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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 (most prominently in the Eddaic poems *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*), medical texts themselves are little attested in our 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.² This image contrasts with the medieval Christianity with which non-Christian Scandinavian traditions co-existed: miracles 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 (cf. Reff 2005). We need not doubt that the differences in emphasis between traditional mythological texts and Christian ones circulating in medieval Scandinavia reflect different ideological emphases in these cultural systems. But there is also reason to think 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 manuscripts would suggest.

The core evidence through which this paper makes this case comprises two texts in the medieval Scandinavian language, written using runes, one surviving in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript, the other archaeologically, and so outside the mainstream of our Scandinavian mythological textual record. Each of these is a medicinal charm intended to counteract illness caused by (or, as I argue, identical with) monstrous beings which the texts refer to as *þursar* (singular *þurs*). These texts are well-known. My aim here, however, is to argue that the attitudes to illness which they imply are more deeply connected than has been realised with the wider, better-attested world-views traditionally encompassed by the study of medieval Scandinavian traditional beliefs. This means that we can situate beliefs about illness and healing in a wider cultural—and therefore moral—context, to understand more fully the interactions between these spheres in traditional, in some ways pre-Christian, culture. 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: specifically, *þurs* 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 reveals a discourse in which healing and illness can be understood as a transformation 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.

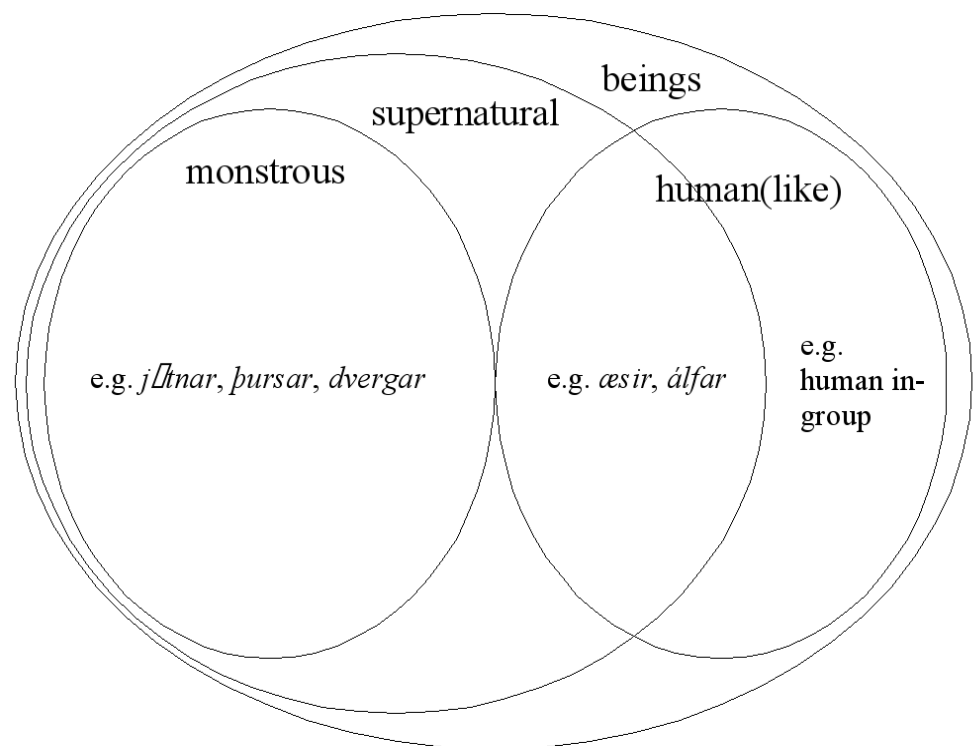
1 Research done at Helsinki. Thanks to Markku and Jari obviously; also my students on the Conversion of Scandinavia course XXXXX. Versions given in morality and health seminar and at Leeds.

2 Ed. for poems XXXXX. The principle exception is Dubois 1999, 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.

These arguments aim to develop connections between morality and health in our understanding of medieval Scandinavian world-views, but they do not incorporate moral transgression specifically. This is because the evidence on which I focus here does not present clear correlations between moral transgression and the aetiology of illness. That said, texts mentioning *pursar* are not without 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*), 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 promote. Using these texts, I conclude by developing some more speculative readings of our evidence.

What is a *purs*?

Purs is a medieval Scandinavian word with cognates in all the medieval Germanic languages (XXXXXcheck Gothic). 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).³ To cite some standard definitions of the Norse term, Sveinbjörn Egilsson (as revised by Finnur Jónsson) defined *purs* as a 'turs, jætte' (1931, s.v.); Cleasby and Vigfusson as 'a giant, with a notion of surliness and stupidity'



(1957, s.v. XXXXcheck def.); Figure 1: Semantic field diagram of Old Norse words for beings and Jan de Vries as 'riese, XXXXXinclude vanirXXXXX unhold' (1961, s.v.).

(XXXXXOSw, Old Norwegian, Old Danish dictionariesXXXXX). This is consistent with the cognate evidence: *tursas* means 'XXXXX'; while Old English *þyrs*, and the early forms of the German *Turse*, gloss terms like *cyclops*, *Orcus* and *Colossus*, indicating meanings similar to the Norse *purs* (B-T XXXX; OED, s.v. *thurse*; Grimm-Grimm XXXXX, s.v., accessed from <http://germazope.uni-trier.de/Projects/DWB>).

There are, of course, more subtle aspects to *purs*'s meanings, which have yet to receive a full analysis: it would probably be possible to identify variation in the word's meanings over time, space and/or register. Cleasby and Vigfusson emphasised the 'notion of surliness and stupidity' (for evidence of which see further Dickins 1942, 12). In our canonical mythological texts, *pursar* invariably appear evil, but the *purs* Þórir in *Grettis saga* chapter XXXXX, born of mixed giant and human parentage, is a sympathetic character (XXXXX; cf. Dickins 1942, 13–14 for this and English parallels).

³ See Haavio 1967, 102–24; XXXXXSANAKIRJA; each of these words could also be taken as a personal name rather than a common noun.

Another connotation, omitted by the lexicographers but which I shall elaborate in the course of this article, is one of sexuality, which emerges most clearly from a line in the Icelandic rune-poem, explicating the rune-name *purs*: ‘þ er kvenna kvöl ok kletta íbúi / ok Valrúnar verr’ (‘þ[urs] is women’s torment and crags’ inhabitant, / and Valrún’s mate’; ed. Page 1998, 27) XXXXXDronke?XXXXX.

Understanding the connotations of *purs* may be particularly important for understanding how far it overlapped with words of related meaning, and what set its meanings apart. 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 *purs* belongs (as well or instead) to a more common kind of lexical set, which can be exemplified by *monarch*, *king* and *ruler* (cf. Hall 2007b, 22–23; forthcomingXXXXX; dis’ Haavio 117–18?XXXXX). 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 *purs* and other words for monsters. Thus, in an insult closely paralleling *Skírnismál* stanza XXXXX, *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* stanza 25 has the hero Atli refuse a request by the giantess Hríngerðr to claim compensation for her father’s killing by sleeping with his slayer:

‘Loðinn heitir, er þic scal eiga, leið ertu mann-kyni;
sá býr í Polleyio þurs,
hundvíss jotunn, hraunbúa verstr;
sá er þér macligr maðr.’

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

Atli refers to Loðinn with *purs*, *jötunn*, *hraunbúi*, and even *maðr* (‘person’). Likewise, *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 33 refers to Aurgelmir both as a *jötunn* and a *hrímpurs* (ed. Neckel-Kuhn 1983, accessed from <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/anord/edda/edda.htm>).⁴ One reason for the variation in terminology in these texts is of course the metrical and aesthetic requirements of poetry, but equally Snorri Sturluson supported his prose claim that ‘ættir hrímpursa’ (‘the races of the frost-*pursar*’) descend from Aurgelmir/Ymir by quoting the statement in *Hyndluljóð* stanza 33 that ‘iotnar allir frá Ymi komnir’ (‘all *jötnar* come from Ymir’; ed. Faulkes 1988, 10; Neckel-Kuhn 1983, accessed from <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/anord/edda/edda.htm>). We also have an example of similar patterns in Old English, where the poem *Beowulf* refers to the monster Grendel by the cognates of both the Norse terms *purs* and *jötunn*—as a *þyrs* (line XXXXX) and an *eoten* (line XXXXX) (and a good deal besides). Once more, there is a likelihood here that we are dealing to some extent with figurative rather than literal language, but the evidence strikes me as strong enough to put the burden of proof on those who would assume that words like *purs* and *jötunn* (for example)

4 In case you need it later:

Undir hendi vaxa qváðo hrímpursi
mey oc mōg saman;
fótr við foti gat ins fróða iotuns
sexhōfðaðan son.

Beneath the arm of the frost-*purs* they said
the girl and boy to grow together;
one leg begat the six-headed son
of the wise *jötunn* with the other.
XXXXX

My argument in the next section extends this kind of thinking to another aspect of the meanings of *burs*, 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 *burs* 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: 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 Anglo-Saxon 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 (ed. and trans. Frankis 2000, 2–5; cf. McKinnell–Simek–Düwel 2004, 127 [O 17]). Linguistic evidence suggests that the charm is likely first to have been written down by about 1000 (Moltke 1985, 360 XXXXXcheck); it runs: 'kuril sarþuara far þu nu funtin istu þur uigi þik / þorsa trutin iuril sarþuara uipr aþrauari'. This can be translated into standard Old Norse 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 *bursar*, Kuril of the wound-spear. Against ?vein-pus'. The charm is not without its problems; in particular, its use of *víga*, usually 'to consecrate' and used of XXXXX, seems curious here, but a sense along the lines of 'exorcise' seems likely (Frankis XXXXX; cf. Turville-Petre on prominence of the collocation, and *Þrymskviða* if Frankis doesn't XXXXX). But it clearly envisages Kuril both as a supernatural being (and specifically lord of *bursar*), and as the root cause of poisonous fluid in the veins. Finding and attacking Kuril seems to be a means to deal with this symptom. Trying to decide whether Kuril belongs in our ontological categories of beings and illnesses will not greatly help us to understand this text: what will is to recognise that illness could in some sense be conceptualised as a being, and interacted with on that basis.

Þórr's role as a god to be invoked for healing in the Canterbury Rune-Charm is not overly well paralleled. A large number of pendants in the form of hammers survive from early medieval Scandinavia, which have been associated with Þórr on account of Þórr's possession of the famous war-hammer Mjöllnir in a wide range of our texts. Meanwhile, they have also been assumed to have had amuletic functions, a suggestion which gains some slight evidential support from the existence of one XXXXX hammer which is also inscribed with a cross, suggesting that the hammers may have had similar functions to crucifixes. These points would link Þórr with amuletic protection against day-to-day threats, whether from monsters, illnesses, or other ill fortune. But although conventional wisdom, the points also rely on a chain of inference which is rather poorly substantiated.

However, there is an important analogue for the Canterbury Rune-Charm in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, book 4 (*Descriptio insularum aquilonis*), chs 26–27, written c. 1075 (trans. Tschan XXXXX). More intro? XXXXX

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.

Not without reason, the reliability of Adam's account has been called into question (in most detail, though not necessarily with greatest plausibility, by Janson 1997; for an English summary see 2000). It is worth emphasising, however, that the passage in question is part of Adam's original *Gesta*, to be distinguished from the infamous *scholion* providing more lurid further details about the temple (ed. XXXXX). Meanwhile, although traditional criticisms of Adam's source value stand—he was not an eye-witness to what he described, while the proximity of his oral sources to events is not clear either; he clearly Classicised his material; he was operating in an ideologically and politically charged Christian community; and so forth—his 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 affected by similar problems. Moreover, Perkins has pointed out that Adam's attribution to Thor of power over the wind, though not apparent in Snorri's work, is well-attested in sources which must be independent, most strikingly Dudo of St Quentin's *Gesta Normannorum*, of around 1060 (XXXXXtrans. Felice Lifshitz (ed. and trans.), *Dudo of St. Quentin's 'Gesta Normannorum'* ([1996]), accessed from http://www.the-orb.net/orb_done/dudo/dudintro.html) (2001, 18–26; also 27–52? XXXXXcheckXXXXX). 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 *þursa dróttinn*, to cure *áðravari*.

That the Canterbury rune-charm is not entirely unique in its representation of *þursar*, meanwhile, is shown by a roughly contemporary text, the Sigtuna Amulet, found in 1931 (which may indicate one of the means by which the text of the Canterbury Rune Charm may have found its way to Christ Church, Canterbury; it is perhaps also worth noting that it comes from much the same place as that described by Adam, at much the same time). The amulet is a thin copper plate with an inscription on each side. It is not certain whether the inscriptions are to be read consecutively or as two separate texts, but it is worth quoting both (ed. McKinnell-Simek-Düwel 2004, 126 [O 16]):

A: þur x sarriþu x þursa / trutinþunuf[bind rune uf]untinis
 B: afþirþriarþrarulfx
 af þir niu nöþir ulfr iii +
 isiR [þ]is isir aukis unir ulfr niut lu -fia

A: Þórr (or Þurs?) sárriðu, þursa 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/þurs of wound-fever, lord of *þursar*,
 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 our confidence 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 show that both represent a wider tradition of similar incantations, and specifically 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. It was conventional in runic inscriptions, when two identical consonants appeared next to each other, to write only one rune, while XXXXXnegation of difference between *ó* and *u* in standard ONXXXXX, 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 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*. Either way, however, the prospect that a *purs* could 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 was a reasonably prominent aetiology of certain kinds of illness, and given the prominence of this it is curious that similar associations have not been made for *pursar* and other monsters before (check Title: Discerning spirits : divine and demonic possession in the Middle Ages / Nancy Caciola. Published: Ithaca, N.Y. ; London : Cornell University Press, 2003. 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). In such cases, the illness is usually identical with the supernatural being, commencing with its arrival 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*.⁵ 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 (see generally Battles 2005). 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 '**ulfuraukupinaukhutiur ·hialbburiisuiþr / þaimauiarkiaktuirkunin**[underdotXXXXX] [hole] **buur**', which can be rendered into standard Old Icelandic 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' (ed. McKinnell-Simek-Düwel 2004, 50 [B 6], where a further selection of translations is provided). 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.

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'. XXXXXcheck DOEXXXXX The kind of interface between *dweorgas* as

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

beings and *dweorgas* as ailments which this process must have entailed is suggested not only by the Ribe Cranium inscription, but by a text in the early eleventh-century manuscript British Library Harley 585, which contains a range of medical texts, the last of which comprises a miscellaneous collection of remedies, among them the following (ed. XXXXX):

Wið dweorh man sceal niman [VII] lytle oflætan, swylce man mid ofrað, and writan [MS *writtan*, with a line-break between the *ts*] þas naman on ælcra oflætan: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion. 4: þænne eft þæt galdor, þæt her æfter cweð, man sceal singan, ærest on þæt wynstre eare, þænne on þæt swiðre eare, þænne bufan/ þæs mannes moldan. 7: And ga þænne an mædenman to and ho hit on his sweoran, and do man swa þry dagas; him bið sona sel.

her com in gangan in spiden wiht
hæfde him his haman on handa
cwæð þæt þu his hæncgest wære
legde þe [MS *legeþe*] his teage an sweoran
ongunnan him of þæm lande liþan
sona swa hy of þæm lande coman
þa ongunnan him ða liþu 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]

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*).⁶ 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 (see generally Raudvere 1993; Hall 2007a; Hall 2007b, 125–26).

Myth, health, and moral transgression

Reinterpreting *bursar*, then, as potentially not only causes of illness, but synonymous with illness, is plausible, and moreover seems to be representative of a larger and

6 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 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

more widespread, if 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 patient with a wider world charged with moral meaning. To begin explicating this claim at a lexical level, it is possible to situate the term *purs*, as a word denoting monsters, in a wider, schematic 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 (Hall 2007b, 11–12, 21–53, esp. 28–29, 32–34, 47–53; cf. 54–74, esp. 60–74, for Anglo-Saxon comparisons). As figure 1 shows, the world of male supernatural beings⁷ 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. Questions of the relationship of humans to supernatural beings are not ones which I can go into at length here. 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). At any rate, gods might walk among men and men might become gods (XXXXX), while the boundary between the human and the monstrous was not impermeable.⁸ But the diagram still represents the fundamental lineaments of a world view.

The diagram is symptomatic of one of the basic structuring principles of medieval Scandinavian world-views, in which people and gods are locked into a cosmic struggle with the monsters which threaten their society. Monster-fighting occurs widely in medieval Scandinavian narratives of all kinds and carries great ideological importance of gods fighting giants, forces of chaos stuff etc. As I’ve mentioned in discussing the diagram above one of the axiomatic forces in the Scandinavian mythological world is the struggle between gods and monsters, culminating in and (prospectively) epitomised by the *Ragnarök*. And that sometimes gets mapped onto interactions between in-group and ethnic others (just like Rome vs. the Barbarians)—perhaps most vividly in the introduction to the U-text of *Heiðreks saga*. And Þórr is of all the gods pre-eminent as a fighter of giants—so his invocation against *pursar* in the context of

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

8 (Hall 2007b, 49–51) Mundal XXXXX XXXXX Thus the rubric to chapter 26 of Snorri Sturluson’s *Haralds saga ins Hárfagra*, as edited by Finnur Jónsson, declares it to be ‘frá Svása jötni’ (‘about Svási the *jötunn*’ XXXXX check the MS status of the rubrics XXXXX), but Svási himself ‘kvað sik vera þann finninn, er konungr hafði játat at setja gamma sinn’ (‘said himself to be that Saami whom the king had allowed to put up his tent XXXXX’; ed. Finnur Jónsson 1911, 56 <http://www.septentrionalia.org/> but get the proper critical edn H3 YLEISKOK 12 B 1 Snorre; XXXXX rubric not in Bjarni’s edition, what to do? XXXXX Mundal 2000 at any rate; Flateyjarbók goes for *dvergr*). Meanwhile, Svási, described in the CXXXX *Ágrip* and the partly-derived XXXXX early thirteenth-century *Heimskringla* as a *finnkonungr* (‘king of the Saami’), appears in the fifteenth-century redaction of this material in Flateyjarbók as a *dvergr* (my ed vol 2 p. 69), though his daughter remains *finnsk* (‘Saami’; XXXXX p. 53). The act of turning into a *troll* (‘XXXXX’) was even lexicalised in the verb *trylla(sk)*, and was liable to be evidenced in people of Saami origin (XXXXX).

Follow up—check source and significance of AldV 1 (Goossens) C31.1

1. [1635 (1637)] *colosi imagini* <**pyrses**> anclincysse.
2. [3160 (3166)] *marsorum pyrsa* obbe wyrmgalera Marsi .i. incantatores **pyrsas** † wyrmgaleres.

AldV 10 (Nap) C31.10

1. [0183 (183)] *et marsorum, i incantatorum & pyrsa.*

Prosa de virginitate ed. Ehwald 279, line 8XXXXX

illness fits with this well neatly. XXXXX

NB also sexual overtones of the dwarf-charm—would fit with *kvenna kvöl* stuff in a tangential wayXXXXX.

So far we've been able to link (an aspect of) the struggle for human health with one of the dominant discourses in medieval Scandinavian mythology, allowing us to gain an alternative perspective on the roles and significance of the god Þórr in medieval Scandinavian culture, and to infer something of how the mythological world gave meaning to the experience of illness, and perhaps even promoted people's resistance to it. The link with mythology also connects medieval Scandinavian health with, in a general sense, morality, insofar as the mythological world was a key ideological component in the moral structures of medieval Scandinavian culture (Clunies Ross 2003?XXXXX). Is it possible to link illness with moral transgression specifically? The possibility of this was 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 (see http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=6387755&dopt=Citation XXXXX)—but it is harder to trace in more traditional texts (though see Hall 2007b, 134–37, 144–45). We must be ready to accept to possibility, then, that moral transgression was not a (prominent) aetiology of illness. That said, comparison with better-attested cultures—prominently including those studied by Hokkanen and Eilola elsewhere in this collection—encourages the supposition that moral transgression could be seen as one cause of illness in medieval Scandinavian culture. Which idea I'm going to follow up with regard to *Skírnismál* and *Riiden synty*.

Unlike our material concerning Þórr, which emphasises only the martial hostility between the *Æsir* and the *jötnar*, *Skírnismál* is a paradigmatic text for another aspect 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. 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 one step lower in status than their own (XXXXXcheck and cite Clunies Ross). *Skírnismál* is one of our main examples of this process: in it, the *Vanr* Freyr falls in love with the *jötunn* Gerðr, and 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 will 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. This process itself has a moral dimension, in that in resisting the conventional exercise of patriarchal power (wealth and violence), Gerðr forces Skírnir to turn to the unmasculine and morally dubious method of using magic. XXXXXso?XXXXX And Skírnir has quite a lot to say about *pursar*, in a text which correlates with the *kvenna kvöl* thing XXXXX. Skírnir's curse and Gerðr's reply (stanzas 26–37) are worth quoting in full:

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

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.

At undrsíonom þú verðir, er þú út kømr,
á þic Hrímnir hari, á þic hotvetna stari!
víðkunnari þú verðir enn vorðr með goðom,
gapiðu grindom frá!

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

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

Með þursi þríhøfðoðom þú scalt æ nara,
eða verlaus vera;
þitt geð grípi,
þic morn morni!
ver þú sem þistill, sá er var þrunginn
í ønn 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 mæer, 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,
mæer, af þínom munom,
mæer, at mínom munom.

Þurs ríst ec þér oc þriá stafi,
erggi 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."

Skírnir deploys a colourful vocabulary of monsters: XXXXX, XXXXX; but (-) *purs* is the most prominent term, both for the number of repetitions (5) and the fact that, perhaps used polysemically to denote not only the rune-name but also the being (cf. the polysemy of *kostr* in stanza 30: Larrington 1992, 9), *purs* begins the culminating stanza of Skírnir's curse. This lexical choice is of course consistent with the specification of the rune-poem that 'þ er kvenna kvøð', and the two pieces of evidence together suggest that *purs* specifically connoted beings which were liable to rape women (perhaps, in this respect, to be compared with the *incubi* and *succubi* of the mediterranean tradition). The curse implies a narrative in which Gerðr attracts a man by her beauty but refuses his suit, and therefore attracts the opprobrium of the gods (stanza 33) and is cursed to an exile in which she is ravaged by *pursar*.

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). One that has been little-emphasised, however, is a Finnish charm collected in XXXXXplace in XXXXXyear. XXXXXtextual/editorial problemsXXXXX. As one of the main texts in the canon of Finnish folk-poetry to mention a *tursas*, it has been discussed in connection with *pursar* and the Canterbury rune-charm by Martti Haavio (XXXXX). It is worth quoting in full (ed. Lönnrot XXXXX trans Abercromby 1898, ii 356-57 [cf. 1890-92 (1891), 46-48 for an earlier version of the same collection]):

<p>Riiden synty.</p> <p>Neitonen norosta nousi, Hienohelma heiniköstä, Jok' on kaunis katsellessa, Ilman ollessa ihana; Se ei suostu sulhasihin, Mielly miehiin hyvihin.</p> <p>Tuli yksi mies turilas, Meritursas paitulainen, Kyllä keho keinon keksi, Arvasi hyvän asian: Pani tuolle painajaisen, Saatti nurjan nukkumahan, Laitteli lepeämähän, Nurmelle mesinukalle, Maalle maksan karvaiselle. Siinä neitosen makasi, Teki neien tiineheksi, Kostutti kohulliseksi, Itse ottavi eronsa, Läksi kurja kulkemahan, Vaivainen vaeltamahan.</p> <p>Neitis tuskille tulevi, Kohtu kääntyvi kovaksi, Valittavi vaivoissansa: "Minnekkäs minä piloinen, Kunnes kurjan päivällinen, Näissä pakkopäivssäni, Vatsan vaivoissa kovissa!"</p> <p>Virkki Luoja taivosesta: "Mene portto poikimahan Synkeän salon sisähän, Metsän korven kainalohon! Siellä poiki muutki portot, Lautat lapsia lateli."</p> <p>Meni tuonne toitualle, Kulki rinnoin ripsutteli,</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 took, the scoundrel started to go away, the wretch to wander forth.</p> <p>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?'</p> <p>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.</p> <p>In another direction she went, walked forward with rapid</p>
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<p>Astuvi kivi kiveltä, Harppasi hako haolta, 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, Sarannoilta seitsemiltä. Niinpa riisi ristittiin, Katopoika kastettiin, Rannalla vesikivellä, Yli aallon käytävällä, Lainehen lipottamalla. Oliko vesi puhasta, Millä riisi ristittiin? Ei ollut vesi puhasta, Se vesi verensekaista, Huorat pesi huntujansa, Pahat vaimot paitojansa, Nukkavieru-nuttujansa, Hamehia haisevia. Siin' on riisi ristittynä, Katopoika kastettuna, Nimi pantuna pahalle, Nimi riien riiviölle.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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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 the description of how the maiden refuses suitors with the subsequent description of how the *meritursas* has sex with her implies a causal connection between them: the moral failing facilitates the attack (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.

Aquatic associations not unparalleled in OE—Maxims, Grendel and toponyms. Cite whitelock and me obviously, and particularly well paralleled in the Lincolnshire material assembled by Dickins p. 14.
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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?

Jarrington 1992, 10: Finally, 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.

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