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“Rúmr inngangs, en þrøngr brottfarar”

Introduction

Thirty years ago, Bo Almqvist published his discovery of modern Irish and Scots Gaelic parallels to the proverb invoked by Arinbjörn in *Egils saga* (ch. 68) to warn Egill not to try to reclaim property confiscated by King Hákon: “Er konungsgarðr rúmr inngangs, en þrøngr brottfarar” [The king’s residence is wide of entrance but narrow of exit]. The Celtic analogue runs, “Is fusa dul go tigh an rí ná teacht as” [It is easier to go to the king’s house than to leave it] or “Ní hionann dul go tigh an rí agus teacht as” [Going to the king’s house is not the same as leaving it]; a related form is “Am fear nach doir gnothach do’n bhaile mhór bheir e gnothach as” [He who goes to town lightly will not come so lightly back] (Almqvist 1966: 181–83, 191).¹ Since these proverbs are sometimes used together with another one, “Is sleamhain iad leacacha an tighé mhóir” [Slippery are the flagstones of the mansion door] (183, 191), there can be no doubt that not only the form, but also the underlying idea is the same in both Celtic and Icelandic: as Almqvist put it, “Det är vanskligt att slippa helskinnad hem från mellanhavanden med de rika och mäktiga” [It is difficult to return unscathed from dealings with the rich and powerful] (186).

Almqvist ventured the hypothesis that the proverb was an Icelandic borrowing from the Irish, perhaps transmitted by Irish captives (186–89), but he conceded that proverbs can spread in many directions, noting that classical Latin parallels to Old Icelandic proverbs have been found and that a fifteenth-century Latin sententia, “quisque scit egressum, sed non est scire regressum” [Knowing that one is leaving is not the same as knowing that one will return], had already been com-

¹ The oldest Celtic attestation Almqvist found was from the 17th century: “Ní hionann dul ann is as” [Going is not the same as coming back] (183). The translations of the Celtic proverbs given here are taken directly from Almqvist’s article, though I have checked them against the appropriate dictionaries. I am responsible for the other translations in the present essay, except for those of the two Bible passages, which are cited from the King James Version.

pared with the Irish “king’s house” proverb by a Celticist (189–90).² At the time Almqvist wrote, no other Scandinavian examples of the *Egils saga* proverb were known to him (Icelandic proverb collections cited only this passage); in a note added to his article in proof (191–92), however, he announced that he had located a comparable Swedish proverb, which in its oldest printed form runs, “Herredören plägar wara gefit wijd in och trong vt” [A lord’s door tends to be wide in and narrow out].³ Since this Swedish version fit the Icelandic even better than the Celtic examples did, Almqvist was now inclined to favor a Scandinavian, rather than Celtic, origin for the proverb. Perhaps it was loaned to Ireland in the Viking Period, he concluded, or perhaps the Celtic and Scandinavian forms ultimately had a common source in Continental tradition (192). In what follows, I would like to present evidence that overwhelmingly supports the latter idea.

“Vestigia terrent”

In one of Aesop’s fables (Aarne-Thompson 1963: type 50A, Thompson 1955–58: motif J644.1), a sick (or old) lion calls the other animals to its den. When the fox arrives, it hesitates; the lion asks why it does not come in, and the fox says it sees many tracks leading in, but none leading out.

The simple but powerful antithesis of the fox’s remark seems to have made this fable especially popular already in antiquity. Numerous retellings and allusions to it outside the Aesopian corpus proper have been preserved:

Plato, *Alicibiades I*, 123A (4th c. B.C., if genuine): πολλὰς γὰρ ἤδη γενεὰς εἰσέρχεται μὲν αὐτόσε ἐξ ὁπάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων, πολλὰκις

² Ó Máille 1948: 195, no. 1297. Ó Máille’s source was Werner (1966: no. 179), who found the line in an early 15th-century manuscript (Basel, Univ.-Bibl. A XI 67, 273v). In fact, this line, like much of the manuscript in question, seems to have been borrowed from the collection of gnomic verse attributed to “Jocalis”, according to Lehmann a product of 13th-century Germany (lines 768–69 in Lehmann’s edition, 1938: 64); a similar line is also found in another 13th-century manuscript (Zacher 1859: no. 103). Almqvist did not comment on the close similarity between this Latin line and the oldest of his Celtic examples (see the preceding note).

³ *Swenske Ordsedher eller Ordsaghor* (Stockholm: Anund Olufsson, 1604), known to me only in Sahlgren’s edition with modernized orthography, Sahlgren 1946–56: 8.173–306, here 217. In his note Almqvist also added a reference to an early Modern Swedish version of the “slippery flagstones” proverb (191).

δὲ καὶ ἐκ τῶν βαρβάρων, ἐξέρχεται δὲ οὐδαμῶσε, ἀλλ' ἀτεχνῶς κατὰ τὸν Αἰσώπου μῦθον ὃν ἡ ἀλώπηξ πρὸς τὸν λέοντα εἶπεν, καὶ τοῦ εἰς Λακεδαίμονα νομίσματος εἰσιόντος μὲν τὰ ἵχνη τὰ ἐκείσε τετραμμένα δηλα, ἐξιόντος δὲ οὐδαμῆ ἄν τις ἴδοι [For many generations now it (money) has been entering in there (Lacedaimon) from all of Greece, often even from outside of Greece, but nowhere coming out again. For indeed, just as in Aesop's fable in which the fox addressed the lion, clear tracks of the money are seen leading into Lacedaimon, but nowhere leading out.]

Lucilius (Warmington 1938), fragments 1111–20 (2nd c. B.C., preserved only in Nonius Marcellinus; a retelling)

Horace, *Epistulae* 1.1.73–75 (20 B.C.): when his public asks why he does not bow to its collective taste and produce more lyric, "olim quod volpes aegroto cauta leoni / respondit, referam: quia me vestigia terrent, / omnia te adversum spectantia, nulla retrorsum" [I repeat what the fox said of old to the ailing lion: for I am afraid of the tracks, all leading toward you and none returning]

Seneca, *De otio* 1.3 (1st c. A.D.): "turba uestigiorum, in quibus nulla sunt redeuntium" [a mass of tracks, of which none are returning]

Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.11.20 (1st c. A.D.): "quid dixit uulpes aegroto cauta leoni" [what the fox said to the ailing lion]

Plutarch, *Moralia* 79a (2nd c. A.D.): καὶ ζητεῖν λόγους, ὧν κατὰ τὸν Αἰσώπου εἶσω μᾶλλον ἢ ἔξω τὰ ἵχνη τέτραπται [and seek oratory whose tracks, in the words of Aesop, lead inward rather than out]

a student's wax tablet from the 3rd c. A.D. found in Palmyra (a retelling; Hesselting 1892–93: no. 8, pp. 309–10; Hausrath 1957–59: 2.117)

Themistios, 13.174c (speech before the Roman senate in A.D. 376 or 377; Schenk and Downey 1965: 250): ὡσπερ τὸν λέοντα, ὃν ἐποίησεν Αἰσώπος, ἀρρωστοῦντα ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ ἢ κερδῶ ἐρεσχελεῖ εἰσιόντων τὰ ἵχνη δεικνύσα τῶν ζώων, ἐξιόντων δὲ οὐ [just as Aesop's lion, languishing sick in its cave, is answered by the wily one (fox), who points out the tracks of animals going in but not coming out].⁴

The fable itself is preserved in the Greek prose corpus attributed to Aesop (Perry 1952: no. 142, Hausrath 1957–59: no. 147), the collections of Babrios (1st c. A.D.?, Crusius 1898: no. 103, pp. 93–94; also the

⁴ Phraseological affinities with this fable have been perceived also in fragments of the writings of Archilochos and Solon, which would then be the oldest attestations of all; see the discussion in Garbugino 1984: 38–39, 41–42.

younger tetrastichon no. II.2, *ibid.*, p. 286), Pseudo-Dositheus (3rd c. A.D., no. 6 in Hausrath 1957–59: 2.123), Aphthonius (4th–5th c. A.D., no. 8 in Hausrath 1957–59: 2.136), Romulus (5th c. A.D.?, Thiele 1910: no. 86), and the late Byzantine collection known as *Syntipas* (11th c., no. 37 in Hausrath 1957–59: 2.170; also Perry 1952: 541).⁵

Thanks to its inclusion in the Romulus corpus, the principal medieval prose fable collection, the transmission of this fable blossomed in the Latin Middle Ages. In this form it is attested in countless manuscripts, beginning in the tenth century (see Holbek 1962: 75–91, with stemma, p. 84; Thiele 1910, especially p. lxxvii; and the still helpful survey in Oesterley 1870: 9–37). Versions of the fable may be consulted at the following places in Hervieux 1893–99: 2.230 (no. 4.12 in the earliest manuscript of the recensio Gallicana, 10th c.); 2.153 (no. 59 in Ademar of Chabannes's version of the recensio Gallicana, c. 1025; also Thiele 1905: 60 and plate 17; Bertini-Gatti 1988: 178); 2.509 (no. 3.32 of the Romulus Florentinus recension, another version of the Gallicana); 2.544 (no. 3.7 of the Romulus Nilantinus recension, 11th c.); 2.710–11 (no. 41) and 2.749 (no. 3.27), verse derivatives of the Nilantinus adding phrases from Horace; 2.370 (no. 6, an imitation of Horace); 2.244 (Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* 3.8, 13th c.; the same in his *Speculum doctrinale* 3.123); 2.451 (no. 72 of the Romulus Vindobonensis recension, 11th c.? [manuscripts 13th–14th c.]); 2.550 (no. 4 of the Romulus Roberti recension, derived from Marie de France? [manuscript 14th c.]); 2.622–23 (no. 84 of the "LBG" recension, 12th c. [manuscript 15th c.]); 4.412–13 (no. 4.54 of a collection of additions to Odo of Cerington's fables, manuscript from 1326). A two-line condensation in the present tense appears in Jocalis (lines 137–38 in Lehmann 1938: 64). The fable was included by Marie de France in her *Esope* of the 1170s or 1180s (Warnke 1898: no. 36), which was based on the Nilantinus recension but apparently also followed English-language sources, if her own statement is to be believed. The German transmission of the fable begins in 1215/16 with Thomasin von Zerklære (*Der Wälsche Gast*, lines 10905–34), continuing in the same century with the Vienna fable collection (no. 9 in Mihm 1965: 433) and, if Leitz-

⁵ On the definition of the Aesopian corpus, see Holbek 1962: 60–63. Holbek's essay "Fablernes historie" (59–102) outlines the principal manuscript traditions to the end of the Middle Ages; cf. the notes on the history of the Latin corpora in Grubmüller 1977: 67–85 and Dicke and Grubmüller 1987: xxviii–xliv, and the sketch of the textual history of this particular fable in Garbugino 1984. The dates given above are intended only for purposes of (approximate) relative chronology. Non-European variants of the fable, which I exclude from consideration here, are cited by Thompson.

mann's dating is correct, Gerhard von Minden (Leitzmann 1898: no. 72). For the later Middle Ages, more references may be found in Dicke and Grubmüller 1987: 229–33 and Holbek 1962: 177–78.

An additional path of transmission was provided by medieval commentaries on Horace's First Epistle, which reproduced the fable in toto in order to explain the allusion cited above.⁶ The versions edited in Keller 1904, Botschuyver 1935, and Botschuyver 1942 (all ad Ep. 1.1.70–75),⁷ based on numerous medieval manuscripts, are further proof — if any should be needed — that the Aesopian tradition flourished in literary circles as well as in the schoolroom and along other avenues of oral transmission (cf. Voigt 1891, Warnke 1898: xvii, Holbek 1962: 85). As far as I can see, these versions of the fable do not coincide with any known branch of the Romulus tradition.

Nor should it be overlooked that the "footsteps" metaphor can have brought to mind the passage in the *Aeneid* (6.126–29) in which the Cumaean Sibyl warns Aeneas, yearning to visit his father in the underworld, "facilis descensus Averno: / noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis; / sed reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras, / hoc opus, hic labor est" [It is easy to descend to Avernus: night and day the door of dark Dis stands open; but to retrace one's steps and escape to the upper air — this is the task, the difficulty]. Alternatively, Vergil's line can have recalled the fox's to hearers familiar with the fable; the two passages must have reinforced each other, impressing the metaphorical antithesis all the more firmly into popular memory. Although I am not aware of an explicit juxtaposition of the Vergil passage and the Aesop in medieval or Renaissance literature, I have found such a comparison in an early nineteenth-century commentary on Horace, and it no doubt has older roots.⁸ Formally, the Sibyl's

⁶ I was led to these versions of the fable by Warmington's reference to Porphyry in the apparatus to his edition of Lucilius; fable scholars seem to have missed them. On the transmission of Horace and his commentators in the Middle Ages, see Stemplinger 1913 and Schanz-Hosius 1935: 157–59.

⁷ Porphyry's comment on the passage (Holder 1894: 319) does not include a retelling.

⁸ "Diese sehr bekannte äsopische Fabel ... wendet auch Lucilius ... auf das Volk und die Grossen an ... So verschmäht der Weise den äussern Glanz, welcher die Menschen, besonders auf unrechtem Wege erlangt, am Ende doch nicht glücklich macht, sondern in's Verderben stürzt. Leicht ist es, sich von seinen Begierden und der lockenden Stimme des Haufens auf diesen gefährlichen Weg verleiten zu lassen, aber — *reuocare gradum, hoc opus, hic labor est!*" [This very well known Aesopian fable ... is also applied by Lucilius to the people and great men ... Thus the wise man scorns outer glamor, which in the end, especially when it has been achieved by unjust means, does not make people happy but rather sends them to their ruin. It is easy to be

dictum is even closer to the line in *Egils saga* than the Aesopian material is: the door stands open, but retracing one's steps will be a very difficult task.

Form and sense

The relation of double antithesis between the two halves of the fox's apophthegm (in : out :: many : none) is the same as that in Arinbjörn's (in : out :: wide : narrow); the lines are structurally identical. (Vergil's lines are syntactically more varied, but the double antithesis is still discernible: down : up :: easy : difficult.) The surface content of the metaphors, too, differs only slightly: footprints as opposed to a door (Vergil has both footsteps and a door). Is the underlying message also the same? In the classical Aesopian corpus, the moral of the fox-and-lion fable is that one should learn from others' mistakes, but the medieval tradition consistently adds the further comment, "because it is easy to enter the houses of the powerful, but difficult to leave".⁹

... Interrogata autem a leone: Quare non intrasti? respondit: Quoniam uideo introeuntium uestigia, exeuntium autem non uideo. Sic quorundam periculum doctrina nobis debet esse nostrę salutis, quia in domum potentis facile quisquam intrat, exire uero tarde est.

[Asked by the lion why it did not enter, it (the fox) answered: because I see tracks of those going in, but of none coming out. Thus the perils of others ought to be a lesson for our own welfare, for everyone enters the house of a powerful man easily, but leaving is difficult (slow).] (the tenth-century Codex Burneianus, in Hervieux 1893-99: 2.230; similarly most other Romulus manuscripts)

tempted onto this dangerous path by one's desires and by the alluring voice of the mob, but — 'to retrace one's steps, this is the task, the difficulty'!] (Schmid 1828: 35n, on the Aesop allusion in Horace's First Epistle). See also note 13 below.

⁹ The use of the word *potens* has been taken as evidence for the ultimately Phaedrian origin of these redactions, even though the fable is absent in all known versions of Phaedrus's collection: a polarization between *humiles* and *potentes*, with strong negative weighting of the latter, is typical of Phaedrus, according to Garbugino (1984: 51). But even if it did hark back to the days of the Roman empire, "in which no one knew whether he would leave the imperial palace alive" (Herrmann 1950: 55, cited in Garbugino 1984: 51), the revised epimythion was at least as appropriate for the Feudal Age. Garbugino interprets it as a warning to the medieval *petit bourgeois* to be prudent in his dealings with nobles and monarchs, who were increasingly fearful of the economic power of the middle class (1984: 56).

Other variants:

... quia in domum potentis facile quisque intrat, exire autem non omnibus equaliter licet. [For everyone enters the house of a powerful man easily, but it is not equally easy for everyone to leave.] (Romulus Nilantinus, in Hervieux 2.544)

... quia facile est intrare curias principum et regum, sed non tam facile ab illis exire. [For it is easy to enter the courts of princes and kings, but not so easy to leave them.] ("LBG" recension, in Hervieux 2.622–23)

In some texts this secondary epimythion appears as heading: "Item contra illos qui domos potentum facile intrant" [Against those who enter the houses of the powerful easily] (Vincent of Beauvais, in Hervieux 2.244). The metrical Nilantinus version begins with the verse heading, "Qui regis facile intrat nec sit deserit aulam" [whoever enters the king's hall easily will not leave it thus], and ends with the moral,

Sic intrat facile excelsum quis doma potentum,
Sedque modo simili semper non deserit illud,
Cum proceres nectunt legis per retia multos.

[One can enter the high hall of the powerful so easily,
but one does not always leave it the same way;
for rulers kill many with the snares of law.] (Hervieux 2.710–11)

Neither Marie de France nor Gerhard von Minden has explicit antithesis in the moral, but the sense is clearly the same:

De curt a rei est enement:
tels i entre legierement,
mielz li vendreit en sus ester
pur les nuveles esculter.

[It is the same with a king's court: one enters it easily;
it would be better to listen to the news from outside.]
(Warnke 1898: no. 36, lines 25–28)

Den enes andern schade wis
maket, de mach hebben pris.
ok vil tor vörsten hove komen,
darvan se bringen ginen vromen.

[Whoever learns from another's misfortune is to be praised.
And many who come to princes' courts leave with no benefit from
them.] (Leitzmann 1898: no. 72, lines 25–28)

Garbugino has pointed out in this context that folio 17 of the Ademar manuscript contains an illustration, perhaps by Ademar himself, of the lion in a "villa" complete with turret, wall, and arcade (1984: 55–56; cf. the facsimile and detailed description in Thiele 1905: 60). Even in the Horace commentaries, which have a decidedly Christian bent, the lion is equated with a human monarch: "mandavit omnibus bestiis, ut visentes illum venirent ad curiam suam ut ad regem suum" [ordered all the animals to come to his court to visit him, as if to their king] (Botschuyver 1942: 326–27). Horace's refusal to follow the dictates of his public, a "many-headed beast", is interpreted as a renouncement of the world as den of sin: "Similiter in populo Romano nullus est qui, postquam ingreditur societatem vitiosorum illorum, recedet inde, sed conformabitur illis" [Similarly, in the Roman populace there is no one who can leave, once having entered into the company of those sinful people; rather, one conforms to them] (*ibid.*). (From here it is but a short step to seeing the lion's den as Hell, as Odo of Cerington's continuator did, perhaps thinking of Vergil: "Ita etiam, qui intrat infernum numquam exibat" [And similarly, whoever enters Hell will never leave], Hervieux 1893–99: 4.412–13.) Other commentaries on Horace, however, add a wry remark on the patronage of the powerful:

Quam ut coepit leo hortari, ut ad se intraret, respondit: terrent me, inquiens, vestigia ingredientium sed non revertentium, quod est dicere a poeta: ideo non consentio vobis diligendo divitias quas amatis, quia neminem vestrum abundantem divitiis prosperare video.

[When the lion asked it (the fox) to enter, it replied, saying, "I am frightened of the tracks of those entering but not returning", which is the poet's way of saying, "I am not willing to love the wealth that you love, for I see none of your men prospering with an abundance of it".] (Botschuyver 1935: 346; a similar text in Keller 1904: 213)¹⁰

¹⁰ Likewise, in one of the best known of all Aesopian fables, the country mouse is impressed by the well-stocked pantry in the house of the city mouse, but dismayed that it is fraught with the constant peril of death at the hands of the human inhabitants (Aarne-Thompson type 112, Thompson motif J211.2). Under his "Meaning-Types" 325–30, Wienert groups this fable together with others in which a poor but peaceful existence is preferred to a luxurious but dangerous one (1925: 123–24); some of these emphasize the loss of freedom experienced by domestic animals in comparison with

And Thomasin von Zerklære, who presents the fable as ethical allegory, equating the lion with the Devil and the fox with the man circumspect enough to avoid the snares of *übermuot*, speaks of the Devil as of a treacherous lord: "der tuot niemen leids sô vil / sô dem der im dienen wil" [He harms no one so much as the man who desires to serve him] (lines 10945–46). It is not difficult to read similar sentiments between the lines of several passages in *Egils saga*: in chapter 25, for example, Skalla-Grímr declines King Haraldr's offer of prestige and financial reward, saying with deep sarcasm — as the king has killed Grímr's brother, who served him loyally — that he would not be able to repay the king as he deserved. I return to these passages below.

In sum, for an antithetical saying which means, "It is difficult to return unscathed from dealings with the rich and powerful" (to quote Almqvist), one need look no further than the medieval Aesop tradition.

Rudolf von Habsburg

Additional evidence for the popularity of the "vestigia terrent" motif in the Middle Ages is furnished by a legend attached to the German king Rudolf I (Treichler 1971: 101–02; Kleinschmidt 1974: 148n258–59, 167). At a meeting between Rudolf and Pope Gregory X in Lausanne in October 1275, Rudolf vowed to undertake a crusade and the Pope agreed to perform the imperial coronation ceremony the following Pentecost; but for various reasons, not least Gregory's death in January 1276, the coronation never took place (Redlich 1903: 195–203). According to the legend, Rudolf sensed danger, like the fox in the fable, which he cited to explain his position. The earliest version appears in the First Bavarian Continuation of the *Sächsische Weltchronik*, written according to Weiland between 1292 and 1314/15 (1877: 320):

Also gesigt der chünich den Pehaimen an, und dovon wart er also wert, daz in die herren ofte anmüten, daz er ze Rom füre und kaiser wurde. Der kunich was ein weis, chündlich man, er antwurt den herren der rede also mit dem peispiel: "Ez wurden vil tier geladen fur einen perch, nu chom de fuhs auch dar; diu tier giengen elliu in den perch, der fuhs belaib alain hie auzzen stan und warte, wenne diu tier herwider giengen. Der chom dehainz herwider auz; do wolt der fuhs in den perch niht". Mit dem peispiel gab der künich den herren ze

their counterparts in the wild. See also Henderson 1978 and 1981.

versten, daz vor im manich chünich uber daz gepirg in Wælscheu lant fur, die alle dorinne beliben. Dorumb wolt er ze Wælschen landen noch ze Rom niht.

[In this way the king defeated the Bohemians, and this led the nobles (*herren*) to urge him frequently to travel to Rome and become emperor. The king was a wise and knowledgeable man; he answered the nobles with this exemplum. "Many animals were summoned before a mountain; the fox came as well. The animals all went into the mountain; the fox alone remained outside and waited for the animals to come out. None came out again, so the fox did not want to go into the mountain." With this exemplum the king gave the nobles to understand that many kings before him had crossed the mountains into Romance territory, and they had all remained there. For this reason he did not want to go into Romance territory or to Rome.] (Weiland 1877: 328)

The antithetical *pointe* is missing, and in general the fable is inferior artistically to the medieval Latin fables, let alone *Egils saga*; also, it is certainly younger than the saga (though no younger than *Möðruvallabók*). But it is remarkable for two reasons. First, if the legend is accurate, it constitutes an example of the practical application of a well-known fable in conversation or oratory, with or without a *pointe*; Rudolf was probably illiterate (Treichler 1971: 140).¹¹ Second, even if the story was invented by the continuator, it confirms the testimony of the medieval texts cited above that the "vestigia terrent" motif was typically applied to the same kind of political danger that Egill and other characters in the saga faced — or at least sensed — abroad.

The labyrinth of San Savino

In his ecclesiastical history of Piacenza, Pietro Maria Campi describes the rich floor-mosaic decoration of the Benedictine monastery church of San Savino in that city, including a labyrinth accompanied by the following inscription:

¹¹ Another example of the practical application of an animal fable is no. 89 of the *Magdeburger Aesop*, from c. 1400 (Seelmann 1878, with discussion, xxi–xxii, xxxi): a falcon dives to attack an eagle that has stolen its prey, but misses it and crashes against a rock. The narrator claims that while on a diplomatic mission to Denmark he was told this story by King Valdemar Atterdag, who represented it as his own observation from nature, and it seems to have been meant as a political warning to Germany. According to Holbek (1962: 88), this is the only medieval fable with a Scandinavian connection.

HVNC MVNDVM TIPICE LABERINTHVVS DENOTAT ISTE,
INTRANTI LARGVS, REDEVNTI SET NIMIS ARTVS.
SIC MVNDO CAPTVS, VICIORVM MOLE GRAVATVS,
VIX VALET AD VITE DOCTRINAM QVISQVE REDIRE.

[That labyrinth metaphorically signifies this world,
wide for one entering, but less wide for one leaving.
Captured thus by the world, burdened by the weight of sins,
one is scarcely able to return to the doctrine of life.]
(Campi 1651: 1.241)

Campi is our only eyewitness for the labyrinth and its inscription, which no longer exist, having apparently been destroyed in the course of renovations in the early eighteenth century, though other mosaics survived (Tononi 1903).¹² The present church of San Savino was consecrated in 1107, and the mosaics are thought to date to the 1120's (Valla 1992: 98).

The verse is apparently original, though such a claim is difficult to verify, since medieval inscriptions have not been centrally registered (cf. the partial collections cited in Kajanto 1993). (Another hexameter line with an "in-out" antithesis, HOC OPUS INTENDAT QUISQUIS BONUS EXIT ET INTRAT [May he who leaves and enters as a good man understand this work], occurs at least twice in Northern Italy, in Piacenza Cathedral and in the abbey Sagra di San Michele della Chiusa, both roughly contemporary with the San Savino mosaics; Verzár 1968: 84–85 and plate 58.) At any rate, the "Hunc mundum"

¹² In *Il nome della rosa* (secondo giorno, dopo vesperi, Eco 1984: 163), Umberto Eco has Alinardo recite the first two lines of this inscription, a citation which Stauder, in his exposé of Eco's sources, including a discussion of the labyrinth motif (1988: 153–60), does not identify. The San Savino labyrinth and its inscription have often been mentioned in studies of the labyrinth as artistic motif, however (e.g. Haubrichs 1980: 102 n81 with literature, 149). Ironically, one of the less reliable of these works, Santarcangeli 1967, may have been Eco's direct source; in a foreword written for its 1984 edition, Eco cites the first line of the inscription and plays with the idea of the labyrinth "as a place easy to enter but difficult to leave" (Santarcangeli 1984: vii–ix). Santarcangeli misinforms on several points (1967: 247, 259–60): Campi is cited as "Carpi"; the two citations of the inscription text both contain errors; and following Campi almost word for word, Santarcangeli speaks of the labyrinth and inscription in the present tense, giving the impression they are still visible, though the labyrinth is "damaged". Santarcangeli says he corresponded with the sexton of San Savino, but he must have either misunderstood him or not asked the right questions. (The French translation of 1974 leaves everything unchanged; the second Italian edition deletes the first quotation of the inscription but otherwise reproduces the text of its predecessor exactly.)

couplet does not appear in the standard proverb and hexameter lexica (Singer 1944–47, Walther 1959, 1963–69, 1982–86, Werner 1966, Schaller-Könsigen-Tagliabue 1977, Schumann 1979).

The second line of the couplet is structurally identical with the passages in *Egils saga*, Aesop, and Vergil, and its surface content, moreover, fits the *Egils saga* proverb even more closely than the others do: the entrance is wide for one going in, narrow for one going out.¹³ The context, on the other hand, is strictly religious. As in one of the Horace commentaries cited above (Botschuyver 1942: 326–27), the trap, here equated with a labyrinth, is the world with its sins.

From the logical point of view, it is not obvious that a labyrinth should have a wide entrance. Although classical and medieval conceptions of the labyrinth could alternate between emphasizing impenetrability and “inextricability” (Doob 1991: 55, 72–82), I have found no scholarly discussion of a labyrinth topos in which ease of access plays an explicit role. This idea is missing even in Doob’s book¹⁴; in another context, however, Doob does cite a text in which just this image appears. It is letter 19 of Petrarch’s *Epistolae sine nomine*, addressed to Francesco Nelli in 1359, in which Petrarch compares Nelli’s stay in Avignon with Aeneas’s sojourn in Hades: “Sciebam et Averni descensum facilem et apertum laberinthi limen, laboriosum atque operosum exitum” [I knew that the descent to Avernus was easy, the entrance of the labyrinth was open, but leaving it toilsome and difficult] (1974: 218, in Doob 1991: 159).

Petrarch, at least, may have been alluding not only to Vergil but also to the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus admonishes (in the Vulgate text),

Intrate per angustam portam / quia lata porta et spatiosa via quae
ducit ad perditionem / et multi sunt qui intrant per eam / quam
angusta porta et arcta via quae ducit ad vitam / et pauci sunt qui
inveniunt eam.

¹³ The similarity in content between the San Savino inscription and Vergil’s lines was noted by Santarcangeli (1967: 247).

¹⁴ Although Doob mentions the San Savino labyrinth and inscription (1991: 117–18), she does not discuss them and does not seem to be aware of the other mosaics of San Savino, such as the self-portrait of the artist (lost, but described by Campi, loc. cit.) and the two major surviving works, a Wheel of Fortune and a zodiac (see, e.g., Tononi 1903), knowledge of which might have added to her discussion of the links between labyrinths and imprints left by architects (121), labyrinths and zodiacs (130), and labyrinths and Wheels of Fortune (ibid.).

[Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.] (Matthew 7.13–14)

Structurally, Jesus’ speech is a compact quadruple antithesis contrasting easy and difficult passage (wide gate : strait [i.e., narrow] gate :: broad way : narrow way :: destruction : life :: many : few). Since the “in-out” dimension is missing, however, and since Jesus does not warn against, but rather recommends the difficult route, the degree of similarity between Matthew 7.13–14 and the “konungsgarðr” speech in *Egils saga* must be deemed remote.¹⁵

The San Savino inscription and its counterpart in Petrarch are the closest formal parallels to Arinbjörn’s figure that I have found. Should one wish to look for possible avenues of borrowing, one could even speculate that the San Savino text was seen and remembered by an Icelandic author. The city of Piacenza lay on one of the most popular routes taken by Northern European pilgrims to Rome and the Holy Land (Hill 1984), and the Icelander Nikulás Bergsson not only made such a pilgrimage, probably between the years 1149 and 1153, while still a monk at Þingeyrir (in 1155 he became Abbot of Munkaþverá), but he also wrote a guide to the route, the so-called *Leiðarvísir*, including an entry for Piacenza with the remark, “þar er byskups stoll ath Mario kirkju” (Kálund 1908: 15). Now it is true that “Mario kirkia” refers to Piacenza Cathedral (Magoun 1944: 336), not the monastery church of San Savino (dedicated to Sabinus, a fourth-century bishop of Piacenza); still, the extensive mosaics of the latter church, which were no more than a generation old at the time of Nikulás’s journey, must have constituted a point of interest in their own right and had their share of visitors, perhaps especially among fellow Benedictines such as Nikulás.

Although Nikulás is known to have been a poet, little of his work is preserved, so it is pointless to extend the chain of speculation even further to include his possible influence on later literature. But we do know that either he or another travel author had a hand in the trans-

¹⁵ The Old Norse translations of Matthew 7.13–14 listed by Kirby do contain, among others, the key words “þröngr” and “rúmr”, and several other echoes of the Matthew verses are evident in the examples collected by the Copenhagen *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* for these two words; I thank the Arnarnagnæan Institute for permission to examine them.

mission of at least one piece of foreign material later attested in saga literature: a second account of Jerusalem, preserved with the *Leid-arvisir* but of uncertain authorship, found its way into *Kirialax saga*, which (coincidentally?) also makes use of learned descriptions of a labyrinth and a Wheel of Fortune (Cook 1985: 305–06, 308–13).

A more obvious potential “source” for Arinbjörn’s figure is the fable material used in school instruction. Ernst Voigt has pointed out that although only a small proportion of medieval schoolbooks survives, contemporary reports show that the Latin reader for the first several years of instruction in the Trivium, for children aged roughly from nine to eleven years, normally consisted of Aesopian fables in prose (Romulus) and verse (Avianus), together with gnomic poetry (*Disticha Catonis*), and he emphasized that the formative influence of this curriculum should not be underestimated. “[D]ie über die Schriften des Mittelalters zerstreuten zahlreichen Entlehnungen und Anklänge an die alten Klassiker”, he says, “sind in den meisten Fällen nicht Plagiate ad hoc, sondern unwillkürliche Erinnerungen aus der Trivialzeit” [The numerous borrowings and parallels to the Classics strewn throughout medieval texts are in most cases not plagiarism ad hoc, but rather inescapable mental images from trivium school days] (1891: 43). And teachers, for their part, constantly produced new versions of such readers: “Gerade das erste Triviallesebuch . . . zeigt bei allem Festhalten an der ursprünglichen Autorentrias *nach Form wie Inhalt eine erstaunliche Fülle immer neuer und neuer Gestaltungen*” [The first trivium reader, especially, . . . despite its adherence to the original trio of authors (sc. Romulus, Avianus, Cato), *displays in both form and content an astonishing number of new and different versions*] (1891: 45, emphasis in the original).

We know less about Scandinavian schools in the Middle Ages than about Continental ones, but there is no reason to believe that there were substantial differences in the curriculum (cf. Haastrup 1970). Although no animal fables from the Scandinavian High Middle Ages are known to have been preserved,¹⁶ an Icelandic translation of the *Disticha Catonis* exists, having been made perhaps as early as the

¹⁶ None is registered in Boberg 1966 or Sveinsson 1929. The only specimens I am aware of which may be older than the 15th century are translations from the 12th-century *Disciplina clericalis* of Petrus Alfonsi preserved in a paper manuscript from 1690 but perhaps stemming from the 14th century (cf. Gering 1882–83: xxix–xxxi); they include “The Mule’s Parentage” and “Wolf and Fox” (Gering’s numbers 55 and 76).

twelfth century (Pálsson 1985: 22), and citations and “echoes” of the *Disticha* — including one in the original Latin — have been traced in a number of medieval Scandinavian texts, *Egils saga* among them (Pálsson 1985: 28, 38–39, 41). In any case, those Scandinavians who were educated on the Continent will have been able to absorb there some of whatever might have been missing at home. There can be no doubt that both the *Aeneid* and the “vestigia terrent” complex had reached Iceland in some form by the time of *Egils saga*’s composition, and for my purposes here, it is unimportant what precisely the avenues of transmission were.

Borrowing and Creating: Internal Evidence

For Almqvist, both internal and external evidence indicated that the passage in question was indeed a proverb rather than an original coinage. I shall review this evidence briefly — in each case presenting Almqvist’s observations before adding my own — not so much in order to settle the question whether the passage is a proverb, as in order to identify its intra- and intertextual connections more precisely.

From the stylistic point of view, the compact form and double antithesis of the passage support its identification as a proverb, according to Almqvist (1966: 178). That it bears no introductory formula like the one in the following sentence (“sem fornkveðit orð er, at þá verðr eik at fāga, er undir skal búa” [as the old saying goes, that one must take care of the oak one is to live under]) is irrelevant, since proverbs can be employed without such formulas (*ibid.*). The proximity to the “oak” proverb can even serve as an argument in favor of proverb status, since Arinbjörn’s speech is symmetrical: the “king’s residence” phrase rounds off the first half of the chain of argument, just as the “oak” proverb rounds off the second (*ibid.*). “Egils sagas upphovsman . . . tillhör [inte] den typ av författare som strör ordspråk omkring sig för ordspråkens egen skull, utan att han tvärtom applicerar dem med stor finess och säker stilkänsla” [*Egils saga*’s creator is not the kind of writer who tosses around proverbs for their own sake; on the contrary, he applies them with great finesse and a sure sense of style], writes Almqvist (177–78). Arinbjörn’s warning speech is carefully constructed in many respects, in fact; Almqvist observes that it is one of a number of weightier, rhythmic speeches in the saga characterized

by parallelism, antithesis, alliteration, metaphor, proverb, and sententia, and he cites other examples in legal contexts in chapters 3, 56, and 57 (174).

Further investigation of the extraordinarily rich parallelism in *Egils saga* is impossible within the limits of this essay, but there is reason to mention at least a few additional, very closely related passages.¹⁷ Closest of all is perhaps King Haraldr's memorable warning to the brothers plotting the murder of Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson: "‘en þó geta þess sumir menn', segir konungr, 'ef þit siglið norðr, at þit munið bæði sigla ok róa norðan'" [but some say that if you sail north, you will both sail and row south again] (ch. 21; cf. M. Taylor 1992: 296, 298, 302).¹⁸ The only difference between the logical structure here (sail : sail + row :: north : south) and the double antithesis in the "king's residence" apophthegm is that the element "sail" is not negated, but incremented. The underlying warning against the trip to a dangerous enemy is identical. Comparable is also the warning given Þórólfr Skalla-Grimsson by his father: "‘hefir þú', segir hann, 'farit fremðarför mikla, en þat er mælt, er ýmsar verðr, ef margar ferr'" [you have made a great journey of accomplishment, but it is said that the journeys are mixed if many are made] (ch. 38; cf. M. Taylor 1992: 304). The symmetrical structure is not fully explicit in the syntax, but can easily be reconstructed as "one trip : many trips :: great success : varied success (i.e., inevitable failure)". Even within Arinbjörn's speeches in chapter 68, the "konungsgarðr" passage is not the only multiple parallelism. The passage leading into the "oak" proverb, for example, although syntactically complex, is a warning based on the structure "then : now :: more friendship : less friendship :: difficult : (even more difficult)": "Hafa oss þá orðit margar tórsóttar fjárheimtur við ofreflismennina, ok sátu vér þá í meira trausti við konung en nú er, því at vinátta okkur Hákonar konungs stendr grunnt" [Many of our financial claims against powerful men were difficult to prosecute in the past, and we stood in a better position with the king then than we do now, for our friendship with King Hákon has cooled] (cf. M. Taylor 1992: 299). The last conceptual

¹⁷ Cf. Schach 1986: 411–13. Schach's comparison of the 13th-century θ fragment with corresponding passages in the 14th-century Möðruvallabók redaction suggests to him that the earliest versions of *Egils saga* displayed even more parallelism. In this essay I cite Sigurður Nordal's edition, which follows Möðruvallabók.

¹⁸ One might also compare Deuteronomy 28.25: "per unam viam egrediatis contra eos et per septem fugias" [thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them].

pair (of which the second element, “even more difficult”, is only implied) displays pointed incrementation rather than antithesis, as in the passage in chapter 21. In any case, then, proverb or not, the “konungsgarðr” passage is integrated skillfully into the surrounding narrative; it is a stylistic high point, to be sure, but only one of many.

Another criterion considered by Almqvist is metaphoricity; the invariant form of proverbs means that in many situations they can be applied only metaphorically, not literally. The fact that here the key word “konungsgarðr” is used literally could thus be an indication that the phrase was not traditional, but coined by the creator of *Egils saga* on the spot (178–79). But Almqvist cites examples of other proverbs applied in the sagas literally as well as metaphorically, and concludes that metaphoricity is not a necessary condition of proverbs; a frozen phrase can be awakened to new life by its being taken literally. Also, the elements “wide entrance — narrow exit” are in any case used metaphorically (179–80).

The content of the “konungsgarðr” phrase fits just as seamlessly into the narrative as its style does. Almqvist reasoned that Egill’s descendants must have been especially attuned to its message (189), given such chapters in the family history as Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson’s death (*Egils saga* ch. 22) and Egill’s brush with death at York (*Egils saga* ch. 59–60). One can go further: Arinbjörn’s warning resonates through *Egils saga* from beginning to end.¹⁹ In chapter 3, Kveld-Úlfr refuses King Auðbjörn’s summons with these words:

‘Þat mun konungi skylt þykkja, at ek fara með honum, ef hann skal verja land sitt ok sé herjat í Firðafylki; en hitt ætla ek mér allóskylt, at fara norðr á Moeri ok berjask þar ok verja land þeira.’

[The king will consider it my obligation to follow him if he has to defend his land against incursions in Firðafylki; but I consider myself

¹⁹ Thus, for example, Melissa Berman: “The fundamental problem, in the author’s eyes, seems to be the danger of putting oneself in another’s power” (1983: 108), in her section on “Politics in *Egils saga*” (95–109); and Bjarni Einarsson: “*Egils saga* may be seen as a warning against intimate relations with the royal power, and, on the other hand, a glorifying of the old aristocratic system in Iceland” (1993: 156). According to Theodore Andersson, *Egils saga* displays less Icelandic bias than *Morkinskinna* (since Egil’s troubles can be attributed to his immoderation and King Eiríkr, for example, “seems almost implausibly patient”), though more than *Heimskringla*, which represents a later stage of political opinion (1994: 71–77).

under no obligation whatsoever to travel north to Moerr and fight there to defend those people's land.]²⁰

He justifies his position further with his lack of faith in the king's *hamingja* as measured against the challenger Haraldr's. But in chapter 6, when Haraldr, now king, has summoned either Kveld-Úlfr or his son Grímr to the court, Kveld-Úlfr's warning against making the journey becomes explicit: "ætla ek, at þær lykðir muni á vera, at vér munim aldrtila hljóta af þeim konungi" [I believe that the consequences will be loss of life for us at the hands of that king]. He repeats it almost verbatim in chapter 25, when his son Grímr has refused another offer to join the king's retinue (see below): "sagði enn sem fyrr, at þeir myndi af konungi hljóta skaða einn, en enga uppreist" [he repeated what he had said before, that they would reap only harm from the king, and no advancement]. After Þórólfr has begun to run into difficulties in the king's service, Kveld-Úlfr recalls his prophecy "at Þórólfr myndi eigi til alls endis gæfu til bera um vináttu Haralds konungs" [that Þórólfr would not always have luck on his side in his friendship with King Haraldr] (ch. 18). And after Þórólfr is killed, having fallen three feet short of killing the king, who he knew had betrayed him, the now clearly ironic idea of "not bringing luck with oneself in entering the king's service" is played on in Grímr's answer to the king in chapter 25, when he is told he should enter the king's service if he expects any compensation for his brother's death (cf. M. Taylor 1992: 205):

'Þat var kunnigt, hversu miklu Þórólfr var framar en ek em at sér gorr um alla hluti, ok bar hann enga gæfu til at þjóna þér, konungr. Nú mun ek ekki taka þat ráð. Eigi mun ek þjóna þér, því at ek veit, at ek mun eigi gæfu til bera at veita þér þá þjónustu, sem ek mynda vilja ok vert væri. Hygg ek, at mér verði meiri muna vant en Þórólfi.'

[It was well known how much Þórólfr excelled me in all respects, and he brought no luck with him in serving you, sire. Now I will not accept this advice. I will not serve you, because I know that I will not bring luck with me in performing the service that I would like and

²⁰ The same rhetorical antithesis is to be found in King Hákon Hákonarson's refusal of the Pope's offer to crown him Holy Roman Emperor, as reported by Matthew of Paris for the year 1251 (5.201): "protestatus est palam, se semper velle ecclesie inimicos, sed non omnes Papae inimicos, impugnare" [he declared openly that he was always willing to fight the enemies of the Church, but not all the enemies of the Pope]. This passage is discussed in another context in Ólafía Einarssdóttir 1995: 58.

that you deserve. I suspect I would fall further short of the mark than Þórólfr did.]

More examples of ominous royal summonses could be mentioned: the first report of Haraldr's tyranny (without dialogue) in chapter 4, Haraldr's recalling Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson to the court after stripping him of his fief in Hálogaland (ch. 16), and the pressing of men into service as royal tax collectors (ch. 70). While it is true that Egill apparently enjoys his sojourns at the courts of Aðalsteinn and Hákon in chapters 62 and 63, the saga makes it clear that such ventures involve great risk.

This message is certainly not unique to *Egils saga* and the fox-and-sick-lion fable. Especially with Egill's experience at York in mind, one might compare, for example, the conclusion drawn by Franco Sacchetti at the end of one of the anecdotes in his collection *Il Trecento-novelle*, written in the last decade of the fourteenth century:

A cui vien fatta una cosa o bella o laida, dinanzi a un signore, quando è ben disposto, li vien ben fatto, come venne a questo Genovese: ma a molti è incontrato già il contrario, perché l'animo d'un signore parrà talora cheto, e tra sé medesimo combatte con diverse genti, e in diverse parti. Più sicuro saria a chi 'l può fare, di non s'impacciare, e non sarà impacciato.

[Whoever makes a pleasant or unpleasant presentation before a lord will find that it turns out well if the lord is in a good mood, as it happened to this Genoese. But many have already had the opposite experience, for the mind of a lord will sometimes appear quiet, but within himself he is battling various nations in various lands. One will be safer if one can manage to keep out of such situations, and one will not get into trouble (pun on *impacciarsi*).] (1957: no. 82)

Similar conclusions are reached with respect to lawcourts in number 145, in which a vain and fatuous judge is manipulated by the vulgar antics of the defense: "O quanti rettori, se non sono ben cauti, e chi con malizia, e chi senza malizia, dannano li innocenti, e assolvono li nocenti ... [C]hé nelle corte si fa si fatta ragione che guai a chi s'induce in esse con alcuna questione" [O how many judges, whether with malice or without, if they are not very careful, convict the innocent and acquit the guilty; ... for the justice done in the courts is of such a kind that (one can only say) woe to him who comes before them with any matter]. These attitudes also underlie the medieval

animal epic (“Reynard the Fox at court” is Aarne-Thompson’s type 53), which, to borrow Jackson’s characterization of the thirteenth-century Dutch *Reinaert*, is “full of thrusts against feudal trials, the oppression by and cupidity of ruling nobles, and the obscurities of the law” (Jackson 1983: 142).²¹ Arinbjörn’s warning is atypical neither for *Egils saga* nor for medieval thought at large.

Borrowing and Creating: External Evidence

The consensus of proverb scholars is that the proof of the pudding is in the eating: no amount of internal evidence can identify a phrase as a proverb if it is not known to have achieved popular currency.²² Here I have adduced evidence that the figure in question, defined in terms of both style and content, was indeed current throughout the European Middle Ages, confirming Almqvist’s hypothesis.

The comparative evidence presented by Almqvist in 1966, summarized at the beginning of this essay, had been restricted to the post-medieval period. This modern evidence, too, can be supplemented. (I leave aside the modern transmission of Aesop and Vergil.) In 1981, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson remarked on the similarity between Arinbjörn’s figure and a proverb listed in Hallgrímur Scheving’s *Islenzkir máls-hættir*: “Hægt er að komast í kolska gard, en óhægt út að komast” [It is possible (or: easy) to enter the Devil’s house, but impossible to leave] (1843: 30, unfortunately inaccessible to me; in Vilhjálmsson 1981: 81). Vilhjálmsson continued, “Skemmtilegt væri að hugsa sér að Snorri hefði þekkt málshátt áþekkan þeim sem Scheving hefur, og snúið honum upp á konung. Forvitnilegt væri að athuga hvort hliðstæður málsháttur væri finnanlegur í miðaldaritum. Alþýðlegri gerð þessa

²¹ In addition to the material mentioned in note 10, one might also point to Babrius’s fable (Crusius 1898: no. 95; for medieval versions see Dicke and Grubmüller 1987: 323–27 and Henderson 1978: 276–77) of the stag foolish enough to let itself be persuaded by the fox — on the pretext that the sick lion wants to name the stag as its successor to the throne — to enter the lion’s den not only once, but twice. The first time the lion pounces too slowly and the skittish stag is able to flee, but the fox assures it that only a fatherly caress was intended; it returns and is killed. “The fox, ordered to ready the carcass for his master, steals the heart, explaining to the outraged lion that any creature who would willingly respond to such a dangerous summons (or return to such a dangerous place, depending on the version) surely had no heart in the first place” (Henderson’s summary, 1978: 277).

²² Thus, for example, A. Taylor 1931: 3–10, 135–56, and Kjær 1967: 673. Both are cited by Janus (1994), who comes to the same conclusion in his review of phraseological research with special reference to *Egils saga*.

málsháttar er: Það er ekki laust sem skrattinn / fjandinn hefur” [It is attractive to imagine that Snorri knew a proverb similar to that given by Scheving and turned it against the king. It would be interesting to investigate whether an analogous proverb can be found in medieval texts. A more common form of this proverb is, “What the Devil has, is caught”] (ibid.). The present essay confirms Vilhjálms­son’s hunch, which was the same as Almqvist’s: analogous proverbs do indeed exist in medieval texts. As we have seen, already in the early Middle Ages the attestations are of both kinds, secular (applied to rulers) and religious (applied to sin, Hell, the Devil), so the creator of *Egils saga* could just as well have known a secular variant as a religious one.

A related phraseological complex is concentrated on German-speaking territory. Heinrich Bebel’s Latin *Facetiae*, which inaugurated the wave of German *Schwank* collections at the beginning of the sixteenth century, include an anecdote in which a court jester, having listened to a military invasion being planned, makes the ominous remark, “omnes deliberatis enim de ingressu, sed nemo de exitu” [you are all discussing the entrance, but no one the exit] (vol. 3, no. 35 in Bebermeyer 1967). Bebel’s seems to be the earliest attestation of the anecdote in this form, though in terms of both the remark and its context the anecdote is clearly related to the older legend of Rudolf von Habsburg cited above (which survived in several variants, with and without the fable, into the modern period; see Treichler 1971: 101 and Büchmann 1957: 153).

The same anecdote was subsequently told of other princes and jesters, as well, and the jester’s *pointe* also cited alone as a kind of Wellerism: “Man sagt wohl, wie man hineinkompt, aber keiner rätet, wie man wider herauskompt” (Wander 1867–80: s.v. “Hineinkommen 1”; further sources are given by Bebermeyer). The line is also attested in eighteenth-century Denmark: “See [*sic*] ey saa meget hvor du kommer ind, som kandst komme ud” (*Ord-Bog over danske Ordsprog* 1757: 493, cited in Wander: loc. cit.), perhaps having been translated from the German at some point.²³

²³ I have not been able to find anything closer in modern Danish. Peder Syv’s collections (1682–88), which according to Kjær were the principal source of the 1757 *Ord-Bog* (Kjær 1981: 306), do provide antithetical proverbs which share the sense of Arinbjörn’s warning, but they invoke different metaphors: “Af store herrer kand mand baade varmes og brændes. Jo nermere solen / jo førre sveder mand. For langt fra ilden fryser / for nær brændes. Æd ej kirsebær med store herrer / de udlede de beste / og kaste dig tidt stenene i næsen. . . . Godt at varme sig ved store ovne / men de ville have meget brænde” [One can be both warmed and burned by powerful men. The closer the

The ultimate source of this complex may be the Aesopian fable of the fox who finds and eats a shepherd's food stash in a hollow tree but becomes stuck as its belly swells; the commentary of a second fox contains an "in-out" antithesis, though only weakly emphasized (Perry 1952: no. 24; medieval versions are listed in Dicke and Grubmüller 1987: 256–58). In his version of a widespread variant (wolf stuck in cellar or stall; Aarne-Thompson type 41, Thompson motif K1022.1, Dicke and Grubmüller 1987: 263–64), Sacchetti inserts a rhetorical flourish that may be an early representative of the German group: "si che la cosa, se all'entrare era stata leggiera, all'uscire non v'era modo, tant'era gravissima" [if entering had been an easy matter, leaving was impossible: it was that difficult] (*Il Trecentonovelle*, no. 258).

In any case, Wander's dictionary attests numerous other "in-out" antitheses (both proverbs and Wellerisms) that must be representatives of independent, partly self-renewing phraseological traditions, such as "Du darfst ja nur hinausgehen, aber ich muß wieder zurück, sagte der Henker zum Diebe, als er über schlechtes Wetter klagte" [You just have to go out, but I also have to come back, said the hangman to the thief, when the latter complained about bad weather] ("Hinausgehen 1"); "Beter drêmal herût, as ênmal herin (sagen die, denen die Kirchenluft nicht zusagt)" [Better to come out three times than go in once, say those who do not care for church air] ("Heraus 1"); "Wer hineingeht, ehe man ihn hineinruft, den weist man hinaus, eh' er ans Gehen denkt" [Whoever goes in before he is called is shown out before he thinks of leaving] ("Hineingehen 4"); "Herabkommen ist leichter als hinauf" [Coming down is easier than going up] ("Herabkommen").

One form not listed by Wander, but nevertheless a commonplace in present-day German, is the description of prisons or comparable institutions as difficult to enter, but even more difficult to leave. "Es ist schwer, hier hinein-, aber es ist noch schwerer, wieder hinauszukommen", a prison guard at the entrance checkpoint ostensibly told a newspaper reporter as he arrived for an interview with the warden (Mämpel 1992). The same boast, "Es ist schwierig, in dieses Haus hineinzukommen, aber noch sehr viel schwieriger, wieder hinauszugelangen", is made by a German agent about Wehrmacht headquarters

sun, the more quickly one sweats. Too far from the fire, one is chilly; too close, one is burned. Do not eat cherries with powerful men; they take the best ones and often throw the stones in your face. . . . Good to warm oneself at large ovens, but they need a lot of wood] (Kjær and Sørensen 1983–88, nos. 3734–37, 12206). The forthcoming indices to the series *Danmarks gamle ordsprog* may well uncover more references.

in occupied Warsaw in Mel Brooks's film remake "To Be or Not to Be" (my transcription from the German dubbed version; neither Brooks's English-language original nor his source, Ernst Lubitsch's 1942 production of the same name, is available to me). And in his discussion of a modern legend, a German folklorist writes: "Das dieser Geschichte zugrunde liegende Denkmodell, daß man in eine Psychiatrische [*sic*] Anstalt schneller hinein- als herauskommt, korrespondiert mit Erfahrungen, die bereits viele Menschen machen mußten" [The thought pattern this story is based on, that it is easier to enter a psychiatric institution than to leave it, corresponds to many people's unfortunate experience] (Brednich 1994: 376). Whether the figure has its roots in one of the medieval and early modern forms discussed in this essay cannot be determined here.

Is the "konungsgarðr" passage a proverb? In light of the available evidence, there seems to be no reason not to use this label, provided allowance is made for the fluid boundaries between "proverbs" and other recurring phraseological units (cf. Janus 1994). Stylistic analysis, such as the identification of recurring logical relationships (antithesis, incrementation) between phrases or clauses, can bring out structural similarities among utterances belonging to different phraseological classes: proverb, Wellerism, idiomatic expression, and so on. Whether such similarities are genetic is a matter that must then be decided for each case — if it can be decided at all — by literary history in the broadest sense of the term, taking the content and context of the phrase into account. The evidence examined here leads unmistakably to the conclusion that the "konungsgarðr" passage derives from Continental tradition, but this does not necessarily imply the direct influence of a written source. The phrase was part of the general rhetorical repertoire of the age and must also have been transmitted orally.

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