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“Pur sarriþu þursa trutin”: Monster-Fighting and Medicine in Early Medieval Scandinavia¹

Introduction

Healing does not feature prominently in those medieval texts canonically associated with what has traditionally been termed ‘Old Norse mythology’. Although healing powers find mention,² medical texts themselves are little attested in our medieval Scandinavian manuscript record, while illness and healing are not presented as central themes of medieval Scandinavians’ mythical understanding of the world. Healing in this tradition has, accordingly, also received little attention from scholars.³ This image contrasts with the medieval Christianity with which non-Christian Scandinavian traditions co-existed: miracles and metaphors of healing are central not only to the New Testament, but also to the many saints’ lives which it inspired, putting the healing of the sick at the centre of Christian ideologies—as the considerations of the relationships between Christianity and healing in later periods by Eilola and Hokkanen in this volume emphasise.⁴ We need not doubt that the differences in emphasis between traditional Scandinavian mythological texts and Christian ones reflect different ideological emphases. But I argue here that interactions between ideas about health and healing on the one hand, and wider belief-systems, encompassing morality, on the other, were more important in traditional Scandinavian beliefs than our manuscript record would suggest.

The core evidence from which I argue comprises two texts in Old Norse (the medieval Scandinavian language), written using runes, and both surviving outside the mainstream of our Scandinavian textual record: one in an English manuscript, the

1 The bulk of this paper was written during a research fellowship at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, and partly prompted by my students in the University of Helsinki’s Renvall Institute for Area and Cultural Studies. Their influence on this paper will be apparent in its Finnic perspectives, and I thank them accordingly. The paper has benefitted from comments made by a number of my colleagues at Leeds; Malin Grahn, Sari Kivistö, Edith Grüber and Monica Sonck; and most especially, of course, Douglas Aiton, Marrku Hokkanen and Jari Eilola.

2 Most prominently in the Eddaic poems *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*. All references to the Poetic Edda in this article are to NECKEL, G. and KUHN, H. (eds) (1983), *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 5th edn, Heidelberg, Winter; accessed from <<http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/anord/edda/edda.htm>>.

3 See LARSEN, Ø. (1993), “Medicine and Medical Treatment”. In PULSIANO, P. (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, New York, Garland, s.v.; KAISER, CH. (1973–), “Heilkunde (Norden)”. In HOOPS, J. (ed.), *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 2nd edn by BECK, H. et al, Berlin, De Gruyter. The principle recent exception is DUBOIS, T. (1999), *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*, Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia Press, pp. 94–120 which, in a reversal of the usual pattern in the study of medieval Germanic-speakers’ non-Christian beliefs, leans heavily on our richer Anglo-Saxon evidence. XXXXXGrøn, *Altnordische Heilkunde* in Special Collections; Kaiser, *Krankheit und Krankheitsbewältigung in den Isländersagas*, 1998 not in Leeds; also Annette Lassen, *Øjet og blindheden*, not in LeedsXXXXX

4 For a prominent recent study emphasising this theme see REFF, D. (2005), *Plagues, Priests and Demons: Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

other archaeologically. Each of these is a medicinal charm intended to counteract illness and directed at beings called *pursar* (singular *purs*). In themselves, these texts are well-known, but I suggest that the attitudes to illness which they imply are more deeply connected than has been realised to the wider world-views more prominently attested in medieval Scandinavian mythological texts. If so, we can situate beliefs about illness and healing in a broader cultural—and therefore moral—context, to understand more fully the interactions between these spheres in medieval Scandinavia’s non-Christian traditions. One of my main methods in making this argument is to argue that the meanings of the words which we find in our texts contain revealing evidence about past cultural categorisations. In doing so, I draw on the methods of comparative philology, which recognises that, where we lack detailed evidence for the meanings of a word in one language, the meanings of its cognates in closely related languages can provide useful additional indicators for what it is likely to have meant. The main source of comparisons here is Old English, a language not only closely related to Old Norse, but in which medicinal terminology is well-attested. I argue that *purs* can be understood at some level not only to denote a kind of monster (as has traditionally been recognised) but also, at one and the same time, an illness. This implies a discourse in which healing and illness can be understood as a transformation of one of the fundamental themes of medieval Scandinavian mythologies: the cosmological struggle of the human in-group and its gods against the barbarians and monsters which threaten the fabric of society.

My arguments introduce connections between morality and health into our understanding of medieval Scandinavian world-views, but the place of moral transgression specifically is harder to identify, because the evidence on which I focus here does not present clear correlations between moral transgression and the aetiology of illness. This stage of my argument, then, aims only to sketch a possibility, on the basis only of a small part of the available medieval and comparative evidence. Wider evidence concerning *pursar* does include indicators linking their activities to people’s moral transgressions, the most prominent among them being a mythological poem called *Skírnismál*. Moreover, the Finnish folk-poem *Riiden synty*, an aetiological text about the origin (literally, the birth) of rickets, describes the activities of a *tursas*—*tursas* being a Finnish loan-word deriving from *purs*. This text provides (in keeping with the spirit of the present collection) a modern anthropological parallel to the medieval material which helps to illustrate the kinds of networks between moral transgression and health which beliefs in *pursar* might have promoted.

What is a *purs*?

purs is an Old Norse word with cognates in all the medieval Germanic languages, prominently Old English *byrs* and German *Turse*.⁵ In addition, it was borrowed from the Common Germanic language from which all these languages descend into Finnish, as *tursas* (and possibly, at later times or with developments within Finnish, as *turso*, *turilas* and *turisas*, but the case here is less clear).⁶ Dictionaries define it with terms such as ‘ogre’ and ‘giant’, while also mentioning the fact that *purs* was the name of the rune *þ*.⁷ This is consistent with the cognate evidence: Old English *byrs*, and the

5 BOSWORTH, J. and TOLLER, T. (1898), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, London, Oxford University Press, s.v. *byrs*; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *thurse*; GRIMM, J. and GRIMM, W. (1854–1954), *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig, Hirzel, s.v. *Turse*.

6 See HAAVIO, M. (1967), *Suomalainen mytologia*, Porvoo, WSOY, pp. 102–24; XXXXSANAKIRJA; each of these words could, and in some contexts probably should, also be taken as a personal name rather than a common noun.

7 To cite some standard definitions of the Norse term, SVEINBJÖRN EGILSSON (1931), *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis/Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog*, 2nd edn by FINNUR JÓNSSON, Copenhagen, Møller, accessed from

early forms of the German *Turse*, gloss terms like *cyclops*, *Orcus* and *Colossus* (though not these alone), indicating meanings similar to the Norse *þurs*.⁸

There are, of course, more subtle aspects to *þurs*'s (doubtless changing) meanings, which have yet to receive a full analysis. Cleasby and Vigfusson specified the 'notion of surliness and stupidity'.⁹ In our canonical mythological texts, *þursar* invariably appear evil, but the *þurs Þórir* in *Grettis saga* chapter 61, born of mixed giant and human parentage, is a sympathetic character.¹⁰ Another connotation, omitted by the lexicographers but which I discuss somewhat below, is one of sexuality, which emerges most clearly from a line in the Icelandic rune-poem, first attested in manuscript around 1500, explicating the rune-name *þurs*: 'þ er kvenna kvöl ok kletta íbúi / ok Valrúnar verr' ('þ[urs] is women's torment and crags' inhabitant, / and Valrún's mate').¹¹ This description is fairly well paralleled by Norwegian sources: the Norwegian rune-poem, whose earliest surviving copies are from 1636 but were based on a lost, earlier manuscript, describes *þ* with 'þurs vældr kvenna kvillu' ('þurs causes women's illness'), which parallels the Icelandic texts' *þurs er kvenna kvöl*.¹² Meanwhile, Jonna Louis-Jensen has argued that the cryptic runic inscription 7 from Bø church in Telemark, from around 1200, uses the phrase 'fialsibui' (in normalised spelling, *fjalls íbúi*, 'mountain's inhabitant') to denote the rune *þ*, which seems to indicate that a characterisation of *þursar* like the *kletta íbúi* of the Icelandic text was already current centuries before our manuscripts of the rune-poems.¹³

Understanding the connotations of *þurs* may be particularly important for understanding how far it was synonymous with words of related meaning. There has long been a tendency to regard our words for mythical beings in Old Icelandic to represent a lexical set like *robin*, *sparrow* and *hawk*, in which each word's meaning is mutually exclusive of the others', but it is also possible that *þurs* belongs (as well or instead) to a more common kind of lexical set, which can be exemplified by *monarch*, *king* and *ruler*.¹⁴ It would be possible to find people who could only be described with one of these words, and people who could be described by all at once—and this seems fairly clearly to be true of words like *þurs* and other words for monsters. Thus stanza 25 of the poem *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, one of the corpus of mythological and heroic poetry known as the Poetic Edda, has the hero Atli refuse a request by the giantess Hrímgæðr, who wants to take compensation for her father's killing by sleeping with his slayer, with the insult

'Loðinn heitir, er þic scal eiga, leið ertu mann-kyni;
sá býr í þolleyio þurs,
hundvíss iotunn, hraunbúa verstr;
sá er þér macligr maðr.'

<<http://www.septentrionalia.org>>, defined *þurs* as a 'turs, jætte'; FRITZNER, J. (1886–96), *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 2nd edn, Kristiania, Den Norske Forlagsforening, accessed from <<http://www.edd.uio.no/perl/search/search.cgi?appid=86&tabid=1275>>, as 'Troid, Halvtroid'; CLEASBY, R. and VIGFUSSON, G. (1957), *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn by CRAIGIE, W., Oxford, Oxford University Press, as 'a giant' (XXXXXcheck def.); and DE VRIES, J. (1961), *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Leiden, Brill, as 'riese, unhold'.

8 Our English evidence also shows connections with water, which may correlate with the Finnish tradition, discussed below, in which the *tursas* is a sea-dwelling monster: WHITELOCK, D. (1951), XXXXX 72–73, 75; Dickins 1942, 14).

9 For which see further Dickins 1942, 12.

10 ed. Guðni Jónsson 1936, 200; cf. Dickins 1942, 13–14 for this and English parallels.

11Ed. Page 1998, 27.

12Ed. Lindroth 1913, 261.

131994, 35–38, cited by Page 1998, 31–32.

14 Cf. Hall 2007b, 22–23.

'He is called Loðinn ['hairy'], who will have you, you are loathsome to humans;
the *þurs* that lives on Polley,
a very wise *jötunn* ['giant'], worst of *hraunbúar* ['rock/lava-dwellers']:
he is a man well-suited to you'

Atli refers to Loðinn with *þurs*, *jötunn*, *hraunbúi*, and even *maðr* ('person').¹⁵ One reason for the variation in terminology in this and similar texts is of course the metrical and aesthetic requirements of poetry, but equally Snorri Sturluson supported his prose claim, in the earlier thirteenth century, that 'ættir hrímpursa' ('the races of the frost-*þursar*') descend from Aurgelmir/Ymir by quoting the statement in *Hyndluljóð* stanza 33 that 'iötnar allir frá Ymi komnir' ('all *jötnar* ['giants'] come from Ymir').¹⁶ The variation between *jötunn* and *þurs* is also paralleled in Old English, where the poem *Beowulf* refers to the monster Grendel by both *þyrs* and *eoten* (and a good deal besides).¹⁷ Once more, there is a likelihood here that we are dealing to some extent with figurative rather than literal language, but the evidence is sufficient to put the burden of proof on those who would assume that words like *þurs* and *jötunn* denoted distinct races (check Haavio 117–18, and dis?XXXXX).

My argument in the next section extends this kind of thinking to another aspect of the meanings of *þurs*, to argue that we must not only be willing to see different words for monsters as partial synonyms, but to be able to denote things which are in our world-views members of entirely different ontological categories—specifically illnesses.

Monsters and illness

As my summary above shows, senses relating to illness have not been recognised for *þurs* in Old Norse lexicography. Tellingly, our principle evidence for such associations derives from a text-type which enjoys little direct representation in our medieval Scandinavian corpus, but which Eddaic poems like *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*, alongside the evidence of neighbouring medieval regions and later texts, suggest was widespread: healing charms. Though written in Old Norse and in runic form, the most relevant of these survives not in Scandinavia, but in a portion of the English manuscript British Library, Cotton Caligula A.xv, from Christ Church Canterbury and dated to around 1073×76; it is known accordingly as the Canterbury Rune-Charm. Linguistic evidence suggests that the charm is likely first to have been written down by about 1000, by a speaker of East Norse (the ancestor-language of Danish and Swedish); it runs: 'kuril sarþuara far þu nu funtin istu þur uigi þik / þorsa trutin iuril sarþuara uipr apruari'. This can be standardised as 'Kuril sárþvara far þú nú, fundinn ertu. Þórr vígi þik þursa dróttin, luril (leg. Kuril) sárþvara. Viðr áðravari (leg. -vara)' and into English as 'Kuril of the wound-spear, go now, you have been found. May Þórr consecrate you, lord of *þursar*, Kuril of the wound-spear. Against ?vein-pus'. The charm is not without its problems, but it clearly envisages Kuril both as a supernatural being (and specifically lord of *þursar*), and as the root cause of poisonous fluid in the veins.¹⁸ Finding and attacking Kuril seems to be a means to deal with this symptom. Trying to decide whether Kuril is to be classified in our own world-views as a being or an illnesses will not greatly help us to understand this text: what will is to recognise

¹⁵ Likewise, *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 33 refers to Aurgelmir both as a *jötunn* and a *hrímpurs*.

¹⁶Ed. Faulkes 1988, 10.

¹⁷Lines 426 and 761 respectively, ed. Klaeber XXXXX.

¹⁸ Ed. and trans. Frankis 2000, 2–5 (with comments on problems pp. 3–4 and on dating p. 4, on which see also Moltke 1985, 360 XXXXXcheck); cf. McKinnell–Simek–Düwel 2004, 127 [O 17]; for images see the record at Skaldic Project homepage, <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/>, at <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php?table=mss&id=15291>.

that illness could in some sense be conceptualised as a being, and interacted with on that basis.

Pórr's role as a god to be invoked for healing in the Canterbury Rune-Charms is not overly well paralleled. About seventy-five pendants in the form of hammers survive from early medieval Scandinavia, and have been associated with Þórr on account of his possession of the hammer Mjölnir in a wide range of texts. Meanwhile, they have also been assumed to have had amuletic functions, a suggestion which gains support from the existence of hammers inscribed with crosses, worn alongside crosses in burials, or cast alongside crosses in moulds, suggesting that the hammers may have had similar functions to crucifixes.¹⁹ These points would link Þórr with amuletic protection against day-to-day threats, whether from monsters, illnesses, or other misfortune—but though conventional wisdom, they also rely on a chain of inference which is rather poorly substantiated.

However, there is an important analogue for the Canterbury Rune-Charms in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, book 4 (*Descriptio insularum aquilonis*), chapters 26–27, written around 1075:²⁰

Nobilissimum illa gens templum habet, quod Ubsola dicitur, non longe positum ab Sictona civitate. In hoc templo, quod totum ex auro paratum est, statuas trium deorum veneratur populus, ita ut potentissimus eorum Thor in medio solium habeat triclinio; hinc et inde locum possident Wodan et Fricco. Quorum significationes eiusmodi sunt: 'Thor', inquiunt, 'praesidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat ... Thor autem cum sceptro lovem simulare videtur...

Omnibus itaque diis suis attributos habent sacerdotes, qui sacrificia populi offerant. Si pestis et famis imminet, Thor ydolo lybatur, si bellum, Wodani, si nuptiae celebrendae sunt, Fricconi.

That folk has a very famous temple called Uppsala, situated not far from the city of Sigtuna. In this temple, entirely decked out in gold, the people worship the statues of three gods in such wise that the mightiest of them, Thor, occupies a throne in the middle of the chamber; Wodan and Fricco have places on either side. The significance of these gods is as follows: Thor, they say, presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lightning, the winds and rains, fair weather and crops ... Thor with his scepter apparently resembles Jove...

For all their gods there are appointed priests to offer sacrifices for the people. If plague and famine threaten, a libation is poured to the idol Thor; if war, to Wodan; if marriages are to be celebrated, to Fricco.

The reliability of Adam's account has long been doubted: to name the main issues, he was operating in an ideologically and politically charged Christian community, which is likely to have strongly coloured his understanding and reporting of pagan traditions; he clearly Classicised his material to some degree, and perhaps considerably; and he was not an eye-witness to what he described, while the proximity of his oral sources to events is not clear either.²¹ It is worth emphasising, however, that the passage in question is part of Adam's original *Gesta*, to be distinguished from the infamous *scholia* 138–41, which provide more lurid and accordingly less plausible further details about the temple.²² Meanwhile, Adam's source value relative to our other material is rising, because of our growing appreciation that our later, vernacular Icelandic sources—most especially Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*—are themselves compromised by similar

19 WAMERS, E. (1997), "Hammer und Kreuz: Typologische Aspekte einer nordeuropäischen Amulettsitte aus der Zeit des Glaubenswechsels". In MÜLLER-WILLE, M. (ed.), *Rom und Byzanz im Norden: Mission und Glaubenswechsel im Ostseeraum während des 8.–14. Jahrhunderts*. Internationale Fachkonferenz der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Verbindung mit der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz Kiel 18.–25. September 1994, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Steiner), I pp. 83–107 (esp. pp. 89–97).

20 Ed. Schmeidler 1917, 257–59; trans. Tschan 2002, XXXXX.

21 The most detailed, but not the most plausible, criticism is Janson 1997; for an English summary see 2000. XXXXXsomeone sensibleXXXXX.

22 Ed. Schmeidler 1917, 257–60.

problems.²³ Moreover, Perkins has pointed out that Adam's attribution to Thor of power over the wind, though not apparent in Snorri's mythography, is well attested in sources which must be independent, most strikingly Dudo of St Quentin's *Gesta Normannorum*, of around 1060.²⁴ In the same way, we can see Adam's association of Thor with the aversion of plague and famine to be consistent with the evidence of the Canterbury Rune-Charm, which invokes Þórr against Kuril, the *pursa dróttinn*, to cure *áðravari*.

Meanwhile, the representation of *pursar* in the Canterbury rune-charm as sources of illness is consistent with their portrayal in the Norwegian rune-poem as the cause of 'women's illness'. As I have mentioned, this evidence is late; but roughly contemporary with the Canterbury rune-charm is the Sigtuna Amulet, found during excavations in 1931. This may represent the means by which the text of the Canterbury Rune Charm found its way to Christ Church, Canterbury; at any rate, it comes from the area described by Adam, at much the same time as he described it. The amulet is a thin copper plate with an inscription on each side. Despite Høst's claim that 'side B har intet fil felles med Canterburyinnskriften' ('side B has nothing in common with the Canterbury inscription'), it is not self-evident whether the inscriptions are to be read consecutively or as two separate texts, and it is worth quoting both:²⁵

A: **pur x sarriþu x pursa / trutinfliuþunuf**[bind rune uf]**untinis**
 B: **afþirþriarþrarulf x**
af þir niu nöþir ulfr iii +
isiR [þ]is isir aukis unir ulfr niut lu -fia

A: Þórr (or *purs*?) *sárriðu*, *pursa dróttinn*;
Fly þú nú, fundinn es!
 B: [H]af þér þrjár þrár, úlf[r]!
 [H]af þér níu nauðir, úlf[r]!
iii ísir þess, ísir eykis, unir úlf[r]!
Njót lyfja!

A: Þórr/*purs* of wound-fever, lord of *pursar*,
 flee now; you have been found.
 B: Have for yourself three XXXXX, wolf!
 Have for yourself nine XXXXX/n-runes, wolf!
 Three ice[-runes] XXXXX
 Benefit from the medicine!

Besides the uncertainty as to the relationship between the two inscriptions, these texts present a number of complications. Two things are clear, however. The inscription on the second side seems unambiguously to associate itself with *lyf* 'medicine', encouraging us to suppose that the shorter inscription on the first side was also—like the Canterbury Rune-Charm—intended for medicinal purposes rather than, for example, helping the bearer in other kinds of encounters with supernatural beings. Meanwhile, the inscription on the first side is verbally similar enough to the Canterbury Rune-Charm to suggest that they represent a wider tradition of similar incantations, involving the idea that the cause of an illness might be a 'lord of *pursar*'. Whether the 'lord of *pursar*' on the Sigtuna Amulet should be identified as the pagan god Þórr or simply as a *purs* is hard to judge.²⁶ Either way, however, the prospect that a *purs* could

23 See for a recent survey Sundqvist XXXXX; Gunnell 2007 XXXXX.

24 Perkins 2001, 18–26; also 27–52? XXXXXcheckXXXXX.

25 Høst 1952, 342; ed. McKinnell–Simek–Düwel 2004, 126 [O 16].

26 It was conventional in runic inscriptions, when two identical consonants appeared next to each other, to write only one rune, and Høst cited examples where this occurs despite intervening punctuation (1952, 345), while the vowels distinguished as *ó* and *u* in standardised Old Norse spelling were not distinguished in runic writing, meaning that the first word of the inscription could be read as *Þórr* or *purs*. If we read *purs sárriðu*, the metrical requirement for alliteration would be met by repeating the word with *pursa dróttinn*, which from the point of view of literary merit is not promising; but if we read *Þórr*

in some sense be synonymous with an illness is clear.

As a proportion of our complete corpus of earlier medieval Scandinavian charms, the Canterbury Rune-Charm and the Sigtuna Amulet are significant enough to suggest that discourses associating *pursar* with causing illness were prominent; but in finite terms, they admittedly afford rather slight evidence for traditions associating supernatural beings with illness. However, wider parallels are easily come by. One set is provided by medieval Christian thought, in which possession by a demon—whereby monster and illness are again effectively identical—was a reasonably prominent aetiology of certain kinds of illness.²⁷ In such cases, the illness is usually identical with the supernatural being, insofar as it commences with its possession and ceasing with its expulsion.

Analogues can also be found, however, in the non-Christian traditions of Germanic-speaking cultures. The strongest case is that of *dvergr* and its Old English cognate *dweorg*.²⁸ The modern English reflex of this word is *dwarf*, and in our medieval English and Icelandic texts it indeed denotes small beings, usually, at least in the Scandinavian tradition, supernatural.²⁹ We have, however, just enough evidence in Scandinavia to discern a quite different side to the word's meaning, in the form of a fragment of a human cranium from Ribe inscribed, around the eighth century, with the text *·ulfURAUkuþinaUKHutiur ·hialbburiisuiþR / þAIMAUiARkIAUKtuirkuninñ [hole] buur*, which can be standardised as *Ulfr auk Óðinn auk Hó-'tiur*. *Hjalp 'buri' es viðr / þæima værki. Auk dverg unninn. Bóurr*. This we might tentatively translate as 'Ulfr/Wolf and Óðinn and high-tiur. *bur* is help against this pain. And the *dvergr* (is) overcome, BóurrXXXXX'.³⁰ This evidence is consolidated by Old English material: by contrast with the other earlier medieval Germanic languages, surviving writings in Old English include a large number of medical texts, ranging from poetic charms though mundane but apparently local prose remedies to translated Latin medical writing. Without this corpus, the meaning of *dweorg* would have seemed limited to short people. However, the medical texts tell a different story. XXXXXsummarise the footnote to this, citing Cameron, Battles, DOE, E. Pettit, 'Some Anglo-Saxon charms', in J. Roberts and J. Nelson (eds), *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy* (London, 2000), 417±18XXXXX.³¹

sárriðu we must probably envisage the demonisation in an increasingly Christianised Scandinavian culture of the traditionally benign god Þórr such that he becomes aligned with his traditional enemies the *pursar*.

27XXXXXDiscerning spirits : divine and demonic possession in the Middle Ages / Nancy Caciola. Published: Ithaca, N.Y. ; London : Cornell University Press, 2003 XXXXX. Maybe also cite Newman 1998 in texts folder; something on A-S stuff (Jolly) if she lacks early medieval dimension? Luke 9.1–6, Matthew?XXXXX) Dendle forthcomingXXXXX

28 There is also some reason to think that the Old English *puca* ('XXXXX'), Old Icelandic *púki* ('XXXXX'), were cognate with *pox* XXXXX.

29See generally Battles 2005.

30Ed. McKinnell–Simek–Düwel 2004, 50 [B 6], where a further selection of translations is provided [use one of theirs?XXXXX]

31 The most revealing medical text occurs in the CXXXXX Old English translation of the *Peri didaxeon*, where a remedy for asthma mentions the symptom 'hwile he riþaþ swilce he on dweorge sy' ('sometimes he shakes/writhes as though he was *on dweorge*') for 'interdum et februnt' ('sometimes they also suffer fever') in the Latin base-text. Whether or not *dweorg* here should be taken primarily to denote a being, the fact that this is a practical, mundane translation from Latin emphasises that its appearance represents a routine usage in Christian, scholarly writing. Moreover, the phrase *on dweorge* would literally mean 'in/on a dwarf', but it seems unlikely that the patient was envisaged to writhe as though he was inside or on top of a dwarf. It seems rather as though by the eleventh century, *dweorgas*' associations with fever were intimate enough that the word had a meaning in medical discourse in which it primary meant 'fever'. This is perhaps consistent with the mention of a *dvergr* on the Ribe Cranium, a context suggestive of ailments affecting the mind—though it should be admitted that the seat of the intellect may not have been understood to have been the head in this period, but the heart (XXXXX). It is, however, also consistent with the

Myth, health, and moral transgression

Reinterpreting *pursar*, then, as potentially not only causes of illness, but to be at some levels synonymous with illness, is plausible, and moreover seems to be representative of a larger and more widespread, if only patchily attested, medieval Scandinavian discourse. Recognising this affords us, in turn, an opportunity to situate these discourses in a wider cultural—specifically mythological—framework. Our unusually rich mythological evidence from medieval Scandinavia allows us to argue that an individual's experience of a *purs* as a cause of illness could be reinterpreted as a microcosm of a larger, mythological struggle, aligning the experience of the sufferer with a wider world charged with moral meaning. To

association on the Sigtuna / fact that fever and similar, f a prominent recipient of sup 1996, XXXX), allowing us p likely to have been associat The kind of interface betwe Saxon culture must have know text in the early eleventh-centi range of medical texts, the lasi among them the following (ed.

Wið dweorh man sceal nima *writtan*, with a line-break be Malchus, Iohannes, Martini; þæt her æfter cweð, man sc eare, þænne bufan/ þæs mæ his sweoran, and do man sw

her com in ga hæfde him his cwæð þæt þu

legde þe [MS *Illustration 1: XXXXextend human ctegoriy into monsters with ongunnan hinberserkir, halftröll etc.XXXXX*

sona swa hy of þæm lande coman þa ongunnan him ða lipu colian þa com in gangan deores sweostar þa geændade heo and aðas swor ðæt næfre þis ðæm adlegan derian ne moste ne þæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cuþe amen fiað

[XXXXsort out collation with G-S, Cock, MSXXXXX, trans XXXXX]

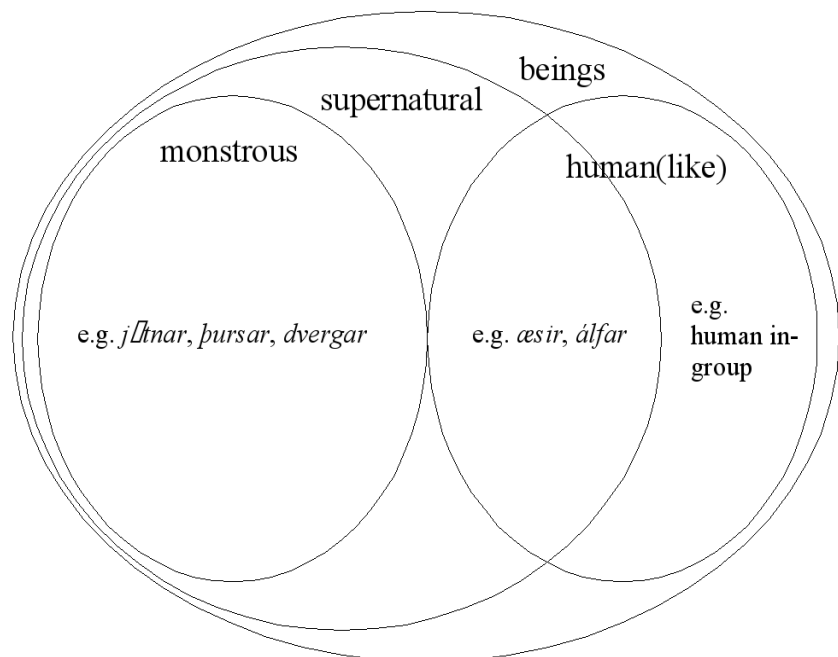


Illustration 1: XXXXextend human ctegoriy into monsters with

The obscurities of the charm are legion, and even sections which are grammatically straightforward have produced many interpretations (for discussion, see esp. Cameron 1993, 151–53; Stuart 1977; Meaney 1981, 15–17 XXXXread it). There are textual problems (e.g. *in spiden*); certain words are of ambiguous meaning (e.g. *teage*); and the syntax can plausibly be construed in numerous ways (e.g. *þa* could mean ‘then’ or ‘when’, with various possible arrangements of clause- and sentence-structure; this last complexity has been particularly ill-handled by the editions of the text, which have aimed to remove rather than acknowledge ambiguity). However, two points which are salient for the present discussion are clear. Firstly, the charm is for an illness identified in the prose as *dweorh*, which presumably at some level means ‘fever’, but which possibly denotes or connotes a supernatural being. Secondly, the charm conceives of the illnessness in terms of a being (*wiht*) treating the sufferer of the disease as its horse (*hæncgest*). [Possibly handy later?: The precise nature of the being is uncertain: it has almost always been assumed to be a *dweorg*, but that word does not occur in the charm (unless *deores* is emended to *dweorges*; this has often been done, but it is not necessary). *In spiden wiht* does not make sense, except insofar as *wiht* seems clearly to be the common word meaning ‘thing, being’, and at least part of the subject of the first sentence and

begin explicating this claim at a lexical level, it is possible to situate the term *burs*, as a word denoting monsters, in a wider semantic mapping of Old Icelandic words for supernatural beings, for which I have argued elsewhere mainly on the basis of our early poetic records, and which itself correlates with narrative evidence for traditional medieval Scandinavian world-views.³² As figure 1 shows, the world of male supernatural beings³³ can be divided into beings whose actions are fundamentally aligned with the interests of the human in-group, whom we might term gods (such as the *æsir* and *álfar*), and those whose actions fundamentally threaten the fabric of the human in-group's existence, whom we might term monsters. Questions of the relationship of humans to supernatural beings are not ones which I can go into at length here—the seventeenth-century Scandinavian witches, the topic of Eilola's contribution to this collection, provide one example of the complexities which these questions can entail (XXXXXmaybe?XXXXX). I have argued elsewhere that the ontological distinction between people and their gods may never have been sharp, to the point at which we should perhaps understand gods as a sub-category of humans (or at least humans of the in-group), while some categories of people could be monstrous.³⁴ Notwithstanding these complexities, however, the diagram still represents the fundamental lineaments of a world view.

The semantic field diagram in turn represents one of the basic structuring principles of medieval Scandinavian world-views, in which the human in-group and their gods were locked into a cosmic struggle with the monsters which threatened their society.³⁵ Monster-fighting occurs widely in medieval Scandinavian narratives of all kinds and carries great ideological significance; the point is epitomised by the fact that the guiding framework for our surviving Scandinavian mythological texts is the inevitability of the Ragnarök, a cataclysm in which gods and men will fight against the monsters and, to at least a significant extent, die.³⁶ Of all the gods, it is Þórr who is pre-eminent as a fighter of monsters. This being so, his invocation against a *burs* in the Canterbury Rune-Charms represents the local application of a global mythological concept. If we are willing to connect the wider evidence for Þórr's invocation against illness and for the conceptual association of (some) illness with monsters, we can begin to perceive a discourse in which the cosmological framework of medieval Scandinavian worldviews was applied at a day-to-day level to provide a medium for healing. If Þórr was the gods' bulwark against monsters, and if monsters were potentially, in some sense, illness, he might also be people's bulwark against illnesses. Having reconstructed this discourse, we can in turn posit that it gave meaning and structure to the experience of illness, not least in allowing potentially debilitating ailments to be interpreted in terms of a model of heroic struggle against external forces whose threats to individuals were symptomatic of the threat they posed to society as a whole (XXXXXcf. Eilola?XXXXX).

the perpetrator of the illness; otherwise no satisfactory explanation or emendation has come forth, leaving the identity of the protagonist of the charm unclear. One would dearly love to know how the apparently beneficent force of the *deores sweostar* ('animal's sister') fits into the belief-systems underlying the charm, but there is too little basis for useful speculation (let alone emendation).XXXXX] It is possible that the charm also depicts the being putting a horse-harness on the sufferer, but this is not certain. This in turn recalls well-attested traditions in our medieval and later evidence from Germanic-speaking cultures in which the female supernatural beings called *mörur* in Old Norse (singular *mara*) and *maran* in Old English (singular *mære*), who give their name to the modern English *nightmare*, ride their victims, causing illness, injury or death, and particularly hallucinatory experiences which might be categorised alongside the fevers mentioned above (see generally Raudvere 1993; Hufford 1982?XXXXX; Hall 2007a; Hall 2007b, 124–26).

32 Hall 2007b, 11–12, 21–53, esp. 28–29, 32–34, 47–53; cf. 54–74 for Anglo-Saxon comparisons.

33 Females are excluded from the analysis as being less paradigmatic examples of beings in Old Norse world-views than males: Hall 2007b, 22–23.

34 Hall 2007b, 49–51; Hastrup 1985, 142–45; cf. Þórir the *burs* mentioned above.

35 Clunies Ross XXXXX; Hastrup 1985, 147–49; others?XXXXX.

36 For a convenient survey of monster-fighting in the sagas, see Hume 1980, 3–7; XXXXXGTP on Ragnarök XXXXX.

As in the Central African context described in this volume by Hokkanen, it is possible, then, to perceive external, supernatural forces as causes of illness in early medieval, and to some extent pre-Conversion Scandinavian society. Given our limited evidence for this society, this is a significant achievement. Moving beyond it to link illness with moral transgression specifically—as in the ‘diseases of men’ discussed by Hokkanen—is a greater challenge again. Links between morality and health were prominent in medieval Christian thought—albeit that the idea of illness as punishment for sin, or purgation of sin, had to compete with a range of other aetiologies—but texts like the Canterbury Rune-Charms provide little basis for linking the assault of a *þurs* with moral transgressions.³⁷ We must be ready to accept the possibility, then, that moral transgression was not a (prominent) aetiology of illness—which, if so, would be a noteworthy feature of pre- and non-Christian medieval Scandinavian culture. There is, however, enough evidence to connect assaults by *þursar* with moral transgression to establish the possibility that this kind of discourse existed. The key text for this discussion is the Eddaic poem with the most extensive attestations of *þurs*, *Skírnismál*.³⁸

Unlike our material concerning Þórr, which emphasises only the martial hostility between the *Æsir* (the main group of gods) and the *jötnar*, *Skírnismál* is a paradigmatic text for a more complex side of their relationship. As Clunies Ross, in particular, has argued, the medieval Scandinavian mythological world allowed for marriage between mythological groups, but only according to strictly regulated patterns determined by group status (as perceived from the perspective of the in-group—mythologically the *Æsir*, mundanely the culturally and linguistically Scandinavian in-group). The group of highest status was the *Æsir*; a group of gods from a different tribe, the *Vanir*, are of second highest status; and the lowest status group is that of the monsters, prototypically the *jötnar*. It was unacceptable for women to marry men of a lower-status group, but it was acceptable for men to marry women of a group lower in status than their own.³⁹ *Skírnismál* is a paradigmatic example of this process: in it, the *Vanr* Freyr falls in love with the *jötunn* Gerðr, and Freyr sends his servant Skírnir to woo her. Skírnir begins his attempt by offering Gerðr wealth, but she refuses. He threatens to behead her, which gets him no further. Finally, then, he pronounces a curse—or perhaps we should say threatens Gerðr by describing the curse which he can put on her, since the status of his speech act is somewhat ambiguous within the poem—which is sufficient to convince her to accept Freyr. It is the content of the curse, however, which is my main concern here, and is worth quoting in full (stanzas 26–37):

Tamsvendi ec þic drep, enn ec þic temia
mun,
mær, at mínom munom;
þar scaltu ganga, er þic gumna synir
síðan æva sé.

I strike you with a taming-rod and I will tame
you,
girl, to my wishes;
you must walk there, where the sons of men
will never see you.

Ara þúfo á scaltu ár sitia,
horfa heimi ór, snugga heliar til;
matr sé þér meirr leiðr enn manna hveim
inn fráni ormr með firom.

Forever must you sit early on the hill of
eagles/an eagle,
look out from the world, turn your eyes to
Hel;
may food be more loathsome to you than to
any person,
the glistening snake among men.

At undrsíónom þú verðir, er þú út kømr,
á þic Hrímnir hari, á þic hotvetna stari!
víðkunnari þú verðir enn vorðr með goðom,

37 On competing aetiologies, see for example Kroll-Bachrach 1984.

38 Although the word occurs as a simplex six times in *Þrymskviða* but only four in *Skírnismál*, in *Þrymskviða* attestations are limited to the formula *þursa dróttin*.

39XXXXXcheck and cite Clunies Ross.

gapiðu grindom frá!

Tópi oc ópi, tiosull oc ópoli,
vaxi þér tár með trega!
Seztu niðr, enn ec mun segja þér
sváran súsbreca
oc tvennan trega.

Tramar gneyþa þic scolo gerstan dag
iotna gorrðom í;
til hrímþursa hallar þú scalt hverian dag
kranga kosta laus,
kranga kosta vön;
grát at gamni scaltu í gogn hafa
oc leiða með tárom trega.

Með þursi þríhöfðoðom þú scalt æ nara,
eða verlaus vera;
þitt geð grípi,
þic morn morni!
ver þú sem þistill, sá er var þrunginn
í önn ofanverða.

Til holtz ec gecc oc til hrás viðar,
gambantein at geta,
gambantein ec gat.

Reiðr er þér Óðinn, reiðr er þér ásabragr,
þic scal Freyr fiásc,
in fyrinilla mæ, enn þú fengit hefir
gambanreiði goða.

Heyri iotnar, heyri hrímþursar,
synir Suttunga, síálfir áslíðar,
hvé ec fyrbýð, hvé ec fyrirbanna
manna glaum mani,
manna nyt mani.

Hrímgrímnir heitir þurs, er þic hafa scal,
fyr nágrindr neðan;
þar þér vílmegir á viðar rótom
geita hland gefi!
Oðri dryccio fá þú aldregi,
mæ, af þínom munom,
mæ, at mínom munom.

Þurs ríst ec þér oc þriá stafi,
ergi oc oði oc óþola;
svá ec þat af ríst, sem ec þat á reist,
ef goraz þarfar þess."

Gerðr qvað:

"Heill verðu nú heldr, sveinn, oc tac við
hrímkálki,
fullom forns miaðar!
þó hafða ec þat ætlað, at myndac aldregi
unna vaningia vel."

XXXXXformatting

May you become a spectacle when you come
out,
may Hrímnir gaze on you, may everyone
stare at you.
May you become more widely known than
the guardian among the gods;
gape from the gates!

?Fenzy and ?shrieking, ?frustration and
unbearability,
may a tear grow with the grief.
Sit down, and I will tell you
the heavy ?torment-wave
and twofold grief.

Monsters [*tramar*] must humiliate you the
whole day
in the farmsteads of *jötnar*;
to the hall of *hrímþursar* you must creep,
every day,
without choice,
creep lacking choice;
you must have weeping in return for
pleasure
and accompany grief with tears.

You must live forever with a three-headed
þurs
or be without a man;
may your lust grip
may ?consumption ?consume you;
become like a thistle— one which was
crushed
in ?the last part of harvest.

I walked to a wood and up to a young tree
to get a ?magic wand,
a ?magic wand I got.

Óðinn is angry with you, the best of the gods
is angry with you,
Freyr must hate you,
the amazingly bad girl, and you have gained
the ?violent anger of the gods.

Let the *jötnar* hear, let the *hrímþursar* hear,
the sons of SuttungiXXXXX, the troop of the
Æsir themselves,
how I forbid, how I exclude,
the merriment of people from the maid,
the enjoyment of people[’s company] from the
maid.

Hrímgrímnir is the name of the *þurs* who
must have you
down below the corpse-gates;
there may farm-boys give you goats’ urine
at the roots of the tree.
Never get another drink,
girl, from your wishes,

girl, at my wishes.

I carve *þurs* [rune-name] at you and three letters:
ergi [perversion] and *oði* [madness] and *óþoli* [unbearability];
 thus will I cut it away, just as I carved it on,
 if you make need of it'XXXXX

Gerðr said:

'Instead, be welcome now boy, and receive the crystal chalice, full of ancient mead. Although I had thought that I would never love the *vaningi* [Freyr] well.

In a sense, this curse is a response to Gerðr's transgression of the will of the gods; much the same reading is demanded of the story told by Saxo Grammaticus around 1220XXXX of Odinus (Old Norse *Óðinn*) being repeatedly rebuffed by Rinda (Old Norse *Rindr*) in his attempts to woo her (partly by afflicting her with a fever), whose similarities to *Skírnismál* McKinnell and I have independently emphasised, and which consolidates this reading.⁴⁰ Admittedly, Skírnir's moral probity in the text is open to question: if nothing else, Gerðr's successful resistance to the conventional exercise of patriarchal power (wealth and violence) reduces Skírnir to turning to the unmasculine and morally dubious method of using magic, and similar criticisms can be levelled at Odinus in Saxo's narrative. Meanwhile, Bibire has shown that Snorri Sturluson was able to develop the story of Freyja and Gerðr (which he derived at least partly through a text similar to our version of *Skírnismál*) into a tale in which 'the gods bring about their own downfall through their own explicit moral failure'.⁴¹ All the same, Skírnir's demands represent the will of the in-group, to which Gerðr is expected to accede: as Larrington put it,⁴²

the gods—the collective patriarchal powers Óðinn, Þórr, and Freyr—will be furiously angry with Gerðr. Far from being a 'good girl', colluding with male wishes, Gerðr's resistance marks her as an 'uppity woman', literally an anathema to patriarchal society. She is condemned, as we have seen, to be marginalized, disempowered, victimized, both sexualized and desexualized; a familiar range of strategies for keeping women in their place.

Skírnir mentions *jötnar* and *tramar* in his curse, but (-)*þurs* is the most prominent monster-word, both in terms of the number of repetitions (five) and the fact that as a rune-name (perhaps polysemically denoting the monster), *þurs* begins the culminating stanza of Skírnir's curse.⁴³ *Þursar* here, then, are effectively invoked as a potential punishment for resisting the will of the gods; and this gives us a framework for supposing likewise that there could also be a moral dimension for the affliction of someone by a *þurs* in the sense of an illness. Dronke considered that⁴⁴

it is apt, succinct, integrating, to use the ogre-world as her [Gerðr's] hell, since proverbially *Þurs er kvenna kvöl*, 'Ogre is women's torment', *Þurs vældr kvenna kvillu*, 'Ogre causes women's illness'. This is the motto applied to the *þ*-rune in the Icelandic and Norwegian Runic Poems. Precisely what torment or illness of women is meant can hardly be determined, nor why a *þurs* should cause it.

The comparanda which Dronke adduced are surely important, but her final statement

⁴⁰ me XXXXX, John XXXXX

411986, 34–39, at 37.

421992, 10.

⁴³ (cf. the polysemy of *kostr* in stanza 30: Larrington 1992, 9

441962, 257.

that ‘precisely what torment of illness of women is meant can hardly be determined’ seems a little over-cautious (if not, indeed, coy).⁴⁵ Regarding the *purs* as a *kvilla*, although our evidence is sparse, it is fairly clear that *pursar* were associated with causing some kind of poisonous fluid in the veins, apparently by means of (metaphorical?) projectiles, and with inflicting *sár-riðXXXXX*. Frankis drew attention to the similarity of a *purs* causing illness with a *sár-þvara*, a ‘wound-spear’, to the phenomenon of *ælfes* (‘elves’, along with *ese* ‘pagan gods’ and *hægtessan* ‘witches/valkyries’) causing illness with *scotu* (‘projectiles’) in the Old English charm *Wið færstice*—to which we might add that *Wið færstice* envisages that the patient may have been ‘on blod scoten’ (‘shot in the blood’), just as the Canterbury Rune-Charms is used against *áðravari*.⁴⁶ I have admittedly taken pains elsewhere to show that Anglo-Saxon *ælfes*, the best-attested traditional supernatural agents of illness in our Anglo-Saxon evidence, need not have been synonymous with illness, nor necessarily aligned with monsters in our Old English medical texts.⁴⁷ While I still think that this argumentation holds, the perspectives adopted in the current article discourage its dogmatic assertion, in favour of accepting a degree of ambiguity concerning the position of supernatural beings. It is noteworthy, then, that the symptoms associated with *pursar* are similar to the range attributed to the *ælfes*, which are most frequently associated with fevers. Despite the sparsity of the data, then, it is plausible that our two texts linking *pursar* with illness are roughly representative. Meanwhile, Skírnir’s curse leaves little doubt one sort of *kvöl* that a *purs* might inflict on a woman was rape. That *purs* as sexual *kvöl* might overlap conceptually with the *purs* as *kvilla* is consistent to some extent with the comparisons adduced above for the concept of monster as illness: XXXXXsexual overtones of the dwarf-charm and *ælfes*XXXXX.

Alongside *Skírnismál*, another stimulating if less proximate analogue for the idea of afflictions by *pursar* as related to moral transgression is provided by the Finnish folk-poem *Riiden synty* (‘The Birth/Origin of Rickets’), collected in the nineteenth century by Elias Lönnrot, and one of the main texts in the canon of Finnish folk-poetry to mention a *tursas*, the Finnish cognate of *purs*. Many parallels for Skírnir’s charm have been noted, particularly from Old Norse and Old English texts, showing that it’s not entirely a literary one-off (XXXXX; cf. the stanza of *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* quoted above), but *riiden synty* has been little emphasised in connection with *pursar* (though see Haavio XXXXX) and not at all in connection with *Skírnismál*. XXXXXtextual/editorial problemsXXXXX. It is worth quoting in full:⁴⁸

<p>Riiden synty.</p> <p>Neitonen norosta nousi, Hienohelma heiniköstä, Jok’ on kaunis katsellessa, Ilman ollessa ihana; Se ei suostu sulhasihin, Mielly miehiin hyvihin. Tuli yksi mies turilas, Meritursas paitulainen, Kyllä keho keinon keksi, Arvasi hyvän asian: Pani tuolle painajaisen, Saatti nurjan nukkumahan, Laitteli lepeämähän,</p>	<p>The Origin of Rickets, Atrophy</p> <p>From a dell [v. the sea] a maiden rose, a ‘soft skirts’ from a clump of grass, who was lovely to behold, the delight of the world; to suitors she paid no regard, for the good men no fancy had.</p> <p>A giant (<i>turilas</i>) came, a shirted monster (<i>tursas</i>) of the sea, the wretch to be sure had planned a scheme, had thought upon a fine affair: a nightmare he put down on her, he caused the unwilling one to sleep, brought her to seek repose on a honey-dropping sward, on the liver-coloured earth. There he lay with the girl, made the maiden with child, quickened her into pregnancy, himself his departure</p>
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45 She cited Reichborn-Kjennerud 1924, 115-16, but he knew of neither the Canterbury or Sigtuna texts. 462000, 3.

47 2007, 96-156, esp. 105, 116-17, 127; cf. the diagram above.

48Ed. Lönnrot 1880, 320-21; trans. Abercromby 1898, ii 356-57 [cf. 1890-92 (1891), 46-48 for an earlier version of the same collection].

Nurmelle mesinukalle,
Maalle maksan karvaiselle.
Siinä neitosen makasi,
Teki neien tiineheksi,
Kostutti kohulliseksi,
Itse ottavi eronsa,
Läksi kurja kulkemahan,
Vaivainen vaeltamahan.

Neitis tuskille tulevi,
Kohtu kääntyvi kovaksi,
Valittavi vaivoissansa:
"Minnekkäs minä piloinen,
Kunnes kurjan päivällinen,
Näissä pakkopäivissäni,
Vatsan vaivoissa kovissa!"

Virkki Luoja taivosesta:
"Mene portto poikimahan
Synkeän salon sisähän,
Metsän korven kainalohon!
Siellä poiki muutki portot,
Lautat lapsia lateli."

Meni tuonne toitualle,
Kulki rinnoin ripsutteli,
Astuvi kivi kiveltä,
Harppasi hako haoilta,
Noien koirien kotihim,
Penivillojen perille.
Siellä vatsansa vajentik,
Sikiönsä synnyttävi,
Sai pojan pahantapaisen,
Riisipojan riekamoisen,
Navan juuren näivertäjän,
Selkäluun lokertelian.

Etsittihin ristijätä,
Kaluajan kastajata,
Kavolla Kalevan poian,
Ketaroilla pienen kelkan;
Ei sieltä sijoja saanut,
Ei kylästä kymmenestä,
Saranoilta seitsemiltä.

Niinpa riisi ristittihin,
Katopoika kastettihin,
Rannalla vesikivellä,
Yli aallon käytävällä,
Lainehen lipottamalla.
Oliko vesi puhasta,
Millä riisi ristittihin?
Ei ollut vesi puhasta,
Se vesi verensekaista,
Huurat pesi huntujansa,
Pahat vaimot paitojansa,
Nukkavieru-nuttujansa,
Hamehia haisevia.
Siin' on riisi ristittynä,
Katopoika kastettuna,
Nimi pantuna pahalle,
Nimi riien riiviölle.

took, the scoundrel started to go away, the wretch to wander forth.

The girl got oppressed with pain, heavy her womb became, in her suffering she bewailed—'Whither shall I, the poor wretch, whither shall I, the luckless, go in these my days of great distress with cruel torments in the womb?'

The Creator [v. Jesus] uttered from the sky—'Thou harlot, go to be confined within a gloomy wood, in a wooded wilderness recess, there other harlots were confined, strumpets [v. mares] have dropt their young.

In another direction she went, walked forward with rapid steps, strode along from stone to stone, leapt from fallen tree to fallen tree, to the homes of the dogs, as far as the woolly whelps. There she discharged her womb, gave birth to her progeny, got a son of an evil sort, the hideous Rickets boy that gnaws the navel's root, that eats the back-bone away.

They sought for a man to christen him, for a man to baptize the gnawing boy at the well of Kaleva's son, or the props of a little sleigh; none was got from there, nor was baptized, they christened the ill-omened boy on the shore, on a water-girt stone, on one passed over by a wave, by a billow lightly touched.

Was the water clean with which the Rickets was baptized? The water was not clean, the water was mixed with blood, harlots has washed their caps in it, bad women—their shirts, their jackets ragged at the rim, their stinking petticoats. Therein the Rickets was baptized, they christened the ill-omened boy, a name was given to the brute, the name of Rickets to the wretch.

This text presents us with a similar narrative to the one implied by *Skírnismál*. A

beautiful woman refuses the offers of suitors; although the text is not explicit on the point, the collocation of this detail with the subsequent description of how the *meritursas* has sex with her implies a causal connection between the events: the moral failing facilitates the rape (or perhaps seduction?) by the *meritursas*. This in turn leads to the girl's banishment by God. (A further moral transgression—this time not paralleled in *Skírnismál*—is that she refuses to undertake the exile prescribed, and this in turn implicitly contributes to the dire outcome of her liaison with the *meritursas*, the disease of rickets.) If Finnic traditions concerning *tursaas* were similar to those concerning the cognate *pursar*, *Riiden synty* would support the argument that there could have been a moral dimension to the harm inflicted but *pursar*.

Conclusions

Dronke, Ursula, 'Art and Tradition in *Skírnismál*', in *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. by N. Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London, 1962), pp. 250-68 (repr. in Dronke, Ursula, *Myth and Fiction in Early Norse Lands* (Aldershot, 1996), ch. 9).

356. ERIKSSON, Manne & ZETTERHOLM, D.O.: "En amulett från Sigtuna. Ett tolkningsförsök" (*FV* 28, 1933, s. 129-156)

603. HOLTSMARK, Anne: "SARPUARA - *Sárþvara*" (*ANF* 66, 1951, s. 216-220)

629. HØST, Gerd: *Runer. Våre eldste norske runeinnskrifter*. Oslo 1976. 133 s.
630. - "Til Sigtuna og Canterbury Formlene" (*Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap* 16, Oslo 1952, s. 342-347)

1096. - "Språkliga strövtåg i forntidens Uppland" (*Saga och Sed. Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademiens årsbok* 1961, Uppsala 1962, s. 47-60) (U 311, U 623, U 836, U 877, U Sigtunaamulett, England Canterbury DR 419)

Check McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*. Parallels with Rindr?

put in ref to elves book discussion of the word *supernatural*.