WULF, MIN WULF: AN ECLECTIC ANALYSIS OF THE WOLF-MAN

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Abstract

Among others, Bouman pointed out that the obscurity of the Old English poem *Wulf and Eadwacer* has continued to challenge as well as confuse the critics for a long time (1949: 104):

As early as 1842 Thorpe wrote “Of this I can make no sense, nor am I able to arrange the verses” (*Codex Exoniensis*, p. 527). In 1916 G. Budjuhn declared: “until today this piece of Old English literature has been the subject of almost desperate efforts by English philologists” (*Anglia* 40, p. 256) W.W. Lawrence (1902) was of the same opinion: “There are few questions concerning Anglo-Saxon literature which have been more widely discussed than the interpretation of the so-called First Riddle of Cynewulf” “Both language and grammatical construction are unusually obscure” (*PMLA* 17, p. 247). Again in 1920 Imelman repeated: “The whole history of the research about this poem, by more than two generations of investigators, shows that this short lament has proved to be almost impenetrable to the pious efforts of numerous philologists” (*Forschungen zur altenglischen Poesie*, p. 73).

By going back in time and trying to understand the literature of long ago I hope to have added some light in the darkness, which surrounds this mysterious and hauntingly beautiful elegy.

In the poem, *Eadwacer* and the *hwelp* are mentioned once only but the name of *Wulf* is mentioned five times, which means that he is the most important figure of the poem. Orton listed the sources of the name *Wulf*, which is written with a small *wynn* in the MS, and he concluded that it did not occur as a personal name in England before the second half of the 10th century. Although he said that ‘In *Beowulf* there are two references to *Wulf* the Geat, son of Wonred (2965) and brother of Iofor (2993 *Iofore and Wulfe*)’...,¹ Orton did not think that the early date of *Beowulf*’s composition was very important and he continued by adding several examples of *wulf* as a ‘metaphor for a

human being': in Christ 256, *se awyrgda wulf* refers to the devil and in the *Martyrology* St Babylas calls the heathen emperor Numerianus a *deofles wulf*. Compounds like *heoruwulf* 'fierce wolf', *wæl-wulf* 'slaughter wolf', *herewulf* and *hildewulf* both 'war-wolf' were used for fierce fighters but even the expression *uulues heued* 'wolf's head', which is a term for an outlaw,² did not impress Orton, who claimed that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is the story of a pack of real wolves in the woods, with *Eadwacer*, the property-watcher, as the narrator's mate and *Wulf* the father of the *hwelp*. Because Orton was not entirely convinced that his conception of real wolves in *Wulf and Eadwacer* was justified he felt that 'A different explanation of the poem's genesis seems to be called for -one founded on a view of the man-wolf analogy, not as an analysable and reversible transaction between man and wolf, but as an indivisible, synthetic conception'³ Indeed, the question is: what or who is *Wulf*, who is capable of inspiring such powerful feelings of love and languid longing?

It was Magoun who recognized as a recurrent theme the presence of the wolf, the eagle and the raven on a battlefield in Anglo-Saxon poetry and he offered twelve poems with examples of these beasts of battle.⁴ Although Magoun wrote that many themes in Anglo-Saxon poetry would never be identified, an explanation for this particular theme may be offered. The Old Norse myths tell about a wolf and an eagle, guarding that gate of Valhalla where the most valiant warriors lived.⁵ The raven was a messenger of the gods and the ravens Hugin (mind) and Munin (memory) told Odin everything they saw. In addition, the Ashr-Yggr-drasill, the ash-tree that was the horse of Yggr (=Wodan), had an eagle in top that watched over the world. The eagle informed a squirrel that ran down to Vingolf, the court of justice, which was under the tree.⁶ The name of Odin was also connected with the wolves Geri and Freki (Greed and Voracity), and they received all the food that was offered to Odin. Furthermore, the world-wolf Fenrir devoured the sun and the moon as well as Odin at Ragnarok⁷ and riding on wolves the *valkyries* brought the fallen heroes over Bifrost (the rainbow) to Valhalla.⁸ The 'horse of the *valkyrie*' was a kenning for the wolf but the grisly occupation of these beasts of battle was to devour the bodies of the slain warriors on the battlefield, which connects Odin and paganism with war, death and destruction.

The connection with the North was also noticed by Lawrence,⁹ who pointed out that the refrain as well as the strophic structure in *Wulf and Eadwacer* reminded him of the Old Norse verse form *ljóðaháttir*. The phrase *on þreat cuman* in lines 2 and 7 could not be found in Anglo-Saxon poetry, while *at þrotum koma* was often used in Old Norse. Uncompounded *īg* in lines 4 and 6 occurred seldom in Anglo-Saxon, but in Old Norse *ey* was the regular word for island. Lawrence also compared *to þon* in line 12 with Old Norse *at því*, *seldcymas* in line 14 with Old Norse *sjaldkvæmr* and *meteliste* in line 15 with Old Norse *matleysa*. He concluded that the poem was probably written in Old Norse and later translated into Anglo-Saxon.

After the publication of Lawrence's article, Schofield¹⁰ proposed an Old Norse source for *Wulf and Eadwacer*. In his opinion, the poem was connected with 'Signy's Lament' in the *Völsungasaga*. In this Lament Schofield found several explanations for the name of *Wulf*. In Old Norse the words *ulfr* and *vargr* were used for an outlaw and Sigmund's ancestor Sigi was called a wolf because he had killed a slave. Sigmund also belonged to the race of the Wolfings, the *Ylfingar* in Old Norse and *Wylfyngas* in Anglo-Saxon. Another explanation was that Sigmund and his son Sinfjötli lived as werewolves in the forest for some time. Schofield also pointed out that the story of Sigmund was already mentioned in *Beowulf* (876 ff), showing that as early as the seventh century the story was known in England.^{11,12} However, in this passage Sinfjötli (Fitela) is Sigmund's nephew instead of his son and no mention is made of Signy. Schofield linked myth to reality by giving a legal example of the term wolf for an outlaw¹³:

The laws of Edward the Confessor (§ 6) speak as follows of one who has fled justice: "Si postea repertus fuerit et teneri possit, vivus regi reddatur, vel caput ipsius si se defenderit; lupinum enim caput geret a die utlægacionis, quod ab Anglis *whuesheved* nominatur. Et hæc sententia communis est de omnibus utlagis"...The phrase "to cry wolf's-head," as synonymous with outlawry, is several times used in the Middle English *Tale of Gamelyn*...

Moreover, in two Old Norse works Pulsiano and Wolf¹⁴ found the compound *vargdropi*, which means 'wolf-dropping' or the cub of a wolf, as a reference to the son of an outlaw being called a *hwelp*. It appears as a legal term in *Arfapáttir*, which is found in the Codex Regius¹⁵:

þat barn er oc eigi arfgengt er kona su getr er sec er orðin scogar maðr. þo at hon geti með sinom boanda osekiom oc heitir sa besingr. þat barn er oc eigi arfgengt er

sa maðr getr er secr er orðiN scogar maðr. þoat hann geti við siNi kono siálfs. sa maðr heitir vargdropi.¹⁶

That child is also not a lawful heir got by a woman under penalty as a full outlaw, even though she gets him by her husband who is not under penalty, and he is called a “cribbling”. That child is also not a legitimate heir got by a man under penalty as a full outlaw, even though he has the child by his own wife. Such a man is called a ‘-wolf’s cub’.

The second reference of the term *vargdropi* occurs in *Sigrdrífumál* of the *Elder Edda*. This story tells of Sigurðr, who rides to Hindarfjall where he finds Sigrdrífa, a *valkyrie*, asleep in the middle of a ring of fire. Sigurðr wakes her and she tells him that she was punished by Odin for causing the death of the old but valiant king Helm-Gunnar, who fought king Agnar contrary to Odin’s wishes. Therefore, he pricked her with his ‘sleep thorn’ and decided that she should marry and never participate in war again. Sigrdrífa vowed that she would marry only a man without fear and fell asleep. The *valkyrie* instructs Sigurðr in pagan wisdom and the son of an outlaw, *vargdropi*, is mentioned in stanza 35 of *Sigrdrífumál*.¹⁷

Þat ræð ec þér it tíunda, at þú trúir aldri
várom vargdropa,
hvárstu ert bróður bani,
eða hafir þú feldan föður:
úlfr er í ungom syni,
þótt sé hann gulli gladdr.

That counsel I tenth, that thou trust never
oath of an outlaw’s son;
whether art his brother’s bane, or felled his father:
a wolf oft sleeps in his son, though young,
and glad of the gold though he be.

In the same way as Schofield, Pulsiano and Wolf found legal as well as mythical evidence to strengthen the idea that *Wulf* is an outlaw and an evil man.

In the introduction of Marcel Otten’s book *De Saga van de Völsungenen, Völsungasaga*, van den Toorn writes that the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Völsungasaga* and the *Elder Edda* have much subject matter in common.¹⁸ To my surprise, a treasury of examples as well as a further explanation for the name of *Wulf* can be found in the *Edda*: Pulsiano’s example from *Sigrdrífumál* is repeated in stanza 12 of *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, The Short Lay of Sigurth: Brynhild advises her husband Gunnar not only to kill Sigurth but also his

little son, 'the cub of the wolf', since the son will surely seek revenge for the death of his father.¹⁹

In addition, female *berserkir* and she-wolves are mentioned in *Hárbarðsljóð*²⁰ or The Lay of Hárbarth, and Thór says in stanza 37:

‘Brúðir berserkja barðag í Hléseyju,
þær höfðu verst unnið, véltu þjóð alla.’ (1998: 109).

‘Against berserk women I warred on Hlésey;
with wickedness they bewitched all men.’ (1928: 93).

That the female *berserkir* are she-wolves is mentioned in stanza 39:

‘Vargynjur voru þær en varla konur,
skelldu skip mitt er eg skorðað hafðag,
ægðu mér járnurki en eltu þjálf.’... (1998: 109).

‘She-wolves were they, not women, indeed;
they shook my ship which was shored on land,
threatened me with iron clubs, and drove off Thialfi.’... (1928: 93).

However, Hollander suggests that these verses point to sea goddesses and their iron clubs are the waves that hit Thrór’s ship on the shore.

Furthermore, The Lay of Volund the Smith, *Völundarkviða*, is one of the most cruel revenge stories in the *Edda*. It begins with the Swedish king Níthoth, who had two sons and a daughter Bothvild and then there was a Finnish king who had three sons: Slagfith, Egil and Volund, who were hunting game.

...Þeir komu í Úlfðali og gerðu sér þar hús. Þar er vatn er heitir Úlfsjár. Snemma of morgin fundu þeir á vatnsströndu konur þrjár, og spunnu lín. Þar voru hjá þeim álfstarhamir þeirra. Það voru valkyrjur... (1998: 142).

...They came to the Wolfdales and made them a house there by a water called Wolf Lake. Early one morn they found by the shore three women who were spinning flax. By them lay their swan-skins, for they were valkyries... (1928: 187).

The *valkyries* with their swan-skins are another example of shape shifting and when the skins are taken away the women are unable to change into swans again. After seven years they become restless and fly away to the battles, leaving Volund broken-hearted in the Wolfdales. For the listeners this would be a sign that the story was not going to be a happy one. Volund waits for the return of his beloved *valkyrie* but instead of the swan-woman king Níthoth comes and

takes him prisoner. They hamstring Volund and he is forced to make beautiful jewellery, which lures the king's two young sons to look into a chest filled with gold. To revenge himself Volund shuts the lid, cutting their heads off and makes jewellery of their skulls, eyes, and teeth, which he sends as a present to the King, the Queen and their daughter Bothvild. When Bothvild comes to him to have her golden ring repaired Volund rapes her and after his revenge is completed, he flies away with wings that he made for himself. Mentioning the Wolfdales and Wolf Lake in the beginning of the Lay prepared the audience for a grisly story to follow.

It is interesting that in the Exeter Book *Wulf and Eadwacer* immediately follows *Deor*, the song that relates the cruel story of Volund the Smith as well. *Deor* also tells about Iormunrekk with his wolfish mind, who is mentioned in stanza 2 of Guthrún's Lament: a wolfish man indeed. Historically, Iormunrekk was Hermanarich, King of the Ostrogoths in the fourth century.²¹ Not only Sigemund but also Volund was mentioned several times in *Beowulf* and it is clear that their stories were known to the Anglo-Saxons. Also the stanzaic structure that *Wulf and Eadwacer* shares with *Deor* is an unusual feature and the links with the Old Norse tradition are obvious.

A kenning for 'battlefield' namely 'wolf-forest' can be found in stanza 16 of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* or the First Lay of Helgi the Hunting-Slayer:

Frá árlega úr úlfði
döglingur að því dísir suðrænar
ef þær vildi heim með hildingum
þá nótt fara. Þrymur var álma. (1998: 157).

At earliest dayspring, in wolf-forest
asked Sigmund's son the Southron maiden
if with the heroes home she would fare
at time of night twanged the bowstrings. (1928: 215).

In the same Lay a fierce dispute occurs between Sinflötli and Guðmundur, full of foul curses and insults. Sinflötli accuses the *valkyrie* of being a 'witch-hag', while Guðmundur reminds him of having been a werewolf in the woods (stanza 36):

... 'Þú hefir etnar úlfa krásir
og bræður þínum að bana orðið,
oft sár sogin með svölum munni,
hefur í hreysi hvarleiður skriðið.' (1998: 162).

... 'Thou hast made thy meal of the meat of wolves,
and been the bane of thy brothers twain;
with thy cold snout hast oft sucked men's wounds,
and hateful to all hast hid in the waste.' (1928: 218–219).

Further references to nine wolves that were their sons is made in stanza 39, while stanza 41 repeats the accusation that Sinfjötli howled as a wolf in the woods and tells of the foul deeds he did while he was transformed.

In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, the Second Lay of the Hundung-Slayer, Helgi, the son of King Sigmund the *Völsung*, enters the hall of his father's enemy as a spy and tells a shepherd boy about the visit of 'the grey heath-dweller'. This is a kenning for the wolf and refers to Helgi's race the *Wolfings*, but there is also the threat of revenge in this kenning (stanza 1):

'Segðu Hemingi að Helgi man
hvern í brynju bragnar felldu,
ér úlf grán inni höfðuð
þar er Hamal hugði Hundingur konungur.' (1998: 182).

'Say to Hæming that Helgi remembers
whom in byrnie the heroes felled:
in the hall had ye the grey heath-dweller
whom King Hundung thought Hamal to be.' (1928: 224).

The Lay also tells about Dag, bringing bitter tidings to his sister Sigrún that he killed her husband Helgi and then the furious Sigrún curses him to run in the woods, transformed into a werewolf (stanza 33):

... 'Þá væri þér hefnt Helga dauða
ef þú værir vargur á viðum úti,
auðs andvani og alls gamans.
Hefðir eigi mat nema á hræjum spryngir.' (1998: 192).

... 'Then had I vengeance for Helgi's death,
if a wolf thou wert in woods abroad,
wretchedly roving, and ravenous,
and feed to bursting on foul carrion.' (1928: 233).

Dag had made a sacrifice to Odin and received a spear to revenge the death of his father, but it is with a heavy heart that he tells his sister the evil story of blood revenge.

A different understanding of the wolf as *fylgjur*, which is a protective pagan spirit, is found in prose between the stanzas 30–31 and 34–35 of *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* or The Lay of Helgi Hiorvarthsson. The *fylgjur* is described as a troll-woman, riding on a wolf.

...Héðinn fór einn saman heim úr skógi jólaaftan og fann tröll-konu. Sú reið vargi og hafði orma að taumum og bauð fylgd sína Héðni. 'Nei,' sagði hann. Hún sagði 'Þess skaltu gjalda að bragarfulli.'... (1998: 177).

...One time Hethin was coming home alone from the forest on Yule eve. He met a troll-woman riding on a wolf, with snakes as reins. She asked his leave to keep him company, but he would not. She said 'That shalt thou rue when drinking from the hallowed cup.'... (1928: 207).

What she meant was the Yuletide feast at the winter solstice, during which men laid hands on the sacrificial boar and made vows for the coming year. Helgi foresaw his own death since the *fylgjur* prepared to leave him and follow his brother Héðinn (stanza 35):

'Reið á vargi er rekvið var
fljóð eitt er hann fylgju beiddi.
Hún vissi það að veginn myndi
Sigurlinnar sonur á Sigarsvöllum.' (1998: 178).

'A witch-woman on wolf did ride
in the gloaming, wished to go with Hethin
full well saw she that soon would fall
Sigrlinn's son on Sigarsvoll.' (1928: 209).

Það kvað Helgi, því að hann grunaði um feigð sína og það að fylgjur hans höfðu vitjað Héðins þá er hann sá konuna ríða varginum...(1998: 178).

Helgi had spoken thus because he thought himself fey, and that it was his wreath Hethin had met with when he saw the woman riding on the wolf... (1928: 208).

In other Icelandic stories black women on black horses would symbolize pagan *fylgjur*, while women dressed in white, riding on white horses, personified the new Christian protective spirits.

A realistic picture of the wolf is given in *Guðrúnarkviða II*, or The Second Lay of Guthrún. Thióthrek listens when Guthrún tells how her brothers Gunnar and Hogni plotted against Sigurth, who was slain by Gotthorm in the end (stanza 8 and 11). Hogni says:

... 'Líttu þar Sigurð á suðurvega,
þá heyrir þú hrafna gjalla,
örnu gjalla, æsli fegna,
varga þjóta um veri þinum.' (1998: 249).

... 'In Southland seek thou Sigurth's body,
there mayst thou hear the hoarse ravens,
the cry of eagles, eager for meat,
the howls of wolves thy husband about.' (1928: 313).

Guthrún does not cry but she wishes that she were dead as well, while she sits there with the wolves howling and the ravens croaking around her in the woods. Guthrún speaks:

'Hvarf eg ein þaðan andspilli frá
á við lesa varga leifar,
gerðig-a eg hjúfra né höndum slá
né kveina ver sem konur aðrar,
þá er sat soltin um Sigerði'. (1998: 249–250).

'Then turned I me from talk away,
in the woods to gather what wolves had left;
I whimpered not, nor my hands did wring,
nor, wept, either, as women else,
as I sate sorrowing over Sigurth's corse'... (1928: 314).

Instead of a romantic story of wolf riding *valkyries* taking a hero to Valhalla, the wolves are pictured as having eaten Sigurth's corpse, while Guthrún mourns silently beside her husband's remains.

A beautiful example of a secret message can be found in stanza 8 of *Atlakviða*, or The Lay of Atli, when Guthrún sends her brothers Gunnar and Hogni the ring Andvaranaut wound with wolf's hair, to warn them that betrayal awaits them.

'Hvað hyggur þú brúði bendu þá er hún okkur baug sendi
varinn voðum heiðingja? Hygg eg að hún vörnuð byði.
Hár fann eg heiðingja riðið í hring rauðum,
ylfskur er vegur okkar að ríða örindi.' (1998: 274).

'What swayed our sister to send us a ring
all wound with wolf's hair? Some warning it meaneth:
the heath-dweller's hair was hidden in the ring:
wolfish would be our way to the Huns.' (1928: 334).

Even though he understands the message, Gunnar says that they have to go anyway since traitors might get hold of their gold (stanza 11):

... 'Úlfur mun ráða arfi Niflunga,
 gamlar granverðir ef Gunnars missir,
 birnir blakkfjallir bíta þreftönnum,
 gamna greystóði ef Gunnar né kemur-at.' (1998: 274–275).

... 'The Niflung gold-hoard old grey-coated wolves
 may grasp greedily, once Gunnar is fallen,
 and black-skinned bears, biting with fox-teeth,
 to dog-packs give game if Gunnar return not.' (1928: 334).

However, the two brothers are betrayed anyway; Hogni's heart is cut out of his living body and Gunnar dies in the snake pit, without revealing where the Niflung treasure is hidden.

Indeed, Guthrún is the most troubled woman in the *Edda*, and in *Hamðismál* or The Lay of Hamthir, she tells her two sons how King Iormunrekk had her daughter Svanhild trampled to death by horses, because he suspected her of infidelity with his son Randvér. Guthrún urges her sons Hamthir and Sorli and their half-brother Erp to revenge the murdered sister, but for no good reason Erp is killed and as the two brothers go on they see Randvér hanging on the *vargtré vindköld*, which is a kenning for the gallows (stanza 17):

Fram lágu brautir, fundu vástigu
 og systur son sáran á meiði,
 vargré vindköld vestan bæjar,
 trýtti æ trönu hvöt, títt var að biðja. (1998: 312).

Still further they fared on their fateful path,
 till their sister's stepson they saw on the gallows,
 the wind-cold wolf-tree, to the west of the castle,
 by the crane's-food becrept- uncouth was that sight. (1928: 379).

The two brothers suffer for having murdered Erp, who would have cut Iormunrekk's head off, and they are stoned to death helplessly (stanza 29):

'Ekki hygg eg okkur vera úlfa dæmi,
 að við mýnim sjálfir um sakast
 sem grey norna, þau er gráðug eru
 í auðn um alin.' (1998: 315).

'I ween we were of wolfish kind,
 since our brother we sought to slay,
 like the wolves of the waste, wild and greedy,
 that howl in the hills.' (1928: 381).

The examples speak for themselves and of course many more can be found in the *Edda*. However, these suffice to prove the wolf to be a kenning well known to the audience that would be used to indicate the cruelty and destruction that was an integral part of the heroic times. Lawrence, Schofield, Pulsiano and Wolf focused on Norse mythology to find an explanation for *Wulf and Eadwacer* and the *Edda* proves them right.

The *Book of Werewolves* by Baring-Gould was first published in the year 1865, approximately the same time when the first critical essays appeared about *Wulf and Eadwacer*. Baring-Gould never referred to the poem, nor was he mentioned by any of the critics and yet his description of the man-wolf would have been a perfect answer to Orton, who wished for 'an indivisible, synthetic conception.'²² I shall give the gist of Baring-Gould's explanations, staying as close to his words as I can.

Among the Scandinavian people, it was customary for certain fighters to dress in the skins of animals. This made them look like beasts themselves and their intention was to paralyse their enemies with fear. Baring-Gould drew attention to an instructive sentence in the *Vatnsdælasaga*²³: 'Those *berserkir* who were called *ulfheðnir* had got wolf-skins over their mail coats.' He explained that the word *berserkir* was used for a man who suffered from terrifying fits of fury, during which he possessed ferocious strength. In Norway the *berserkir* was greatly feared because the law said that a man who refused to accept a challenge lost all his possessions, even his wife, to the *berserkir* and if a man was killed during the fight, his property was forfeited anyway. It was no wonder that superstition was aroused by the fear of these *berserkir*, who were believed to be as ferocious as the beasts whose skins they wore²⁴:

Their eyes glared as though a flame burned in the sockets, they ground their teeth, and frothed at the mouth, they gnawed at their shield rims, and are said to have sometimes bitten them through, and as they rushed into conflict they yelped as dogs or howled as wolves.

In fact, among the Scandinavians there existed a form of madness, under the influence of which fighters behaved as if they were changed into beasts and at the same time they became insensitive to pain.

The *Aigla* tells about Ulf, son of Bjálfi and Hallbera, who was called the evening-wolf or *kveldúlfr*. When the night fell he became so savage that people said he was changing into a wolf and then he was called a *hamrammr*. Baring-Gould mentioned that the old verb

að hamaz was derived from *hamr*, meaning skin or habit. The Norse word *hamr* was in Anglo-Saxon *hama*, *homa*; in Saxon *hamo*; in Old High German *hamo*; and in Old French *hama* or *homa*. In composition we find this word in Old Norse as *lik-hamr*; in Old High German *lik-hamo*, in Anglo-Saxon *lik-hama* or *floesc-hama* and Old Saxon *lik-hamo*, which literally means a garment of flesh.

The Teutonic and Scandinavian people saw the body as a garment of the soul for human beings and animals alike. In Old Norse the bodies of wolves were called *úlfsamr*, and the verb *að hamaz* meant to change from one body to another, the *hamrammr*, while *hamaskipti* signified the transmigration of the soul into another body. In later times the verb meant to change shape or to become a werewolf and finally it was used for those who suffered from the madness of lycanthropy.

Men who could change themselves into animals were said to be *eigi einhamir*, and if the man went on a wolf's-ride, *gandreið*, he would be evil and full of the rage of the animal whose form he had taken. Barling-Gould explained that this happened to Sigmund and Sinfjötli and he translated the passage from the *Völsungasaga* as follows²⁵:

Sigmund and Sinfjötli got into the habits, and could not get out of them again, and the nature of the original beasts came over them, and they howled as wolves- they learned both of them to howl.

Another example of savage animal behaviour is given when Sigmund is angry with Sinfjötli for fighting with eleven men at a time²⁶:

Sigmund flew at him and rent him so that he fell, for he had bitten through his throat. That day they could not leave their wolf-forms. Sigmund laid him on his back and bare him home to the hall and sat beside him, and said, 'Deuce take the wolf-forms!'

This is certainly a fit of uncontrolled wolfish behaviour, in which Sigmund uses his teeth for killer instincts against Sinfjötli. Here the animal instincts are stronger than the human being, which results in the inability to remove the wolf-skins and Sigmund curses the wolf-forms that lead to the destruction of the enemy as well as self-destruction.

There is another story of a werewolf in the same saga, which tells about an old she-wolf that devours Signy's brothers one at a time. When only Sigmund is left alive, Signy sends a man who smears honey over her brother's face and mouth. The she-wolf licks his mouth and then²⁷:

He bore it ill, and bit into the tongue of the she-wolf; she sprang up and tried to break loose, setting her feet against the stock, so as to snap it asunder: but he held firm, and ripped the tongue out by the roots, so that it was the death of the wolf.

The she-wolf was King Siggeir's mother, who shifted her shape with evil witchcraft and devilry.

The Old Norse word *vargr* signified wolf but also a godless man and the Anglo-Saxons also regarded its Old English cognate *wearg* as an evil man. Baring-Gould pointed out that *vargr* is the English *were* in the word were-wolf and *varou* or *garou* in the French *loup-garou*. The Danish word for werewolf is *var-ulf* and the Gothic word *vaira-ulf*. In *Vie de S. Hildefons* by Gauthier de Coinsi the *loup-garou* represents the Devil himself²⁸:

*Cil lou desve, cil lou garol,
Ce sunt deable, que saul
Ne puent estre de nos mordre.*

However, very often the word wolf meant simply outlaw, as several critics observed. The ancient Norman laws said: *Wargus esto* 'be an outlaw' to condemned criminals and the *Lex Ripuaria* ordered: *Wargus sit, hoc est expulsus*.²⁸ In the *Leges Canuti* an outlaw was called a *verevulf* and the *Salic Law* decreed: *Si quis corpus jam sepultum effoderit, aut expoliaverit, wargus sit*: 'if anyone shall have dug up or despoiled an already buried corpse, let him be a varg'.³⁰ For the Anglo-Saxons the sentence for an *utlagh* was: 'he shall be driven away as a wolf, and chased so far as men chase wolves farthest.' The outlaws lived alone in the woods, and the Old Norse expression *verða at gjalti* meant to be so afraid as to lose the senses, like a hunted animal about to be killed.

As a definition of lycanthropy Baring-Gould offered³¹:

The change of man or woman into the form of a wolf, either through magical means, so as to enable him or her to gratify the taste for human flesh, or through judgement of the gods in punishment for some great offence.

The name lycanthropy can be traced back to Arcadia, where the shepherds suffered severely from the attacks of wolves and to help them king Lycaon instituted a sacrifice in which a child was thrown to the famished wolves. However, in his *Metamorphoses* Ovid told the story of Lycaon in a different way: when the king of Arcadia invited Jupiter, he offered him human flesh to eat to test his omniscience and as a punishment the god changed Lycaon into a wolf³²:

In vain he attempted to speak; from that very instant
 His jaws were bespluttered with foam, and only he thirsted
 For blood, as he raged amongst flocks and panted for slaughter.
 His vesture was changed into hair, his limbs became crooked;
 A wolf, – he retains yet large trace of his ancient expression,
 Hoary he is as afore, his countenance rabid,
 His eyes glitter savagely still, the picture of fury.

Baring-Gould wrote that the myth of the werewolf was known all over the world, but he also gave examples of real people who lived under the delusion of being a wolf.

For example, the story of a farmer of Pavia who tore many people to pieces with his teeth. When the man was caught, he told that the only difference between himself and a real wolf was that on the animal the fur grew outward, while in him the hair was hidden under his skin (*versipellis*). Then the magistrates ordered his arms and legs to be cut off to see if this was true and the poor lunatic died in the year 1541; this story was related by Job Fincelius in *de Mirabilibus*³³.

Another example was found in Boquet's *Discours de Sorciers*³⁴: in the year 1598, Pernette Gandillon, a poor girl in the Jura, used to run like a wolf in the fields. Terrified bystanders finished her off, after she tried to kill two innocent little children. Her brother Pierre and his son Georges admitted that they could also change themselves into wolves, by using an ointment that they received from the devil. In prison, they ran like wolves in their cells and howled until they were executed. Although the causes for their behaviour were different, these wolf-men had much in common with the Norse *berserkr*.

The *Vatnsdælasaga* describes the cure of a *berserkr* and Baring-Gould commented: 'the manner in which he [Thorir Ingi-mund's son] was cured is remarkable; pointing as it does to the craving in the heathen mind for a better and more merciful creed.'³⁵ The story tells that Thorgrim of Kornsa's concubine gave birth to a baby and Thorgrim's wife ordered the child to be brought to the banks of the Marram river, where it was left to die. Thorir, a man who belonged to Thorgrim's clan, suffered from the *berserkr* fits and in order to cure him his brother Thornstein proposed³⁶:

'Now I will make a vow to Him who created the sun, for I ween that he is most able to take the ban off you, and I will undertake for His sake, in return, to rescue the babe and to bring it up for him, till He who created man shall take it to Himself- for this I reckon He will do!'

They took the baby home and cared for it and the *berserkr* fits stopped troubling Thorir. The Old Norse historians wrote that the

berserkr rages were cured by baptism and as faith in Christianity became stronger, the number of *berserkir* diminished.

In paganism, a man who could shift his shape was looked at with worship and thought to have a divine nature. However, Christian priests were suspicious of everything that belonged to pagan mythology and for this reason, they condemned magic powers that were not acknowledged by the church as devilry. Although Baring-Gould was convinced that only a moralistic and religious upbringing could cure cruelty, he told several stories about Christian priests who were as malicious as wolves in sheepskins. As an example a Dutch priest was mentioned, who became chaplain of a regiment because he wished to see death around him all the time. This priest was informed by all the hangmen in the country and he would attend the execution of criminals for his pleasure, which leaves the question if Christianity and a moral upbringing really worked.³⁷

All the same, it was probably a Christian priest who wrote *Wulf and Eadwacer* in the Exeter Book, and line 18 and 19 seem to refer to Christ's words about marriage in Matthew 19: 6 'What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.' Lines 18 and 19 show the tension between the heroic times of pagan Northern myths and the professed law, love and compassion of Christianity. A priest would probably know that in the Bible many passages refer to the wolf, and they symbolize death and destruction in the same way as can be found in pagan myths, for example:

Ezekiel 22: 27:

Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain.

Even so, the first example of a man who is turned into a wolf is found in a pagan poem, *GILGAMESH, Epic of Old Babylonia*, which was written about 2000 B.C.: Gilgamesh refuses the Great Goddess's favours because she continually destroys the ones she loves:³⁸

Gilgamesh opened his mouth and speaks,
Says to Ishtar, sublime one:
'Keep thy gifts to thyself!...
...Thou fellest in love with the herdsman, the keeper,
Who ever scattered the grain for thee,
And daily slaughtered a kid for thee;
Thou smotest him,
Turnedst him into a wolf.

And his own shepherd-boys give him chase,
 And his dogs bite-up his shanks...
 (my underlining)

Ishtarte is furious and asks her father to create a bull-of-heaven filled with fire, to destroy Gilgamesh and his hairy friend Enkidu, who lived with the animals of the field. This is again the scene of a violent fight but the fierce bull-of-heaven is overcome and then Gilgamesh and Enkidu sat down in front of Shamash (the Sun) and their heart had peace. Before the dawn of times ancient people already recognized the symbol of the wolf, which shows that over the boundaries of time and space, the thoughts and feelings of human beings are very much the same.

Although the symbol of the wolf-man is universal, the renewed knowledge of the Northern wolf-man can be used for a reading of *Wulf and Eadwacer*³⁹:

Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife;
 willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.
 Ungelic is us.
 Wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre.
 5 Fæst is þæt eglond, fenne biworpen.
 Sindon wælreowe weras þær on iege;
 willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.
 Ungelice is us.
 Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode;
 10 þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotogu sæt,
 þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,
 wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæpre eac lað.
 Wulf, min Wulf, wena me þine
 seoce gedydon, þine seldcymas,
 15 murnende mod, nales meteliste.
 Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer? Uncerne earne hwelp
 bireð wulf to wuda.
 Þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,
 uncer giedd geador.

Line 1: Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife;

Lines 2 and 7: willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.

Lines 3 and 8: Ungelic(e) is us.

Line 1 is usually translated as 'It is to my people as if one gave them a gift'. I see *Wulf* as the *lac* to the narrator's people since he is either an outlaw or a killer and certainly a dangerous man. Lines 2 and 3 are often seen as a refrain, which is repeated in lines 7 and 8. It makes sense that the narrator's people intend to kill *Wulf* if they can catch him because he is a threat to them.

The half-lines 3 and 8 stand alone and therefore they receive much attention. The previous lines (2 and 7) express the narrator's anxiety about *Wulf* and the following lines (4 and 9) refer to her separation from him. Consequently, I read lines 3 and 8 as a gentle confession that the speaker and *Wulf* long for each other: 'It is different with us', with the stress on the alliterating personal pronoun.

Line 4: *Wulf* is on iege, ic on oþerre.

Line 5: *Fæst* is þæt eglond, fenne biworpen.

Line 6: *Sindon* wælreowe weras þær on ige;

The murderous people may be the narrator's *leodum* who want to kill *Wulf*, or other wandering outlaws but the two islands symbolise the painful separation between the narrator and *Wulf*.

Line 9: *Wulfes* ic mines widlastum wenum dogode;

Line 10: þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotogu sæt,

Line 11: þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,

Line 12: wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæpre eac lað.

This passage shifts back in time; while the speaker is thinking of her *Wulf*'s long journey she suddenly remembers their first encounter: when it was rainy weather she sat weeping and when the bold warrior *Wulf* laid his *bogum* around her it was a joy to her but it was also hateful. This ambivalence is the most important characteristic that goes on repeating itself all through the poem. The episode of the lovemaking with the wolf-man shows ambivalence in the words *wyn* and *lað*, but is enclosed by the tender *Wulfes ic mines* and *Wulf, min Wulf*. When the action took place the speaker was not undividedly happy, but when she thinks of *Wulf* in retrospect she claims him for herself.

Line 13: *Wulf, min Wulf*, wena me þine

Line 14: seoce gedydon, þine seldcymas,

Line 15: murnende mod, nales meteliste.

These short half-lines mournfully express the grief in the lady's heart: longing for *Wulf* has made her ill, not lack of food. The woman is trapped in a situation that she does not want but cannot change and, ironically, the only one with whom she can share her anxiety is *Eadwacer*, the husband, who watches his property. *þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotogu sæt...* The rainy weather reflects the gloom inside her heart, just before the wolf-man makes her painfully aware of a happiness that will tear her apart.

Line 16: Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer? Ucerne earne hwelp

Line 17: bireð wulf to wuda.

First the narrator asks: 'Do you hear *Eadwacer*?' Obviously she shares her life with him but she does not claim the husband for herself by calling him 'my *Eadwacer*'. The word *ucerne* in line 16 probably refers to *Wulf* and the narrator, but maybe also to both men at the same time if *Wulf*'s child, the *hwelp*, grew up in *Eadwacer*'s house as was the case in 'Signy's Lament'. *Ucerne earne hwelp/ bireð wulf to wuda* may be explained not only by stanza 35 of *Sigrdrífumál*: 'trust never oath of an outlaw's son ... a wolf oft sleeps in his son' and by stanza 12 of *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, when Brynhild tells Gunnar to kill Sigurth as well as his little son, because he will grow up to revenge his murdered father, but also by the legal terms in *Arfapátttr* that describe an outlaw's son as a 'wolf's cub'. The narrator knows that her son will join the outlaws in the wood and that *Wulf* and the *hwelp* may be killed during a fight.

Line 18: Þæt mon eape tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,

Line 19: uncer giedd geador.

The narrator is obviously not married to *Wulf* and the verb *tosliteð* may predict a terrible end for *uncer giedd geador* ... Whatever belongs to the lady and *Wulf* together may be destroyed: their love, their child, and probably *Wulf* himself. That this is not what the lady wants can be read in the last line *uncer giedd geador*: she experiences her and *Wulf*'s love as a song and that melody is enclosed as a treasure between the words 'uncer' and 'geador'.

It stands to reason that the priest who wrote *Wulf and Eadwacer* in the Exeter Book vaguely remembered fragments of the *Edda* and 'Signy's Lament' and he may have added his Christian views to an originally pagan story: the same subject matter was often treated in several works and told in different ways. The narrator of *Wulf and Eadwacer* utters words of languid love and longing that still have the power to move, however, the *Edda*, the *Völsungasaga* and other Old Norse myths, combined with the terms from ancient Norse and Anglo-Saxon legal texts make it very clear that the kenning *Wulf* stands for war, violence, treason, crime, cruelty, blood revenge, shape shifting, and bestial behaviour.

Notes

1. Orton, Peter. An approach to *Wulf and Eadwacer*. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1985): 225.
2. *ibid.*, p. 228.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 257–258.
4. Magoun, Francis. The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 56: (1955): 84–88.
5. de Vries, Ad. *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*. Amsterdam/London: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974, p. 505.
6. *ibid.*, p. 24.
7. *ibid.*, p. 506.
8. *ibid.*, p. 484.
9. Lawrence, William W. The First Riddle of Cynewulf. *PMLA*, 17 (1902): 247–261.
10. Schofield, William Hernry. Signy's Lament. *PMLA* 17: (1902): 262–295.
11. The manuscript of *Beowulf* dates from about the year 1000, but nowadays the date of composition is thought to have been two centuries earlier, although the oral tradition started in the centuries between the Age of Migration and the Age of Bede.
12. *ibid.*, p. 275.
13. *ibid.*, 265.
14. Pulsiano, Phillip and Wolf, Kirsten. The 'Hwelp' in *Wulf and Eadwacer*. *English Language Notes*, 28(3) (1991): 1–9.
15. *ibid.*, p. 3
16. Here I have omitted the underlining of the original quote.
17. Pulsiano and Wolf (1991: 4).
18. Otten, Marcel. *De saga van de Völsungen, Völsungasaga*. Baarn: Ambo, 1996.
19. Hollander, Lee M. *The Poetic Edda*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1928.
20. Sigurðsson, Gísli. *Eddukvæði*. Danmörku: Nørhaven A/S, 1998.
21. Hollander (1928: 370).
22. Orton (1985: 257–258).
23. Baring-Gould, Sabine. *The Book of Werewolves*. London: Smith and Elder, 1865 [1995]. Reprinted with an introduction by Nigel Suckling in 1995, p. 36.
24. *ibid.*, p. 40.
25. *ibid.*, p. 18.
26. *ibid.*, p. 19.
27. *ibid.*, p. 21.
28. *ibid.*, p. 48.
29. *ibid.*, pp. 48–49.
30. *ibid.*, p. 49.
31. *ibid.*, p. 8.
32. *ibid.*, p. 10.
33. *ibid.*, p. 65.
34. *ibid.*, p. 78.
35. *ibid.*, p. 41.
36. *ibid.*, p. 42.
37. Baring-Gould claims that lycanthropy can be found in all times, and Otten confirms this statement in *A Lycanthropy Reader, Werewolves in Western Culture* (1986). The contents of the book present a varied array of 'Medical Cases, Diagnoses, Descriptions, Trial Records, Historical Accounts, Sightings, Philosophical and

Theological Approaches to Metamorphosis, Critical Essays on Lycanthropy, Myths and Legends and Allegory.' Another relevant book is *The Werewolf Complex, America's Fascination with Violence* by Duclos (Duclos, Denis *Le Complexe du loup-garou*. Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1994), who often makes use of Norse mythology to explain the violence of American serial killers, who mainly kill women and children. Duclos bases his theories on the Puritan witch-hunts that took place as a result of collective hysteria in Salem town. The writer Hermann Hesse (Hesse, Hermann. *Der Steppenwolf*. Berlin: Fischer, 1927) gave a modern example of a wolf-man, in his book *Der Steppenwolf*.

38. Leonard, William Ellery. *GILGAMESH, Epic of Old Babylonia*. New York: Viking Press, 1934.

39. The text of the poem is copied from the Exeter Book volume of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, edited by Krapp and Dobbie (1936:179–180).

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