákonarsonar</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson, Sverrir Jakobsson, and Ulset (2013), II, 182	King Hákon goes riding with <i>hundar</i> and hawks
<i>Fagrskinna</i>	Finnur Jónsson (1902–08), 12	A jester fondles an earless <i>hundr</i>
<i>Ásmundar saga</i> <i>Flagðagæfu</i>	Jón Árnason (1862), 171	Naddarnautr is a loyal companion first to a <i>risi</i> and then to Ásmundr
<i>Egils saga einhenda</i> <i>ok Ásmundar</i> <i>berserkjabana</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 163	Ásmundr and his <i>hundar</i> chase a hare
<i>Egils saga einhenda</i> <i>ok Ásmundar</i> <i>berserkjabana</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 166	Árán is buried with his <i>hundr</i> , hawk, and horse, each of which he later eats as a <i>draugr</i>
<i>Gautreks saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 3	King Gauti goes hunting with <i>veiðihundar</i>
<i>Gautreks saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 4	King Gauti finds his way out of a forest by following the sound of a dog barking; the dog is killed by its family
<i>Gautreks saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 35	Two <i>rakkar</i> with gold collars are exchanged multiple times as gifts
<i>Göngu-Hrólfs saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 388	King Eiríkr hunts a stag with his <i>hundar</i>
<i>Hálfðanar saga</i> <i>Eysteinnsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 306	Karlsnautr is gifted to Hálfðan and is a loyal companion
<i>Hálfðanar saga</i> <i>Eysteinnsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 305	Selsnautr is a loyal companion first to a <i>purs</i> and then to Hálfðan
<i>Hálfs saga ok</i> <i>Hálfsrekka</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 164	Hjörleifr strikes his <i>hundr</i> Flóki, but Flóki later saves his life
<i>Hervarar saga ok</i> <i>Heiðreks</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1943), 211	Queen Hervör wraps a <i>hundr</i> in a blanket in lieu of the king's son
<i>Hervarar saga ok</i> <i>Heiðreks</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1943), 212	King Heiðrekr goes hunting with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Hrólfs saga kraka</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 3	Vífill has two <i>hundar</i> , Hoppr and Hó, whose names are taken by princes in hiding
<i>Hrólfs saga kraka</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 18	Queen Ólǫf names her daughter after her <i>hundr</i> Yrsa
<i>Hrólfs saga kraka</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 44	Many <i>hundar</i> attack and are killed by the human/bear Björn
<i>Hrólfs saga kraka</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 75	The <i>hundr</i> Gramr tears apart a troll transformed into a bear
<i>Ragnars saga</i> <i>loðbrókar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1943), 106	Ári's <i>hundr</i> accompanies Kráka as a solution to Ragnarr's riddle
<i>Völsunga saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1943), 48	Sigurðr goes hunting with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Þorsteins saga</i> <i>Víkingssonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1944), 216	Gramr is a loyal companion to the <i>risi</i> Fullafli
<i>Guiamar</i> <i>(Strengleikr)</i>	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 14	The knight Guiamar goes hunting with <i>hundar/sporrakkar</i>

<i>Eskia (Strengleikr)</i>	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 48	A maiden finds a community of nuns by the sound of their barking <i>hundar</i>
<i>Equitan (Strengleikr)</i>	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 66	Sir Equitan goes hunting with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Bisclaret (Strengleikr)</i>	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 90	The king of Brittany and his <i>hundar</i> hunt a werewolf
<i>Desiré (Strengleikr)</i>	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 110	King Desiré goes hunting with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Tidorel (Strengleikr)</i>	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 136	King Tidorel goes hunting with <i>mjóhundar</i>
<i>Janual (Strengleikr)</i>	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 224	<i>Hundr</i> and hawk accompany the most beautiful otherworldly woman
<i>Erex saga</i>	Kalinke (1999), 224	King Arthur and his knights go hunting with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Flóvents saga</i>	Cederschiöld (1884), 177	Nobles hunt deer with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Hærra Ivan</i>	Williams and Palmgren (1999), 96	King Arthur and his knights go hunting with <i>leðehundar</i>
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 10	<i>Smárakkar/Hundar</i> are among the great retinue of Duke Herfi
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 376	The Franks and their <i>hundar</i> go hungry in a besieged castle
<i>Parcevals saga</i>	Wolf (1999), 176	Knights go hunting with <i>veiðihundar</i>
<i>Partalópa saga</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1949), 83	King Hlōðvir hunts a boar with his <i>hundar</i>
<i>Partalópa saga</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1949), 85	Partalópi has one or two loyal <i>hundar</i>
<i>Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar</i>	Jorgensen (1999), 58	Tristram and various kings and chieftains hunt deer with <i>sporrakkar</i> and <i>mjóhundar</i>
<i>Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar</i>	Jorgensen (1999), 62	King Markis puts Tristram in charge of his <i>sporrakkar</i>
<i>Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar</i>	Jorgensen (1999), 140 and 160	King Markis goes hunting with <i>veiðihundar/sporrakkar/hundar</i>
<i>Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar</i>	Jorgensen (1999), 152	A marvellous colourful <i>rakki/hundr</i> gets gifted from character to character, eventually loyal to Tristram and Ísönd
<i>Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar</i>	Jorgensen (1999), 176	The Duke's giant enemy takes his <i>hundar</i> hostage
<i>Trójumanna saga</i>	Louis-Jensen (1963), 2	Plútu's <i>varðhundr</i> Cerberus guards the underworld
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 34	Þiðrekr and Hildibrandr go hunting with hawks and <i>hundar</i>
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 203	King Attila and Vildifer go hunting with hawks and <i>veiðihundar</i>
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 208	King Osantrix tests his sixty <i>stórhundar/veiðihundar</i> against a bear
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 229	A <i>hundr</i> 's tongue is cut out instead of Queen Sisibe's
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 313	Jarl Íron puts Tristram in charge of his <i>veiðihundar</i>
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 346	Sigurðr and the Niflungar go hunting with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 549	Alibrandr rides a white horse with two <i>hundar</i> and a hawk
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 560	King Þiðrekr goes hunting with <i>hundar</i>

<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 562	King Þiðrekr goes hunting with his <i>hundar</i> , but they refuse to follow a demonic horse
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern (Írons þátrr jarls)</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 341	Jarl Íron has numerous named <i>hundar</i> , including Stutt, Stappi, Brakka, Porsa, Ruska, and Luska
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern (Írons þátrr jarls)</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 349	King Salomon frequently hunts with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern (Írons þátrr jarls)</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 367	Two of Jarl Íron's <i>hundar</i> mourn his death, along with his horse and two hawks
<i>Ála flekks saga</i>	Hui and others (2018), 22	Hlaðgerðr send her <i>hundr/skikkjurakki</i> to rescue Áli from a cave
<i>Dámusta saga</i>	Tan-Haverhorst (1939), 77	The <i>hundr</i> Albus/Asper/Ljoone is one of Dámusti's three great treasures, along with horse and hawk
<i>Dámusta saga</i>	Tan-Haverhorst (1939), 92	The giant Alheimr's <i>hundr</i> and other animals are killed by Dámusti's
<i>Drauma-Jóns saga</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1951), 160	A <i>rakki</i> 's heart is eaten instead of Jón's
<i>Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns B</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1951), 209	<i>Sporhundar</i> search for a missing princess
<i>Mágus saga jarls</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1949), 241	A crowd of <i>hundar</i> attack a man dressed in a costume of shells
<i>Samsons saga fagra</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsón (1949), 356	Ólympia makes her <i>mjótíkr</i> look like a beautiful maiden to save Valentina
<i>Sigurðar saga þøgla</i>	Loth (1963), 113	The people of the region hunt with hawks and <i>hundar</i>
<i>Páls leizla</i>	Bullitta (2017), 16	<i>Hundar</i> and other animals torture souls in hell
<i>St. Povel's Nedfart til Helvede</i> (Danish)	Brandt (1859), 28	Cerberus, <i>helvitis hundr</i> , reacts gloomily to a Sunday respite for sinners in hell
<i>Duggals leizla</i> ; also in <i>Tundalus och hans syn</i> (Swedish)	Cahill (1983), 36	<i>Hundar</i> and other animals torture souls in hell
<i>Martinus saga byskups</i>	Unger (1877), 568	Martin saves a hare from hunting <i>hundar</i>
<i>Martinus saga byskups</i>	Unger (1877), 570	Martin's disciples silence an aggressive <i>hundr</i>
<i>Vitae Patrum I</i>	Unger (1877), 367	Mice and <i>hundar</i> gnaw a monk's bread
<i>Vitae Patrum I</i>	Unger (1877), 477	A <i>hundr</i> bites a boy, who goes mad
<i>Vitae Patrum II</i>	Unger (1877), 568	A monk is attacked by <i>hundar</i> and birds as penance
<i>Rokúss saga</i>	Loth (1969), 141	Godderth's <i>dyrhundr</i> takes bread to St Roch every day
<i>Jóhannes saga gullmans</i>	Kalinke (2006), 216	Hunting <i>hundar</i> bark in chase of an animal
<i>Guðmundar saga biskups A</i>	Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1858), 444	Guðmunðr separates <i>hundar</i> fighting at a funeral
<i>Guðmundar saga biskups D</i>	Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1878), 138	A farmer's <i>rakki/hundr</i> is fatally wounded but healed
<i>Guðmundar saga biskups D</i>	Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1878), 148	Guðmundr has a vision of a strange dog-fight

<i>Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i>	Guðrún Helgadóttir (1987), 15	Bergþórr is given a <i>hundr</i> when a woman rejects him
<i>Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar</i>	Guðrún Helgadóttir (1987), 35	Rafn has a <i>hundr</i> Rósta, good in battle
<i>Sögubættir og Ættatölur Jóns Biskups Arasonar</i>	Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1878), 355	The Danes send <i>sporhundar</i> after two men
<i>Thomas saga erkibyskups I</i>	Unger (1869), 233	<i>Hundar</i> under the table of Robert de Broc refuse bread from his hands
<i>Péturs saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 87	Simon magus ties a <i>hundr</i> in front of St Peter's door
<i>Jóns saga postola I</i>	Unger (1874), 423	<i>Hundar</i> lick Lazarus' wounds
<i>Thomas saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 713	<i>Hundar</i> eat a man's remains and one carries his hand across a hall
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Unger (1871), 859	<i>Hundar</i> chase a sinful man off a bridge
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 207	Asenath gives her meat to <i>hundar</i>
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 207	Asenath hears <i>hundar</i> bark and cocks crow at dawn
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 283	The firstborns of all Egyptians, including their <i>rakkar</i> , are killed

APPENDIX B: INDIRECT DOG REFERENCES

Text(s)	Edition, first page occurrence	Dog(s)
<i>Hávamál</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 339	Advice to feed a <i>hundr</i> in the house
<i>Grímnismál</i> ; also in <i>Gylfaginning</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 377	Garmr is described as the best of <i>hundar</i>
<i>Helgakviða Hundingsbana II</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 279	Helgi says Hundingr will have to tie up the <i>hundar</i> in Valhöll
<i>Guðrúnarkviða II</i> ; also in <i>Völsunga saga</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 361	Atli dreams of loosing and eating his <i>hvelpar</i>
<i>Atlamál in Grœnlenzku</i> ; also in <i>Völsunga saga</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 387	Glaumvǫr dreams of wolves howling; Gunnarr interprets this as <i>hundar/rakkar</i> running
<i>Málsháttakvæði</i>	Frank (2017), 1219	A <i>gagarr</i> is said to be shaped for barking
<i>Skaufhala bálkr</i>	Gade (2017), 979	No long-legged <i>hundr</i> could catch the fox when he was younger
<i>Sturlunga saga</i>	Guðrún Grímsdóttir (2021), III, 179	The bishop ordered that food scraps should be given to <i>hundar</i>
<i>Sverris saga</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson (2007), 133	Bodies are to be left to <i>hundar</i> and ravens
<i>Sverris saga</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson (2007), 140	Enemies will be cut down as meat for <i>hundar</i> and ravens
<i>Sverris saga</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson (2007), 197	Nikolas says that Sverrir will become food for <i>hundar</i> and ravens
<i>Haraldssona saga</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1951), 345	'Dog-broth' is used to deconsecrate King Eysteinn's tomb

<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 323	Óláfr says that souls will be tortured in hell by snakes and <i>hundar</i>
<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 368	King Óláfr has his enemies torn to pieces by savage <i>hundar</i>
<i>Svaða þáttir ok Arnórs kerlingarnefs</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 438	Árnorrr decrees that <i>hundar</i> should be killed during a famine
<i>Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson, Sverrir Jakobsson, and Ulset (2013), II, 199	Archbishop Philippus says that a man is better suited to hunting with <i>hundar</i> than being a cleric
<i>Bósa saga ok Herrauðs</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 474	Busla curses Hringr to be gnawed in hell by <i>hundar</i>
<i>Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1943), 224	According to a cow/ox riddle, the animal wards off <i>hundar</i>
<i>Sqrla saga sterka</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 222	Sigmundr says his enemy will be killed for <i>hundr</i> and raven
<i>Volsunga saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1943), 21	Sinfjötli says in rhetorical flourish, “When you have fed your swine and <i>hundar</i> ...”
<i>Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1951), 139	There is such destruction that not a single <i>hundr</i> is left to bark
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 167	Jamund laments that he will never again see a <i>veiðihundr</i> go hunting
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 317	King Agulandus wishes to go hunting with <i>hundar</i> and hawks
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 372	King Charlemagne announces his intentions to go hunting with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 375	The Franks say they lost neither men nor horses, <i>hundar</i> nor hawks
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 485	Marsilius is advised to gift Charlemagne <i>hundar</i> and other valuable items
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 517	Corpses will go to holy places where wolves or <i>hundar</i> will not eat them
<i>Mottuls saga</i>	Kalinke (1999), 21	King Urien often went hunting with <i>hundaveiði</i> and hawks
<i>Parcevals saga (Valvens þáttir)</i>	Wolf (1999), 188	Gawain punished a knight by making him eat with <i>hundar</i>
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 26	King Samson demands great tribute, including sixty <i>veiðihundar</i>
<i>Saulus saga ok Nikanors</i>	Loth (1963), 68	There is such destruction that not a single <i>hundr</i> is left to bark
<i>Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs</i>	Loth (1964), 5	King Rikarðr often went hunting with <i>hundar</i> and hawks
<i>Duggals leizla; also in Tundalus och hans syn (Swedish)</i>	Cahill (1983), 49	<i>Bithundar</i> await Duggal inside an infernal oven-like house
<i>Agathu saga</i>	Unger (1877), 9	Agatha makes her torturer feel the pain of hell, where his soul will be torn apart by infernal <i>hundar</i>
<i>Fides Spes Caritas</i>	Unger (1877), 371	Emperor Adrianus says he will throw maidens’ bodies to <i>hundar</i>

<i>Gregorius saga</i>	Unger (1877), 383	A monk has a vision of a man setting black <i>hundar</i> upon him
<i>Vitae Patrum I</i>	Unger (1877), 390	Egyptians used to worship <i>hundar</i> and she-apes
<i>Gregors saga byskups</i>	Loth (1970), 24	Gregory asks an innkeeper to bring him food he gives his <i>hundar</i>
<i>Porkáks biskups saga hin yngri</i>	Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1858), 318	A woman hears a child fall into a vat of whey, but assumes it is a <i>hundr</i> or cat
<i>Thomas saga erkibyskups I</i>	Unger (1869), 16	A hunting man more suited to breeding <i>hundar</i> and falconry should not be appointed Archbishop
<i>Thomas saga erkibyskups I</i>	Unger (1869), 76	Becket says that he used to roam with <i>veiðihundar</i>
<i>Matheus saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 816	There is no barking of <i>hundar</i> in Paradise
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Unger (1871), 489	Elerin dreams of her unborn child as a white barking <i>smárakki</i>
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Unger (1871), 493	<i>Hundar</i> attack Peter Monoculus in a vision of Mary's hall
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 71	Indians are said to mate <i>rakkar/hundar</i> with tigers
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 81	Albanians are said to have <i>hundar</i> that can kill bulls and lions
<i>Stjorn</i>	Unger (1862), 304	It is said that meat bitten by an animal should be fed to <i>hundar</i>
<i>Konungs Skuggsjá</i>	Holm-Olsen (1983), 97	Kings in other places go hunting with <i>hundar</i>

APPENDIX C: DOG HYBRIDS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Text(s)	Edition, first page occurrence	Hybrid/Transformation
<i>Bósa saga ok Herrauðs</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 495	Witch transformed into a <i>glatunshundtik</i>
<i>Hrólfs saga kraka</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 45	Þórir hundsfótr is a human with the feet of a dog
<i>Sturlaugs saga starfsama</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 328	A Sámi and a Norse magician transform into <i>hundar</i> and eagles while fighting
<i>Bervers saga</i>	Sanders (2001), 347	A demon is cast out of a body in the form of a <i>hundr</i>
<i>Kirjalax saga</i>	Kålund (1917), 28	Cynocephali in the army of King Solldan
<i>Sigurðar saga þøgla</i>	Loth (1963), 177	Cynocephali in India
<i>Viktors saga ok Blávus</i>	Loth (1962), 31	A berserker transforms into a savage <i>hundr</i> in battle
<i>Dunstanus saga</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon (2012), 389	A host of demons in the form of <i>hundar</i> attack Dunstan
<i>Dunstanus saga</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon (2012), 406	The devil is cast out of a body in the form of a <i>smárakki</i>
<i>Guðmundar saga biskups A</i>	Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1858), 446	Children invoke Guðmundr's name to banish a demonic <i>hundr</i>

<i>Péturs saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 91	Simon magus makes barking <i>hundar</i> from stones
<i>Péturs saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 95	Simon magus summons demonic <i>hundar</i> to attack St Peter
<i>Andreas saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 324	Demons in the form of <i>hundar</i> attack people and kill a child
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Unger (1871), 116	A demon attacks a drunk monk in the form of a <i>hundr</i> , a bull, and a lion
<i>Stjörn</i>	Unger (1862), 68	Cynocephali in India
<i>Qnnu saga</i>	Loth (1970), 446	The devil takes the form of a black <i>hundr</i>

APPENDIX D: DOG SIMILES, METAPHORS, AND INSULTS

Text(s)	Edition, page	Metaphor
<i>Skaufhala bálkr</i>	Gade (2017), 956 and 967	The fox is described as <i>hunds jafningi</i>
<i>Skaufhala bálkr</i>	Gade (2017), 973	The fox is <i>hundeygðr</i> in fright
<i>Íslendingabók</i> ; also <i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i> and <i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar</i>	Jakob Benediktsson (1968), 15	<i>Grey þykki mér Freyja [...]</i> <i>Óðinn grey eða Freyja</i>
<i>Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss</i>	Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991), 153	The <i>pursar</i> rip apart meat <i>sem ernir ok etjutíkr</i>
<i>Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss</i>	Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991), 153	Glámr <i>grenjaði upp sem varghundur</i>
<i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1954), 234	Gunnar Lambason and Grana Gunnarsson are called <i>hvelpar</i>
<i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1954), 452	Insult or descriptor of loyalty: <i>Runnið hefir hundur þinn, Pétur postoli</i>
<i>Eyrbyggja saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson and Matthias Þórðarson (1935), 61	Berserkers go mad <i>sem hundar</i>
<i>Eyrbyggja saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson and Matthias Þórðarson (1935), 106	“They will need to <i>draga okkr í sundr sem hunda</i> ”
<i>Fljótsdæla saga</i>	Jón Jóhannesson (1950), 255	Nollar <i>sitja á hyrniskríku sem hundr</i>
<i>Fljótsdæla saga</i>	Jón Jóhannesson (1950), 265	Insult: “You lie quietly <i>sem hundr á hvelpum</i> ”
<i>Fóstbræðra saga</i> ; also in <i>Óláfs saga helga (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Björn Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943), 258	Grímr is said to have <i>hunds verk unnit</i> , in this case killing a man
<i>Færeyinga saga</i>	Ólafr Halldórsson (2006), 83	Þrándr sniffs <i>sem hann rekði spor sem hundar</i>
<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1936), 44	Grettir says they need not <i>halda á sér sem ólmum hundi</i>
<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1936), 67	Berserkers <i>grenja sem hundar</i>
<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1936), 126	Þorbjörn says Ásmundr <i>kafnaði í stofureyk sem hundr</i>
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>	Björn Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943), 13	They get far away enough to be <i>ór hunda hljóðum</i>
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>	Björn Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943), 84	Insult: <i>mannhundr mikill</i>

<i>Gisla saga Súrssonar</i>	Björn Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943), 101	Insult: <i>hundr</i>
<i>Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls</i>	Jóhannes Halldórsson (1959), 369	Insult: <i>bólvuðum hundum</i>
<i>Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds</i> ; also in <i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1939), 146	Insult: Hallfreðr says he is as afraid as he would be of a <i>búrhundr gamall</i>
<i>Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1939), 175	Skaldic insults: <i>hundr</i> , <i>hundgeðjuðr</i>
<i>Hænsa-Þóris saga</i>	Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (1938), 40	Insult: <i>hundrinn þinn</i>
<i>Kjalnesinga saga</i>	Jóhannes Halldórsson (1959), 10	Insult: <i>hundr</i>
<i>Kormáks saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1939), 217	Skaldic insult: beaten like a <i>tík</i>
<i>Vatnsdæla saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1939), 61	Insult: <i>mestr mannhundr</i>
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<i>Sverris saga</i>	Þorleifur Hauksson (2007), 197	A duel between Sverrir and Nikólás would be like a <i>greyja ágangr</i> , <i>er í hvárigum er hugrinn</i>
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<i>Haralds saga ins Háfagra</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941), 135	Two Sámi men <i>rekja spor sem hundar</i>
<i>#Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941), 310	Insult: Óláfr calls Queen Sigríðr <i>hundheiðin</i>
<i>Óláfs saga helga</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1945), 285	The Svíar <i>þorðu men sem hunda</i>

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Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 354	Insult: <i>mannhundr</i>
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<i>Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 212	Ógautan in the form of a fox is called <i>bikkjustakkrinn</i>
<i>Qrvar-Odds saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1943), 324	Oddr mistakes the sound of berserkers for <i>hundar ýli</i> and other noises
<i>Qrvar-Odds saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1943), 339	The king of the <i>risar</i> is the one who <i>ólmastan hund á</i> – this ‘dog-fight’ includes wolves and bears
<i>*Qrvar-Odds saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1943), 394	Men are harried <i>sem refar hundum</i>
<i>Alexanders saga</i>	Unger (1848), 31	A battle is described using an extensive metaphor about a wolf, sheep, shepherd, and <i>hundr</i>
<i>Alexanders saga</i>	Unger (1848), 173	An old man is <i>svartan tentan sem hund</i>
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[#] <i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 259	Insult: <i>hinn hundheiðinn</i>
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<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 305	Insult: <i>illa hundr</i>
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[#] <i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 360	Insult: <i>heiðnir hundar</i>
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[#] <i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 367	Insult: <i>heiðnir hundar</i>
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[#] <i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 491	King Marsilius is <i>hinn heiðinn hundr</i>
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[#] <i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 505	Valterne is <i>heiðinn sem hundr</i>
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[*] <i>Parcevals saga</i>	Wolf (1999), 174	A knight <i>eigi þorir heldr at hræraz en húkandi heri fyrir hundi</i>
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# <i>Jacobs saga postola I</i>	Unger (1874), 519	Lupa is <i>heiðin sem hundr</i>
<i>Tveggja postola saga Jons ok Jacobs</i>	Unger (1874), 604	Men are trapped <i>sem olmir hundar i einni holu</i>
# <i>Tveggja postola saga Jons ok Jacobs</i>	Unger (1874), 638	Some Romans are <i>verr en hundheiðinn</i>
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Unger (1871), 986	Insult: <i>hinn verstí hundr</i>
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Unger (1871), 1055	Insult: <i>bolvaðr hundr</i>
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 37	There will be enmity between mankind and serpents just as there is <i>milli hunda ok varga</i>
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 99	The <i>formicaleon</i> becomes <i>sva storr sem smarakkar</i>
# <i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 493	Insult: <i>þessir vansignaðir hæiðingjar hundar</i> (only in A recension)
<i>Viðræða æðru ok hugrekkis (Hauksbók)</i>	Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson (1892–96), 306	Evil men are like <i>sumum hundum holldgroið at oft geygia þeir saklaust</i>
<i>Gammel norsk homiliebog</i>	Unger (1864), 22 and 199	Humans who refer to former sins are like a <i>hundr er snyst aptr til spyju sinnar</i>
<i>Gammel norsk homiliebog</i>	Unger (1864), 104	Some think church bells should be louder than <i>hundr gauli</i>
# <i>Gammel norsk homiliebog</i>	Unger (1864), 152	Insult: <i>hæiðnir hundar</i>
<i>Leifar</i>	Þorvaldur Bjarnarson (1878), 38	Priests speak against wickedness, <i>sva sem hundar gøia i gegn þiðpom; hunda slecing</i> can also signify flatterers
<i>Konungs Skuggsjá</i>	Holm-Olsen (1983), 14	Some men in the North are faster than <i>miohundr a rás</i>
* <i>Konungs Skuggsjá</i>	Holm-Olsen (1983), 15	The grampus is ravenous for whales <i>suo miog sem hundar</i>

<i>Konungs Skuggsjá</i>	Holm-Olsen (1983), 26	Some men are so fast that <i>æigi fa aðrer mænnalgast funnd þæira oc æi miohunndar</i>
<i>Islandske Annaler</i>	Storm (1888), 490	King Tamerlane was <i>micell tyranne og blodhundr</i>

* metaphors related to hunting

references to dogs and heathenism

APPENDIX E: DOG KENNINGS

Text	Edition, page	Kenning	Referent
<i>Helgakviða Hundingsbana I</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 249	Viðris grey	wolves / Geri and Freki
<i>Helreið Brynhildar</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 351	hrotgarmr viðar	fire
<i>Hamdismál</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 413	grey norna	wolves
Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, <i>Haustlǫng</i>	Clunies Ross (2017), 447	hrynsævar hræva hund	wolf
Sturla Þórðarson, <i>Hákonarkviða</i>	Gade (2009), 705	viðar hundr	fire
Sturla Þórðarson, <i>Hákonarkviða</i>	Gade (2009), 705	svipkarr selju rakki	fire
<i>Krákumál</i>	McTurk (2017), 728	ræstr rægagarr	sword
Tindr Hallkelsson, <i>Hákonardrápa</i>	Poole (2012), 345	seilar sólgagarr	sword
Halldórr skvaldri, <i>Útfarardrápa</i>	Gade (2009), 491	bræðir benja tíkr	warrior
<i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1954), 455	hjálmagarr	sword
<i>Egils saga</i>	Sigurður Nordal (1933), 82	hróðri hagr brimrótar gagra	sea-snail shells
<i>Fóstbræðra saga</i>	Björn Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943), 136	elris hundr	wind
<i>Kormáks saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1939), 290	blaðshund	sword
<i>Magnússona saga</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1951), 251	benja tíkr bræðir	warrior
<i>Óláfs saga helga (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1862), 98	elrishundrinn	wind
Snorri Sturluson, <i>Háttatal</i>	Faulkes (1991), 32	lim-Garmr	storm
<i>Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar</i>	Heslop (2012), 1038	limgarmr	fire
Arnórr Þórðarson, <i>Hrynhenda, Magnússdrápa</i>	Whaley (2009), 195	geystri fýris garmr	wind
<i>Runhenda</i>	Gade (2009), 556	fyriskógar garmr	fire
Sturla Þórðarson, <i>Hrynhenda</i>	Valgerður Þorvaldsdóttir (2009), 687	elris garmr	fire

Sturla Þórðarson, <i>Hákonarkviða</i>	Gade (2009), 704	leystan elris gram	fire
Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, <i>Ynglingatal</i>	Marold (2012), 14	glóða garmr glymjandi	fire
Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, <i>Sexsteffa</i>	Whaley (2009), 136	hár hrótgarmr	fire
Óttarr svarti, <i>Höfuðlausn</i>	Townend (2012), 741	garms ok Gauta glaðnistanda	warrior
Einnarr Skúlason, fragments	Gade (2017), 157	dýrum blíksólar Garmi	weapon
Gunnlaugr Leifsson, <i>Merlínusspá</i>	Poole (2017), 165	gránir garmar slíðra	swords
Þórðr Kolbeinsson, <i>Eiríksdrápa</i>	Carroll (2012), 493	huggendr sárgarms	warriors
<i>Skáldhelgarímur</i>	Finnur Jónsson (1913–22), 130	borða garm	ship
<i>Geðraunir</i> (<i>Hrings rímur ok</i> <i>Tryggva</i>)	Finnur Jónsson (1913–22), 243	lægis garm	ship
<i>Sálus rímur ok</i> <i>Níkanórs</i>	Finnur Jónsson (1913–22), 701	fetla garmi	sword
<i>Sálus rímur ok</i> <i>Níkanórs</i>	Finnur Jónsson (1913–22), 756	benja Garm	sword
<i>Norna-Gests þáttur</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 356	hrotgarm viðar	fire
<i>Qrvar-Odds saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1943), 392	hrotgarm viðar	fire

APPENDIX F: ‘GEYJA’

Text(s)	Edition, page	Source of sound
<i>Atlamál in</i> <i>Grænlenzku</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 387	Glaumvqr’s dream wolves are interpreted as dogs that <i>geyja</i>
<i>Málsháttakvæði</i>	Frank (2017), 1219	A dog is made to <i>geyja</i>
<i>Skaufhala bálkr</i>	Gade (2017), 972	A dog <i>geyja</i> when it cannot catch a fox
<i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1954), 123	A dog does not <i>geyja</i> at a familiar thief
<i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1954), 173	Sámr will <i>geyja</i> at anyone who means Gunnarr harm
<i>Ljósvetninga saga</i>	Björn Sigfússon (1940), 51	<i>Hundgá</i> signals approaching enemies
<i>Reykðæla saga ok</i> <i>Víga-Skútu</i>	Björn Sigfússon (1940), 226	Flóki <i>geyja</i> up at enemies on a mountain
<i>Sturlunga saga</i> (<i>Íslendinga saga</i>)	Guðrún Grímsdóttir (2021), II, 144	People know Þorvaldr is at home because his dog <i>geyja</i> (only in BLAdd 11127*)
<i>Sturlunga saga</i> (<i>Svínfellinga saga</i>)	Guðrún Grímsdóttir (2021), II, 524	A dog in the kitchen <i>geyja</i> when it senses danger
<i>Sturlunga saga</i> (<i>Þorgils saga</i> <i>skarða</i>)	Guðrún Grímsdóttir (2021), III, 69	Dogs <i>geyja</i> at approaching attackers

<i>Hákonar saga góða</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941), 164	Saurr <i>geyja</i> three words and speaks the third
<i>Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)</i> ; also in <i>Jómsvíkingasaga</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1860), 103	Unborn puppies <i>geyja</i> in their mothers' bellies
<i>Orkneyinga saga</i>	Finnbogi Guðmundsson (1965), 74	Earl Rognvaldr's dog <i>geyja</i> and gives away his hiding-place
<i>Magnúss saga skemmri</i>	Finnbogi Guðmundsson (1965), 314	A dog <i>geyja</i> up at Magnús hiding in a tree
<i>Gautreks saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 4	Gauti follows the sound of <i>hundsgá</i> out of a forest
<i>Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 166	Flóki <i>geyja</i> when it senses danger
<i>Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 82	"This is how we usually beat out dogs when they <i>geyja</i> too loud"
<i>Eskia (Strengleikr)</i>	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 48	A maiden heads out of the forest to a town where she hears dogs <i>geyja</i>
<i>Bervers saga</i>	Sanders (2001), 173	A giant's voice is like if ten dogs <i>geyja</i>
<i>Erex saga</i>	Kalinke (1999), 225	Hunting dogs <i>geyja</i>
<i>Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1951), 139	There is such destruction that not a single dog is left to <i>geyja</i>
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Unger (1860), 376	Starved dogs <i>geyja</i> in hunger (only in B recension)
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern (Írons þáttur jarls)</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 368	Grieving dogs <i>geyja</i> (only in AM 177 fol.)
<i>Mágus saga jarls</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1949), 241	Dogs <i>geyja</i> while attacking a costumed man
<i>Saulus saga ok Nikanors</i>	Loth (1963), 68	There is such destruction that not a single dog is left to <i>geyja</i>
<i>Jóhannes saga gullmans</i>	Kalinke (2006), 216	Dogs <i>geyja</i> on the hunt
<i>Martinus saga byskups</i>	Unger (1877), 570	A savage dog <i>geyja</i> at Martin's disciples
<i>Vincensius saga</i>	Unger (1877), 322	A haughty man is compared to a dog that <i>geyja</i>
<i>Thomas saga erkibyskups II</i>	Unger (1869), 356	Bad priests are like dogs who cannot <i>geyja</i>
<i>Péturs saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 91	Simon magus creates dogs that <i>geyja</i> out of stone
<i>Viðræða æðru ok hugrekkis (Hauksbók)</i>	Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson (1892–96), 306	Some dogs <i>geyja</i> without reason
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 208	Asneth hears dogs <i>geyja</i> at dawn
<i>Gregory's Homilies</i>	Þorvaldur Bjarnarson (1878), 38	Dogs <i>geyja</i> at thieves
<i>Gregory's Homilies</i>	Þorvaldur Bjarnarson (1878), 38	Bad priests are like dogs who cannot <i>geyja</i>
<i>Statuta Eilífs erkibyskups</i>	Jón Þorkelsson (1893), 625	Bad priests are like dogs who cannot <i>geyja</i>
<i>Kirjalax saga</i>	Kålund (1917), 28	Cynocephali <i>geyja</i> like dogs
<i>Sigurðar saga þøgla</i>	Loth (1963), 177	Cynocephali <i>geyja</i> like dogs
<i>Alfræði íslenzk (AM 194 8°)</i>	Kålund (1908), 35	Cynocephali in India have dog heads and <i>geyja</i>

<i>Antonius saga</i>	Unger (1877), 60	Demons <i>geyja</i> and make fearsome noise
<i>Hávamál</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 349	Advice for men to not <i>geyja</i> at guests
<i>Íslendingabók</i> ; also in <i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i> and <i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar</i>	Jakob Benediktsson (1968), 15	In verse: “I do not wish to <i>geyja</i> at the gods.”
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>	Loth (1960), 59	Álfðis <i>geyja</i> (possibly shouts or curses)
<i>Klements saga</i>	Larsson (1885), 67	A man <i>geyja</i> (possibly mocks or taunts) another
<i>Sebastíanuss saga</i>	Unger (1877), 233	A man is said to <i>geyja</i> (possibly mock or blaspheme) the lord’s name
<i>Bjarkeyjarréttr</i>	Storm (1885), 96	Legal clause about men who <i>geyja</i> (possibly insult or quarrel with) each other
<i>Fóstbræðra saga</i>	Björn Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943), 136	The wind (‘elris hundr’) is said to <i>geyja</i>
<i>Óláfs saga helga</i> (<i>Flateyjarbók</i>)	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1862), 98	The wind (‘elris hundrinn’) is said to <i>geyja</i>

APPENDIX G: LEXICON OF DOG SOUNDS (OTHER THAN ‘GEYJA’)

Text(s)	Edition, page	Sound and context
<i>Guíamar</i> (<i>Strengleikr</i>)	Cook and Tveitane (1979), 14	A deer is frightened by <i>gauð sporrakkana</i>
<i>Matheus saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 816	There is no <i>hunda gauþ</i> in Paradise
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Unger (1871), 859	Dogs chase a sinful monk with great <i>gauð</i> (and <i>gnollran</i>)
<i>Stjórn</i>	Unger (1862), 68	The <i>gauð</i> of cynocephali shows them little less to be dogs than men
<i>Alfræði íslenzk</i> (<i>Hauksbók</i>)	Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson (1892–96), 166	Cynocephali in India have dog heads and <i>gauð</i>
<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1936), 67	Berserkers <i>grenja sem hundar</i>
<i>Vatnsdæla saga</i>	Einar Sveinsson (1939), 124	Berserkers <i>grenjuðu sem hundar</i>
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i> (<i>Írons þáttur jarls</i>)	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 368	Grieving dogs <i>grenja</i> (and <i>gnollra</i>)
<i>Flóres saga konungs</i>	Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1951), 87	Berserkers <i>grenjuðu sem hundar</i>
<i>Sigurðar saga þøgla</i>	Loth (1963), 148	A lion is mistaken for a dog that <i>grenja</i>
<i>Andreas saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 361	Demons in the form of dogs disappear <i>með mikilli ylingu ok grenian</i> (only in second recension)
<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar</i> (<i>Flateyjarbók</i>)	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1862), 520	Vígi mourns King Óláfr, <i>gnollrandi</i> (and <i>gnístandi</i>)
<i>Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 307	Karlsnautr leaps <i>gnollrandi</i> at a boar
<i>Þiðreks saga af Bern</i> (<i>Írons þáttur jarls</i>)	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 368	Grieving dogs <i>gnollra</i> (and <i>grenja</i>) (<i>gnollta</i> in AM 178 fol.)

<i>Piðreks saga af Bern (Írons þáttir jarls)</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 370	Grieving dogs <i>gnollra</i>
<i>Mariu saga</i>	Unger (1871), 859	Dogs chase a sinful monk with great <i>gnollran</i> (and <i>gaud</i>)
<i>Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarðarson (1951) 293	Heathen men <i>ýldu</i> like dogs or wolves
<i>Qrvar-Odds saga</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1943), 324	Oddr thinks he hears dogs <i>ýla</i>
<i>Flóvents saga I</i>	Cederschiöld (1884), 132	Heathens <i>ýla sem hundar</i>
<i>Karlamagnús saga</i>	Jensen (1860), 219	The people of the forest <i>ýla sem hundar</i>
<i>Andreas saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 324 and 361	Demons <i>ýldu</i> in the form of dogs
<i>Baldrs draumar</i>	Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014), 446	Óðinn meets a whelp in Hel who <i>gól um lengi</i>
<i>Bervers saga</i>	Sanders (2001), 347	A demon is cast out of a body in the form of a <i>gaulandi</i> dog
<i>Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar</i>	Jorgensen (1999), 58	Dogs on the hunt <i>gólu</i> and <i>goptu</i>
<i>Péturs saga postola</i>	Unger (1874), 87	A <i>gaulandi</i> dog chases Simon magus
<i>Gammel norsk homiliebog</i>	Unger (1864), 104	Some think church bells should be louder than <i>hundr gauli</i>
<i>Sturlunga saga (Íslendinga saga); also in Guðmundar saga biskups A</i>	Guðrún Grímsdóttir (2021), II, 73	Grundarmenn <i>gelstu sem hundar</i>
<i>Sturlaugs saga starfsama</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 336	Guards in Hundingjaland <i>gjöltu sem hundar</i>
<i>Sögubættir og Ættatölur Jóns Biskups Arasonar</i>	Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1878), 355	Dogs <i>gelstu</i> at men they are tracking
<i>Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarðarson (1951) 293	Heathen men, earlier said to <i>ýldu</i> like dogs or wolves, also <i>ýldu ok gnístu</i>
<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Flateyjarbók)</i>	Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger (1862), 520	Vígi mourns King Óláfr, <i>gnístandi</i> (and <i>gnollrandi</i>)
<i>Piðreks saga af Bern (Írons þáttir jarls)</i>	Guðni Jónsson (1951), 590	Grieving dogs <i>gnístu</i>
<i>Brennu-Njáls saga</i>	Einarr Sveinsson (1954), 186	A dying Sámr <i>kvað við hátt</i>
<i>Sturlunga saga (Íslendinga saga)</i>	Guðrún Grímsdóttir (2021), II, 144	People know Þorvaldr is at home because his dog <i>kvað við</i> (only in BLAdd 11127 ^x)
<i>Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla</i>	Bjarni Aðalbjarðarson (1951) 289	Mad dogs <i>léstu illa</i>
<i>Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 308	Selsnautr approaches Hálfðan <i>með gapanda ginit ok lætr allólmliga</i>
<i>Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar</i>	Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1944), 218	Gramr <i>illa lét</i> in the night