
“Þur sarriþu þursa trutin”: Monster-Fighting and Medicine in Early Medieval Scandinavia’[1]

Intoduction

Healing does not feature prominently in those medieval texts traditionally deemed to comprise ‘Old Norse mythology’. It pops up in connection with Óðinn and his arcane wisdom (ref XXXXX), XXXXX or XXXXX, but is not presented as a central characteristic of medieval Scandinavians' mythical understanding of the world—and accordingly has received relatively little attention from scholars (XXXXXhandbooks; XXXXXexceptions—Dubois?). This 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 medieval Christian mythological texts, and wider Christian ideologies. (As no doubt Markku and Jari emphasise with reard to later Christianities XXXXX.) And there is no need to doubt that the differences in emphasis between the Christian and traditional mythological texts circulating in medieval Scandinavia meaningfully reflect different ideological emphases in these cultural systems. On the other hand, the contrast is also sufficient to suggest that interactions between ideas about health and healing and wider belief-systems might have been more important in traditional Scandinavian beliefs than our texts would suggest. This paper responds to this: XXXXXwords for illnesses and words for monsters overlap semantically, making monster-fighting and illness-fighting pretty similar. My word of choice being *þurs*XXXXX.

This isn’t about illness as sin (unlike Markku I guess...), but about situating illness in wider cultural and therefore moral frameworks, from which illness takes meaning. The role of moral transgression specifically is harder to spot in our medieval sources, but in keeping with the spirit of this collection I look to a modern/anthropological parallel to the medieval material which helps to show more clearly the kinds of nexus into which illness, monsters and morality could operate, in the form of the Finnish folk-poem *riiden synty,* and aetiological text about the origin (literally, the birth) of rickets.

What is a *þurs*?

Þurs is a medieval Scandinavian word with cognates in all the medieval Germanic languages (XXXXXcheck Gothic); in

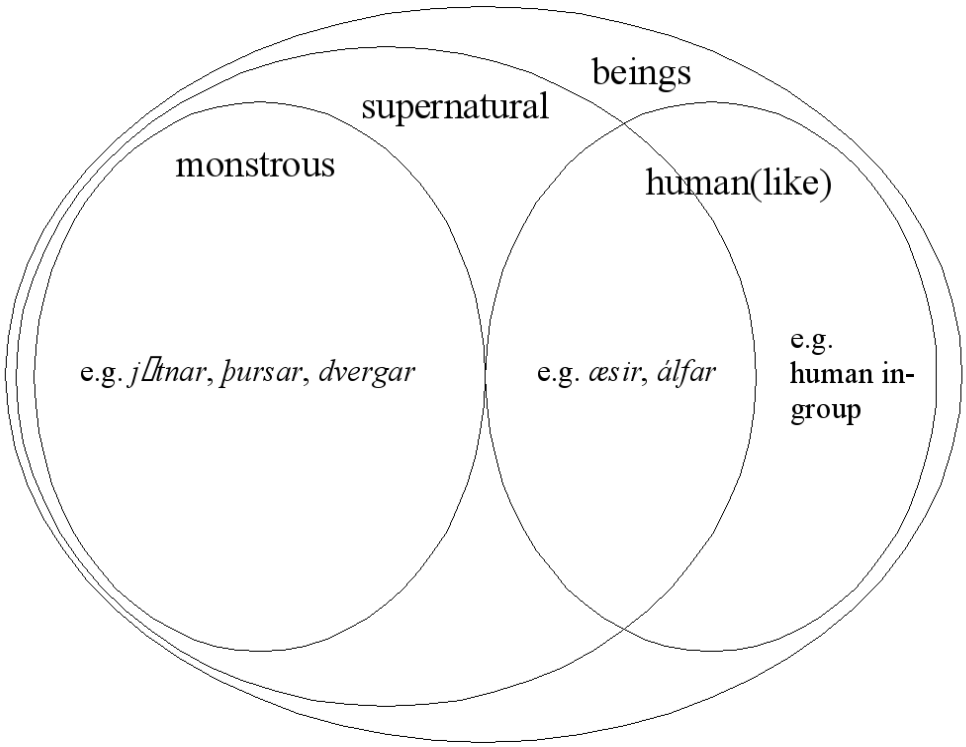

Figure 1: Semantic field diagram of Old Norse words for beings XXXXXinclude vanirXXXXX

1 Research done at Helsinki.Thanks tc course XXXXX. Versions given in

addition, in was borrowed from the Common Germanic language from which all these languages descend into Finnish, as *tursas* (XXXXX). To cite some standard definitions of the Norse term, Sveinbjörn Egilsson (as revised by Finnur Jónsson) defined *þurs* 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.); and Jan de Vries as 'riese, unhold' (XXXXXcaps? 1961, s.v.). (XXXXXOSw, Old Norwegian, Old Danish dictionariesXXXXX). Cite a couple of primary texts showing this: maybe rune poem and *Skírnismál*. This is consistent with the cognate evidence: XXXXX*þyrs*, Finnish *tursas* (which, as Martti Haavio has discussed, can profitably be compared with *þursar*), OS *türse*, *turse* XXXXX. How far Cleasby and Vigfusson's specification of 'a notion of surliness and stupidity' arises from the medieval evidence is a bit unclear to me, but maybe they're thinking of *Skírnismál*—check citationsXXXXX. A clearer connotation—and one to which the notoriorsouly prudish Cleasby and Vigfusson may in fact be alluding—is one of sexuality. 'Þ er kvenna kvǫl ok kletta íbúi / ok Valrúnar verr' ('Þ[urs] is women's torment and crags' inhabitant, / and Valrún's mate'; ed. Page 1998, 27) XXXXX.

Moving beyond these basic observations, one of the key ways to understand a word's meaning is to understand how it overlaps or contrasts with those of other words in the lexicon. It is possible to situate the term *þurs* 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 2007, 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 beings[2] 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.

Within this broad paradigm, however, lie a number of complexities and subtleties. These have yet to receive a full analysis (through which it would probably be possible to identify variation in words' meanings over time, space and/or register), but the outlines seem fairly clear. It is worth noting first that 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' (each in this case denoting one discrete species), but it is also possible that *þurs* belongs (as well or instead) to a more common kind of lexical set, like *monarch*, *king* and *ruler*, in which words potentially overlap in meaning (cf. Hall 2007, 22–23; forthcomingXXXXX).

One issue relates to the relationship of humans to supernatural beings. The ease with which Euhemerus's idea that pagan gods were in fact mistakenly deified human heroes of old was adopted in medieval Scandinavia suggests that the distinction between gods and humans of the in-group may never have been sharp, to the point at which we should perhaps understand gods as a sub-category of humans (Hall 2007, 49–51). At any rate, gods might walk among men and men might become gods (XXXXX). Likewise, the boundary between the human and the monstrous was not impermeable—particularly when the humans in question were not (full) members of the in-group. Thus the rubric to chapter 26 of Snorri Sturluson's *Haralds saga ins Hárfagra* declares it to be 'frá Svása jötni' ('about Svási the *jötunn*'), but Svási himself 'kvað sig 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 tentXXXXX'; ed. XXXXX; XXXXXrubric not in Bjarni's edition, what to do?XXXXX Mundal 2000 at any rate; Flateyjarbók goes for *dvergr*). Meanwhile, Svasi, described in the CXXXX *Ágrip* and the partly-derivedXXXXX 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

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

trylla(sk), and was liable to be evidenced in people of Saami origin (XXXXX). It would be possible to find people who could only be described only as one of *monarch*, *king* and *ruler*, and to find people who could be described by all at once—and this may also be true of words like *þurs*, *jötunn* and *tramr*. Thus, in an insult closely paralleling *Skírnismál* stanza XXXXX, *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* stanza 25 has the hero Atli refuse a reqest by the giantess Hrímgerðr to sleep with her father's slayer in compensation for his death:

> 'Loðinn heitir, er þic scal eiga, leið ertu mann-kyni;
> sá býr í Þolleyio þurs,
> hundvíss iotunn, hraunbúa verstr;
> sá er þér macligr maðr.'
>
> 'He is called Loðinn ['hairy'], who will have you, you are XXXXX to XXXXX;
> that *þurs* lives on ÞolleyXXXXX,
> XXXXX'

Thus Atli refers to Loðinn as *þurs*, *jötunn* and *hraunbúi*. Likewise, *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 33 refers to Aurgelmir both as a *jötunn* and a *hrímþurs* (ed. Neckel–Kuhn 1983, accessed from http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/anord/edda/edda.htm).[3] One reason for the change of terms in these texts is of course the metrical and aesthetic requirements of poetry, but equally Snorri Sturluson supported his prose claim that 'ættir hrímþursa' ('the races of the frost-*þursar*') descend from Aurgelmir/Ymir by quoting *Hyndluljóð*'s statement that 'iotnar allir frá Ymi komnir' in stanza 33 ('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 *þurs* 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 is at least not inconsistent with the Scandinavian material.

My principle concern here, however, is to extend 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: 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-

3 Incase you need it later:

> Undir hendi vaxa qváðo hrímþursi
> mey oc mǫg saman;
> fótr við foti gat ins fróða iotuns
> sexhǫfðaðan son.
>
> Beneath the arm of the frost-*þurs* they said
> the girl and boy to grow together;
> one leg begat the six-headed son
> of the wise *jötunn* with the other.
> XXXXX

Saxon manuscript British Library, Cotton Caligula A.xv dated to around 1073×76, and 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 uiþr aþrauari’. This can be translated into standard Old Norse as ‘Kuril sárþvara far þú nú, fundinn ertu. Þórr vígi þik þursa dróttin, Iuril (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; 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. 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. 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. However, there is an important analogue 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 Iovem 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 frequently 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*, and is to be distinguished from the infamous *scholion* providing such further details about the temple as XXXXX (ed. XXXXX). XXXXXreread Sundqvist 1992, 117–35XXXXX. XXXXXAdam’s star rising because Snorri’s is fallingXXXXX. Moreover, Perkins has pointed out that Adam’s attribution to Thor of power over the wind 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 runic inscriptions discussed above, at least one of which invokes Þórr against Kuril, the *þursa dróttinn*, to cure *áðravari*. XXXXXÞórr’s hammersXXXXX

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 XXXXXmonastery, 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 × sarriþu × þursa / trutinfliuþunuf**[bind rune uf]**untinis**
B: **afþirþriaʀþraʀulf×**
af þiʀ niu nöþiʀ ulfr iii ᛭
isiR [þ]is isiʀ aukis uniʀ ulfr niut lu ·fia

A: *Þórr* (or *Þurs*?) *sárriðu, þursa dróttinn;*
Flý þú nú, fundinn es!
B: *[H]af þér þrjár þrár, úlf[r]!*
[H]af þér níu nauðir, úlfr!
iii ísir þess, ísir eykis, unir úlfr!
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 *þursar*’. Whether the ‘lord of *þursar*’ on the Sigtuna Amulet should be identified as the pagan god Þórr or simply as a *þurs* 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 *þurs*. If we read *þurs sárriðu*, the metrical requirement for alliteration would be met by repeating the word with *þursa 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 *þursar*. Either way, however, the prospect that a *þurs* 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 *þursar* 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 *þursar* 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. The modern English reflex of this word is *dwarf*, and in our medieval English and Icelandic manuscripts it indeed denotes small beings, usually, in the Scandinavian tradition, supernatural. 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 '**ulfuʀaukuþinaukʜutiur ·ʜialbburiisuiþʀ / þaimauiarkiauktuirkunin**[underdotXXXXX] [hole] **buur**', which can be rendered into standard Old Icelandic as *Ulfr auk Óðinn auk Hó*-**tiur.** *Hjalp* **buri** *es við / 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 prose remedies to translated Latin medical writing. Without this corpus, the meaning of *dweorg* would have seemed limited to short people: most prominently, the word glosses *nanus*, *pumilio* XXXXX. However, the medical texts tell a different story: XXXXX*wið dweorg*; *Peri didaxeon*: remedy for asthmatic includes: 'hwile he riþaþ swilce he on dweorge sy' ('sometimes he shakes/writhes as though he was *on dweorge*') for 'interdum et febriunt' ('sometimes they also suffer fever'). 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 NB also sexual overtones of the dwarf-charm—would fit with kvenna kvöl stuff in a tangential wayXXXXX. Also cite *puca*?

Fighting monsters and fighting illnesses

Recognising that there was a medieval Scandinavian discourse in which (certain kinds of) illness could be synonymous with monsters affords us an opportunity to situate some early Scandinavian medical discourses in a wider cultural—specifically mythological—framework. One might suggest generally that the possibilities which this could afford would have included the prospect of naming and concretising illness, specifically in ways which aligned the potentially debilitating experiences of the patient to be renarrated in the martial, heroic terms privileged by medieval Scandinavian societies—a reading which can be paralleled in ethnographic material (XXXXX) and to some extent in our richer Anglo-Saxon evidence for medical discourses (Hall 2007, 115–16; Caciola?XXXXX). XXXXXbenefits of thisXXXXX

But our unusually rich mythological evidence from medieval Scandinavia allows us to go further than this, in arguing that an individual's experience of a *þurs* 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 (haha!). XXXXXthe whole business pivots on the idea 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 *þursar* in the context of illness fits with this well neatly. XXXXX

From myth and health to moral transgression

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 2007, 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 *þursar*, 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 undrsiónom 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 segia þér
sváran súsbreca

oc tvennan trega.

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

Með þursi þríhǫfðoðom þú scalt æ nara,
eða verlaus vera;
þitt geð grípi,
þic morn morni!
ver þú sem þistill, sá er var þrunginn
í ǫnn 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 mær, enn þú fengit hefir
gambanreiði goða.

Heyri iotnar, heyri hrímþursar,
synir Suttunga, siálfir ásliðar,
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,
mær, af þínom munom,
mær, 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."

Skírnir deploys a colourful vocabulary of monsters: *XXXXX*, *XXXXX*; but (-)*þurs* 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), *þurs* 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 kvǫl', and the two pieces of evidence together suggest that *þurs* 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 opprobium of the gods (stanza 33) and is cursed to an exile in which she is ravaged by *þursar*.

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 been discussed in connection with *þursar* 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]):

Riiden synty.	The Origin of Rickets, Atrophy
Neitonen norosta nousi, Hienohelma heiniköstä, Jok' on kaunis katsellessa, Ilman ollessa ihana; Se ei suostu sulhasihin, Mielly miehiin hyvihin.	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.
Tuli yksi mies turilas, Meritursas paitulainen, Kyllä kehno 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.	A giant (*turilas*) came, a shirted monster (*tursas*) 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.
Neitis tuskille tulevi, Kohtu kääntyvi kovaksi, Valittavi vaivoissansa: "Minnekkäs minä piloinen, Kunnes kurjan päivällinen, Näissä pakkopäivssäni, Vatsan vaivoissa kovissa!"	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?'
Virkki Luoja taivosesta: "Mene portto poikimahan Synkeän salon sisähän, Metsän korven kainalohon! Siellä poiki muutki portot, Lautat lapsia lateli."	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.
Meni tuonne toitualle, Kulki rinnoin ripsutteli, 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,	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.

Kaluajan kastajata, Kavolla Kalevan poian, Ketaroilla pienen kelkan; Ei sieltä sijoa saanut, Ei kylästä kymmenestä, Saranoilta seitsemiltä. Niinpa riisi ristittihin, Katopoika kastettihin, Rannalla vesikivellä, Yli aallon käytävällä, Lainehen lipottamalla. Oliko vesi puhasta, Millä riisi ristittihin?	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.
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.	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 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.

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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).

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

larrington 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*.