

Actaeon's Dogs in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the Wolf Pack in *Ysengrimus**

F. J. SYPHER

Anthony Brian Taylor, in his illuminating, carefully researched article, "Arthur Golding and the Elizabethan Progress of Actaeon's Dogs," points out the vigor of Golding's enthusiastic translation of a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (III, 206-24), and shows that Golding's rendering of the lines was admired in the Elizabethan period, especially by Shakespeare. Taylor's emphasis is upon Golding and the influence of his English version, but his article serves equally as a reminder of the vigor of Ovid's Latin verse.

Ovid was highly regarded by his own contemporaries, and his boastful claim to immortal fame—at the end of the *Metamorphoses*—may be admitted to have been an accurate prophecy. All through late antiquity and the medieval period, Ovid's works continued to be read, even though Christian readers were more partial to the *pietas* of Vergil than to the pagan sensuousness of Ovid. And during and after the twelfth century, the age of narrative romance and of love poetry, there is extensive evidence of Ovid's influence, as in, for example, *The Romance of the Rose*, and in the work of Chrétien de Troyes.¹

The influence of Ovid is pervasive also in the poem known as *Ysengrimus*, a beast epic of 6,574 lines of polished Latin elegiac verse composed around 1149, apparently by a Ghentish author, sometimes referred to as Magister Nivardus.² In this work the stories of Reynard the fox and Ysengrim the wolf are woven into a carefully constructed mock-epic in twelve episodes, in which the protagonist, Ysengrim, is presented as a rapacious monk-abbot-bishop who constantly tries to take

*Reference: Anthony Brian Taylor, "Arthur Golding and the Elizabethan Progress of Actaeon's Dogs," *Connotations* 1.3 (1991): 207-223.

advantage of the other creatures around him. The story opens with the wolf's triumphant consumption of a stolen ham, but after a series of encounters in which he is repeatedly bested by his adversaries, Ysengrim is finally devoured by a ravenous herd of swine, led by Abbess Salaura, a mighty sow. It is a story filled with bitter indictment of the Church's greed, but composed with riotous humor and consummate literary art.

There are numerous echoes of Ovid in *Ysengrimus*,³ but, amazingly, none of the commentaries seems to have remarked on the fact that the wolf pack in the episode known as "The Animals' Pilgrimage" is modelled on Ovid's presentation of Actaeon's dogs. Ovid's text is in Taylor's article (219, 221); the passage from *Ysengrimus*⁴ is as follows:

Iam brevis undenos conflauerat hora sodales:
 Ante alios omnes Gripo Triuenter adest,
 Abbatis socer ille fuit, cursuque rapaci
 Ysengrimigene tres comitantur auum:
 Magna salus ouium, Larueldus Cursor, auique
 Cum facie nomen Grimo Pilauca tenens,
 Et numquam uel pene satur Septengula Nipig;
 Griponis subeunt pignora deinde duo:
 Guls Spispisa prior, post natus Gwulfero Worgram;
 Hos inter sequitur Sualmo Caribdis Inops
 Et proles amite Griponis, Turgius Ingens
 Mantica, quo genero Sualmo superbus erat,
 Sualmonisque nepos, Stormus Varbucus, et audax
 Priuignus Stormi, Gulpa Gehenna Minor,
 Hinc patruus Gulpe, Sualmonis auunculus idem,
 Olnam cognomen Maior Auernus habens. (IV, 741-56)

In a brief moment he had stirred up eleven comrades. Gripo Threebelly arrived ahead of all the others. He was the abbot's father-in-law. And at a greedy pace three children of Ysengrim's ran along with their grandfather, the great protector of sheep, Larveld Swiftfoot, and Grimo Gooseplucker, who had the face as well as the name of his grandfather, and Nipig Sevengullet, who was never, or almost never, full. Then followed Gripo's two children: first Guls Spispisa, and the next born, Gwulfero Worgram. Together with these came Sualmo Alwaysinwant Charybdis; and Gripo's aunt's offspring, Turgius Hugebag, a son-in-law of whom Sualmo was proud; and Sualmo's nephew, Storm Varbuc; and the bold stepson of Storm, Gulpa Gehenna Minor; hence Gulpa's paternal uncle, who was also the maternal uncle of Sualmo, Olnam, had the cognomen Avernus Major.

The dogs' names in Ovid's work are Greek, whereas the wolves' names in *Ysengrimus* mix Germanic and Latin elements; but in both texts there is a linguistic counterpoint between the Latin narrative and names in a different language. A number of the medieval poet's wolf names are translations of Ovid's Greek names into Netherlandic equivalents, and in a few instances the names in *Ysengrimus* are strikingly similar to Golding's English names. The following list presents detailed explanations and comparisons.⁵ The wolves are listed in order of appearance:

1. *Gripo Triuenter*. Neth. *grijpen* "to grip"; Lat. *tri-* "three" + *uenter* "belly." Cf. Ovid's *Ladon* "catcher"; Golding's "Ladon."⁶ Cf. below, no. 4.

2. *Larueldus Cursor*. Neth. *laar* "open land" + *veld* "field"; Lat. *cursor* "runner." Cf. Ovid's *Nape* "land"; Golding's "Laund"; Ovid's *Thous* "swift," Golding's "Swift."

3. *Grimo Pilauca*. Obsolete Neth. *grim* "grim"; Lat. *pilare* "to pillage" + Vulg. Lat. *auca* "goose." Cf. below, no. 6. Cf. also Ovid's *Alce* "might," Golding's "Wight" (meaning "strong").⁷

4. *Septengula Nipig*. Lat. *septem* "seven" + *gula* "gullet"; Neth. *nipjen* "to nip." Cf. Ovid's *Harpalos* "greedy," Golding's "Snatch"; also Ovid's *Ladon* "catcher" as in no. 1 above.

5. *Guls Spispisa*. Neth. *gulzig* "greedy"; *spijs* "food." Cf. Ovid's *Harpya* "harpy," Golding's "Greedigut"; Ovid's *Labros* "gluttonous," Golding's "Jollyboy."⁸

6. *Gvulfero Worgram*. Neth. *wolf* "wolf" perhaps with a suggestion of Neth. *golf* "gulf"; Neth. *worgen* "to strangle" + *ram* "ram." Cf. Ovid's *Lycisca* "wolfish," Golding's "Wolfe"; Ovid's *Nebrophonos* "fawn killer," Golding's "Kilbucke." Cf. above, no. 3. Cf. also Ovid's *Theridamas* "beast-conqueror," Golding's "Kildeere."

7. *Sualmo Caribdis Inops*. Neth. *zweigen* "to swallow"; Lat. (from Greek) *Charybdis* (the Sicilian whirlpool, applied metaphorically to a greedy person); Lat. *inops* "needy."

8. *Turgius Ingens Mantica*. Lat. *turgere* "to swell"; *ingens* "huge"; *mantica* "bag."

9. *Stormus Varbucus*. Neth. *storm* "storm"; obsolete Neth. *vaar* "fear" + Neth. *buik* "belly." Cf. Ovid's *Aello* "storm," Golding's "Tempest"; Ovid's *Laelaps* "hurricane," Golding's "Spring."⁹

10. *Gulpa Gehenna Minor*. Neth. *gulpen* "to gulp"; Lat. (ultimately from Hebrew) *Gehenna* (a biblical name for hell); Lat. *minor* "lesser."

11. *Olnam Maior Auernus*. Neth. *al* "all" + *nemen* "to take"; Lat. *maior* "greater"; *Auernus* (Vergilian equivalent of hell, cf. *Aeneid* IV, 126). Cf. Ovid's *Pamphagus* "all eating," Golding's "Eateal."

In general, Ovid's (and Golding's) names and descriptive adjectives are designed to reflect typical characteristics of dogs: their behaviour (running, climbing, hunting, stalking), sound (barking, ringing), appearance (color, coat, teeth), breed (place of origin), as well as agility, strength, ferocity, and greediness. By contrast, the wolves in *Ysengrimus* are characterized in ways that emphasize the greed which is at the core of the poet's satire: taking (*Laruedus*, *Gripo*, *Nipig*, *Pilauca*, *Worgram*, *Olnam*), violent force (*Grimo*, *Stormus*, *Cursor*, *Gvulfero*), food (*Spispisa*), belly (*Triuenter*, *Mantica*, *Varbucus*), great size (*Turgius*, *Ingens*), devouring (*Septengula*, *Guls*, *Sualmo Caribdis Inops*, *Gulpa Gehenna Minor*, *Maior Auernus*).¹⁰

Strong as is the satirical intent in this passage of *Ysengrimus*, one senses also the author's delight in creating comic linguistic coinages by juxtaposing barbarous words with elegant Latin versification. He obviously also enjoys his presentation of this villainous wolf pack according to the conventions of the epic catalogue of forces, including a dizzyingly confusing array of genealogical relationships. The ensuing battle between the wolves and the other animals parodies the siege of Troy, and so offers yet another parallel between the wolves' Germanic names, and their Greek models. Finally, the total number of wolves, eleven plus one, inevitably suggests—in this context—an infernal parallel to the twelve disciples. Note, for example, the last two, with the epithets *Maior* and *Minor*, like St. James the Great, and St. James the Less. The master of this pack would of course be the devil.

Coming back to the passages in Ovid, one wonders what other traces through the centuries might have been left by Actaeon's hounds as they have charged down innumerable paths with ringing voices and unquenchable élan.

NOTES

¹See the discussion and examples given by Gilbert Highet in *The Classical Tradition* (1949; New York: OUP, 1957) 57-69.

²An elaborate investigation of the problems surrounding the author's identity is given by Jill Mann in *Ysengrimus: Text with Translation, Commentary and Introduction*, *Mittellateinische Studien und Texte* 12 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987).

³A lengthy list of Ovidian parallels is given by Ernst Voigt in his edition of *Ysengrimus* (Halle, 1884; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974) lxx-xxii (there is no reference to Actaeon's dogs in this list).

⁴Text from Voigt's edition 238-39. Translation from the English version by F. J. Sypher and Eleanor Sypher, *Ysengrimus by Magister Nivardus* (New York: Printed at the Stinehour Press, 1980) 117-18. Translators differ in their interpretation of the family relationships in the passage. See, in addition to the two English versions already noted, the Flemish verse translation by Van Mierlo (cited below n5), and the German version by Albert Schönfelder, *Isengrimus: das flämische Tierepos*, *Niederdeutsche Studien* 3 (Münster: Böhlau Verlag, 1955). See also the French version by Elisabeth Charbonnier, *Recherches sur l'Ysengrimus, traduction et étude littéraire*, *Wiener Arbeiten zur germanischen Altertumskunde* 22 (Vienna: Verlag Karl M. Halosar, 1983).

⁵These interpretations are the result of an independent consideration of the passage, and, to be sure, there are points in which commentators differ. See bibliographies—in works already cited—for full reference to commentaries, beginning with those by Mone (1832—the *editio princeps*), Grimm (1834), Bormans (1836-37), etc. The most balanced literary appraisal of the poem is given in the learned and finely appreciative study by J. Van Mierlo, *Het Vroegste Dierenepos in de letterkunde der Nederlanden: Isengrimus van Magister Nivardus* (Antwerp: N. V. Standaard Boekhandel, 1943); originally published in *Verslagen en mededeelingen der Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* (1943): 281-335, 489-548. See also the notes in Van Mierlo's translation: *Magister Nivardus' Isengrimus: het vroegste dierenepos in de letterkunde der Nederlanden*, with illustrations by Désiré Acket (Antwerp: N. V. Standaard Boekhandel, 1946). Netherlandic words in the present discussion are quoted from: *van Dale's Nieuw groot woordenboek der Nederlandse taal*, eds. C. Kruyskamp and F. de Tollenaere, 7th ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950).

⁶Golding's use of Ovid's *Ladon* seems odd. Taylor suggests that Golding simply did not read the textual commentary closely enough to note the gloss that explained the name as "to take, seize or catch" (Taylor 219n7). But one wonders if Golding might have intended to suggest a meaning such as *laron* (or *ladrone*) "thief." Cf. also "to lay on" i.e. "attack" as in Shakespeare's "Lay on Macduffe" cited in *OED*, s.v. *lay* verb 55.b. The hound's appearance (*Ov. substricta ilia* "lean flanks"), rendered by Golding as "gant as any Greewnd" (i.e. "gaunt as any greyhound"), suggests a lean and hungry look, and is paralleled in *Ysengrimus* by the Latin epithet *inops* "needy" applied to the wolf *Sualmo*.

⁷The name *Alce* is said by Taylor to be translated by Golding as "Royster"; but Golding's "Wight," in the sense of "strong" (see *OED*, s.v. *wight*, adjective), may, I would respectfully suggest, in fact be his translation of *Alce* (and not of *Leucon* "white"). In this case Golding would mean the descriptive phrase in his line—"Royster, beautie faire and white as winters snow"—to be taken as an

appositive to "Royster," to complete the translation of *Leucon* as "Royster." ("Royster" may also contain an echo of the white color of the inside of an *oyster* shell, but I should not wish to press this suggestion too far.) In this analysis, *Leucon* would not be translated twice (as suggested by Taylor 210-11, who, in order to make the point, has to change the initial letter of "beautie" to a capital). Note also Golding's use of the word *wight* in the sense of "strong" in l. 263, "little Wolfe, as wight as any other"; note also Golding's use of the spelling "white" when he clearly intends the color, in the line on Royster, and again in l. 265.

With the name *Grimo* in *Ysengrimus*, compare also Golding's "Savage" for Ovid's *trux* "savage" (l. 211)—the word does not appear to denote a name in Ovid's text as quoted by Taylor, but it was apparently so interpreted by Golding, even though *trux* is a Latin word—not Greek like the other names in the passage. Cf. also Ovid's use of the adjective *ferox* "fierce" (l. 214).

⁸I would offer the suggestion that Golding's "Jollyboy" (for *Labros* "gluttonous") is not necessarily a mistranslation based on confusion with Latin *labrosus* "with large lips"; as "a great and large flewd hound" he could well qualify, by virtue of his size and big mouth (and jolly disposition) as a gourmand among the hounds (cf. Taylor 219n7). Here again, Golding would be rendering Ovid's Greek name for the dog, not only in the English name but also in the descriptive terms attached to it. One could almost imagine that the echo of the Latin word for "with large lips" in the Greek name affected Golding's composition not as an error of translation but as a kind of punning inspiration. Ovid himself could not have been unaware of the conspicuous play on words between Greek *labros* and Latin *labrosus*.

⁹Golding's "Spring" as a rendering of Ovid's *Laelaps* "hurricane" is not necessarily a mistake if one takes the name in the sense of "spring forward and catch suddenly" like a whirlwind (cf. Taylor 209). Sports aficionados will recall the nickname of the American middleweight boxer of the 1960s, Reuben "Hurricane" Carter.

¹⁰Compare the author's similar treatment of the names of the members of the herd of swine in *Ysengrimus* VII, 141-48, e.g. Salaura (mentioned earlier, whose name is composed of French *sale* "dirty" + Lat. *aura* "air"). The whole subject of literary names, stock names, and generic names for animals was clearly of interest to all three authors, and one wonders to what extent the two Latin poets were drawing on terms that were actually in current use as animal names. Certainly a number of Golding's English dog names are still in use. The substitution of personal or literary names for generic animal designations suggests the strong currents of interchange between literary tradition and popular culture, as in the familiar example of French *renard* "fox" from the Germanic personal name *Reinardus* (cf. German *Reinhard*), replacing O. Fr. *goupil* (from Lat. *uulpeculus*). In this connection an informative fourteenth-century text is presented in Taylor's article in 220n10, with reference to a hare (called *Couart* in the beast fable literature) as "the coward with the short tail." The word *coward* has a perplexing etymology, since the Latin antecedent, *caudatus* "tailed" can mean both "possessed of a tail" and "deprived of a tail." The gloss "with a short tail" nicely combines both significations. In reference to *Ysengrimus*, see the citations for Book III, 659, in *Ysengrimus* by Magister *Nivardus* (n4 above) 219.