# KINDS OF EVIL AND THE EVIL OF KIND
# IN EARLY ICELANDIC LITERATURE

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Before the unyielding resistance of Njal's household, Flosi and the Burners find their own position perilous. As Flosi explains to his confederates, there are two alternatives: either to abandon the attack, which would surely cause their eventual deaths, or to burn the house, an alternative which, says Flosi, is a "stór ábyrgð fyrir guði, er vér erum kristnir sjálfir. En þó munu vér þat bragðs taka" ("great mattter before God, since we are Christians, but we will take that course").[1] Flosi's placing of considerations in this world before those of the next is simply an understanding of the issue of evil in traditional terms. Evil exists for him not in intent or in deed, but in consequences of acts. Flosi sees the crime in burning, a crime against drengskap above all, but not the sin. The crime's consequences are social and not spiritual, collective and not individual. An act is good or evil depending upon its effects on social order. Eyjolf Bölverksson's cunning trap which catches the unsuspecting Mord (who fails to exclude a further six judges from the fifth court) causes more bloodshed directly than most feuds, though his intent is to protect the interests of his clients (Nj 144). A good example of how the exercise of wisdom and will can constrain the ill effects of killing is the feud between Hallgerd and Bergthora (Nj 36-45) in which the social relations between Njal and Gunnar is maintained, even strengthened, despite the killings. It is not that Icelanders valued lives little, but that the saga writer emphasizes the importance of social order over the persons killed. Even where Gunnar becomes involved in killings himself, Njal's counsel and support maintains order, and Gunnar's social status increases. But, the bonds of trust between Gunnar and Njal are not universal, and Gunnar is forced into acts which cannot be redressed by Njal. My point is that views of evil in early Icelandic literature reflect traditional and pre-Christian concepts of nature and society. These concepts disdain ontological moral distinctions, and dis-

play a constant effort to harness the potential ill that resides in nature and society. By "traditional" concepts, I mean the thought that is traceable in early poetry and prose. I refer particularly to Njal's Saga because it makes particular use of Christianity as a moral force, often in opposition to traditional ideas. My examples above suggest two hypotheses which I intend to explore. The first is that evil has no absolute ontological status, but is circumstantial. It is an effect of an act, and not its cause. The second hypothesis is that evil is viewed not in terms of the spiritual status of the doer, but in terms of the collective security of the society to which he belongs. Evil, then, is a potential rather than absolute contingency.

The potential good or evil of any thing or act seems to me to be manifest in the various expositions of pagan myth, both in names and words for things as well as in the structure of the myths which employ them. The inter-relations in name and story of Odin, Thor and Loki illustrate well my argument. Odin is a creator god, but also an agent of destruction. He is god of poets, god of the dead and god of malefic magic (seiðr). It may well be that his name is etymologically linked with óðr "mind, feeling, song, poetry", but it cannot be dissociated from the adjective óðr "frantic", and so there appears to be resident in his name a mixture of control and order with frenzy and disorder. The mythological poems of the Edda and Snorri's prose exposition of them describe his fashioning of the world out of the corpse of the giant Ymir, also known as Brimir. Nonetheless, he is the instigator of a concatenation of events which lead inevitably to the destruction of that creation. He ignites the feud between the giants and gods by breaking sworn oaths. In the Helgakviða Hundingsbana önnur, strophe 34, Dag says:

> einn veldr Oðinn
> öllo bölvi,
> þvíat með sifjungum
> sakrúnar bar.

("Odin alone wields all evils, who stirs up kinsmen with strife-runes") As both creator and destroyer, Odin exemplifies a duality inherent in the natural and social environment.[2]

Odin's sworn brother Loki has a name whose origin is obscure, but its possibilities, as well as his genealogy, are telling. Loki's father is the giant Fárbauti "Cruel-Striker" and his mother is known both as Laufey "Leafy" and as Nál "Blade of Grass" (Gylfaginning 33). The mixed legacy of paternal traits of destruction and maternal features of fecundity seems to determine the very mixed character of Loki and his wife and his progeny. Snorri describes Loki as vömm allra goða ok manna...fríðr ok fagr sýnum, illr í skaplyndi, mjök fjölbreytinn at háttum ("a shame to all the gods and men..., handsome and fair of aspect, but ill of nature and changeable in behaviour"). His career is informed by his character.

Upon him is begotten Odin's steed Sleipnir by the giant horse Svaþilfari, and he is the sire of Fenrisúlfr and Jörmungandr, the sun-swallowing wolf and the earth-encircling serpent, whose mother is the giantess Angrboða "Distress-Boder". He is the father of Hel. The many kennings and epithets which identify Loki also designate his malice. In the Lokasenna he is known as bölvasmiðr ("Forger-of-Bale") and áss ragr ("Perverted God". He calls himself inn lævísi ("the guileful one") in the same poem (see also Hymiskviða 37), and it is this characteristic of deceit which is most commonly noted in the epithets employed in the skaldic poetry and by Snorri: inn slægri áss, rægjandi ok vélandi goðanna, dólgr goða, þrætudólgr ok skaði, and rógbera. On the other hand, he is favourably presented by other epithets, such as vársinna ok sessa Oðins ok ása ("sworn fellow and bench-mate of Odin and the gods"), bróður Býleists, and frændr Hænis. Some of his guile functions for the good of the gods, for he is þjófr jötna ("thief of the giants"), and Brísings girðiþjólfr ("Thief-of-the-Brising-Necklace"). In his epilogue to the Gylfaginning (Kap. 54), Snorri aligns Loki with Ulysses:..."at Tyrkir hafi sagt frá Ulixes ok hafi þeir hann kallat Loka, því at Tyrkir váru hans inir mestu óvinr". Thor is in this case a Nordic reflection of Hector. Loki's name has many possible etymons, almost all of which seem appropriate to his mixed nature, and perhaps most of which were popularly identified with him. The most commonly cited etymon is logi "flame", suggesting that Loki is a Nordic counterpart of the Greek Prometheus. Another possibility is lokarr "seducer,

deceiver" (see lokka "to entice, allure"). Lókr designates both "tramp" and "penis". Swedish lok is a weed and locke a spider. Most interesting is the link between Loki and Lóður, the god who, along with Odin and Hœnir is represented in the Völuspá, strophe 18, as a creator god. This association, which Snorri ignores in his Gylfaginning, is re-enforced in the poetry of Eyvind Skaldaspillar and Hauk Valdísarson, as well as in runes on the Nordendorf clasp (ca. 600) which has the form logaþore, suggesting that Loki's earliest identity was creative. The Old English word Logþor appears as a gloss for both Cacus and Marsius, magicians and snake charmers in Classical myth. Referring to this form, René Derolez and Ute Schwab suggest that Loki is a common Germanic sorcerer figure whose name derives from IE *leug- "to lie" added to an agent suffix. A more traditional view is expressed by E.O.G. Turville-Petre who sees in lóður a nominal compound of lóð and verr--"man of growth"--since Gothic liudan means "to grow".[4] This explanation accords well with a conception of Loki as a generater of life, a conception reflected by his description elsewhere as the "thief of the Brisings belt", for that ornament is a notorious fertility fetish. So, Loki's name as well as his epithets point to a force which is both generative and degenerative, life-giving as well as life-wasting. In the poetry of the Edda, as well as in Snorri's accounts, Loki is a degenerated force. He is a particular enemy of Freyja, the Vanir goddess of fertility, not only because he barters her person in traffic with giants, but because he seems to have developed into a natural enemy of art and artifact.

Thor, Loki's frequent companion, is his opposite among the gods. He is as honest and unbeguiling as Loki is a conniver, though, at Loki's instigation, he was once forced into disguise and deception in order to recover his stolen hammer. Thor is a protector god, friend of peasants and benefactor of crops. His hammer is a blesser of marriage, undoubtedly as a fecundity force. Snorri associates his name with Tror and Troy, and this cannot be far from the truth, since his name has ancient and near-eastern antecedants. His name probably has an association with an Indo-European root *teu ("swelling or increase"). An Old Irish cognate turah means "strong", as

does the Old English cognate form þryð. The ON þrúð is similar, and OE þrymm "strength, violence" is reproduced in the name of the giant Thor combats to recover his hammer. All of these forms seem to be related with the Greek tauros "bull", though that term probably had an earlier designation "penis". One recalls that the Minoan king Minos was born of a divine bull (Zeus in disguise) and that he had another identity himself as a monster bull Minotaur. Thor himself has a monstrous doublet form, for þór undoubtedly derives from the same Germanic root as þurs "giant". Whereas Loki's duplicity is represented in a single mythic identity, Thor's double nature is divided so that the positive aspects of his origins are at war with the negative. So, Thor fights giants to preserve the generative forces of life, particularly in the form of Freyja ("love") and his wife Sif ("peace, bonds of kinship"). Thor is the son of Earth by Odin, and is himself father of Móði "temper" and Þrúðar "Strength" (Skáldskaparmál 11). He is the great grandson of Bölþorr (Háv 140) "Bale-Thor" or Bölþorn (Gylf 6) "Bale-Thorn". The confusion of Þorr with þorn is reproduced in the Old English rune names, where the older þurs rune is called þorn, perhaps because the Gothic þaurnus was too easily confused with þaúris, but perhaps as well because thorn "penis" was somehow easily associated with both giants and Thor. The Old Icelandic and Old Norse rune-poems call þurs "harmers" of women. Karl Schneider has argued that the þ-rune is a pictographic form of a penis as well as Thor's hammer.[5]

It seems to me that the form þurs is a significant clue to the understanding of the nature of evil in Nordic traditional thought. The earliest use of the word is probably the OE use in the poem Beowulf where the hero calls Grendel a þyrs (l. 426).[6] The term appears but two other times in OE poetry, once in the Cotton Maxims to note that "a þyrs inhabits the fens, alone in the country", and again in riddle 40 of the Exeter Book in the "Creation Riddle" in which Creation boasts that "I can eat more mightily and as much as an old þyrs". Þyrs here translates Aldhelm's Latin cyclops, themselves part of the mixed offspring of Uranus and Oceanus. In OE prose glosses þyrs translates most often Cacus, the monstrous son of Vulcan, and Marsi, a race of sorcerers and magicians in Livy and Horace.

The OE logþor, presumably a form of Norse Lóður, also glosses Marsi, so there is a distant, at least, connection between þyrs and Loki.Much later, but with some evidence of local understanding of the term, Wyclif uses the word thirs in the 14th century to translate pilosus ("hair-covered") in Isaiah 34.4, and explains that the creature so designated in a satyr. English þyrs, then, has negative associations of excess of appetite, sexual or gluttonous, or in pride of creation.þyrses seem distinct from, if not superior to, the eoten, or cannibal giants, or gigantas, huge creatures. Distinctions of this sort are even harder to find in Old Icelandic. In the Völuspá , the giants who are the material of creation are jötnar (although in OE eoten is a rare and poetic appellation, jötun is the common term in OI). In Þrymskviða, both jötun and þurs are used of the same person. Elsewhere there is a tendency to use the word þurs to signal a deficiency of generation. In Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, 40, Sinfjötli insults Guðmund by claiming he was gelded by thurse-maidens. In Skirnismál, 36, Skirnir threatens Gerd with thurse-runes so that no man will approach her. Atli uses a similar threat in Helgakviða Hjörvarðsonar, 25, against Hrimgerd. Thor recognizes Alvís as thurse-like in Alvísmál, 2, and in Baldrs Draumar the seeress claims that Odin has mothered three thurse-maidens. These three may be the same maidens who enter Asgard in Völuspá, 8, whose malefic or benign role is uncertain. Whether or not the Norse use of the term reflects an older tradition or belief, it appears that the Norse þurs has a stronger sexual bias in it than the cognate forms in other Germanic languages.[7] Such a usage accords with the the etymological associations the words has with þór.

Giants, monsters if you prefer, possess much of the same dual characterisitics of creation and destruction evident in Odin and Loki. They personify threatening aspects of nature, the hostility to society latent in the environment. They are hostile to life, but as forces of death and waste, they are necessary chthonic powers who destroy what is ripe for death in order to make room for new life. Like the Cyclops they destroy in reaction to others, but not in principle. They are forces revenging

themselves upon the gods who have abused nature. In the myths they war against the gods first to avenge the killing of Ymir and his brothers, and then to avenge the killing of the architect of Asgard. They have an argument against the gods' creation as well as against his art. Giants--þyrsir, risar or jötnar--resist the ordering hand of man and god. No wonder then that Thor is the natural enemy of the giants, for they are consumers, wasters, and destroyers of order; they are excess--sexual and material.

Evil, then, in the myths is a excess of appetite incited by the gods' artful malice and manifest in degeneracy of kind--the spawning of cancerous life-forms by Loki in particular. The myths are stories of the efforts of the gods to maintain a delicate order in nature and society against the onslaughts of their enemies, and in this perspective the sagas record man's attempts to do the same. As architecture and treasure-goods represent for the gods the natural order they must defend, in the sagas it is society itself, and the law is the real as well as fetish force to maintain that order. The myths, the meaning inherent in the names and stories of the gods, provide a traditional model and framework for the sagas. An example comes easily to mind in the episode in Eyrbyggja Saga, 28. Halli the berserk asks Styrr for his daughter Ásdís. Snorri the Priest advises Styr how to handle the situation. Styr demands as a trial that Halli and his brother Leiknir raise a dike and build a sheepshed. Meanwhile, he sets about building a bath-house. When the berserks have completed their labours, they are invited into the bath where Styr traps and drowns them. The episode is a recasting of the story of Loki's deception wrought upon the builder of Asgard, whose reward was to have been Freyja (it is curious how often Snorri is cast in the sagas in a Loki-like role, giving mixed good and ill advice). It is not difficult to see something of Thor in the figures of Örvar Oddr and Þorkell hákí, both of whom fight wondrous monsters and giants in the east.

Njal's Saga reflects in character and interplay between chracters much of traditional mythic models. Njal is informed with something of Odin, a seer who has insight into the inevitable course of affairs that will bring about his own destruction, and at the same time is responsible for much of that

course. Curiously, there is a link, apparently, between Njal's genealogy and Odin. When he is introduced in chapter 20, his father is said to be Þorgeir gollnir. Gollnir seems to be inexplicable unless, as Einar Ol. Sveinsson points out in his notes, it is a form of galdnir, which, he claims, is a heiti for Odin (though I cannot find it anywhere in the prose or poetry). Like Odin, there are gaps in Njal's vision. He seems to fail to see the consequences of Thrain's marriage to Hallgerd's daughter, and seems not to know that Flosi is capable of burning them within the house. His sending of Gunnar to Hrut in disguise in order to regain Unn's dowry recalls the gods' disguising of Thor so that he could journey to Giantland to recover a stolen hammer. The sexual character of Hallgerd cannot but remind readers of Freyja, whose sexuality incites contentions. Höskuld Thrainsson reflects Baldur, Odin's son, and Mord is his ráðbani in much the same way that Loki is Baldur's. Mord is also an inconstant friend, an inciter of evil, motivated by nothing else but envy of the good of others. He is forced to defend the interests of the survivors of Njal against his will, having contrived Njal's death, as Loki is forced to defend Asgard against the giant-builder. Gunnar and Kari are Thor-figures, honest, strong-willed, and sensitive to distinctions of good and evil, though Gunnar allows himself, like Thor, to practice deceit, and Kari to be a party of Höskuld's murder. Skarp-Hedin is the most fascinating character in terms of mythic qualities. He is the master-flyter, comparable to Loki in the Lokasenna, but he wields an ax as Thor wields a hammer. Like Höður, he is goaded into killing an innocent, and like Thor he never flinches before a challenge. If heðin refers to goatskin (as Cleasby-Vigfusson have it) then his name would be a link to Thor's fetish animals.

I am far from proposing that Njal's Saga be viewed as a recasting of Nordic myth in 10th-century dress. I am simply suggesting that Nordic views of nature--society in this case--and the potential evil that permeates it, is traditional, and that habits of thought about essential issues and beliefs cannot but inform the recounting of local history. Interplay of character in 10th and 11th-century society cannot but reflect and even perhaps somewhat shape traditional myth.

Cultural history is a record of types. Kari's vengeance on the Burners and his subsequent marriage to Höskuld's widow reflects the eschatology of the Eddas. The sequence of events that leads toward the burning is a version of the breaking of oaths, the deception, and the slander, the envy and the malice which marks the history of the gods. There is in the burning of Njal and his sons something of the effect of the burning of Asgard, a ragnarök, though Mord is never shown to suffer punishment for his nefarious role in destroying the balance of social accounts. The eschatological ending of the saga, reconciliation in a snowstorm, is a coda to the purgation of the ills intitiated by a series of hapless couplings: Hrut with Unn, Unn with Valgard, Thrain with Thorgerd, and Gunnar with Hallgerd. The saga is itself a sort of typological shadowing of the fall of the gods.

The role Christianity plays in the sagas, and in Njal's Saga in particular, does not appear to alter, but rather to intensify its pagan "spirit". Assuming, from a modern point of view, that the principle message Christianity brought to Iceland was Augustine's insistence that the things of God be placed before the things of this world, that man must serve the interests of his soul ultimately, and that evil consists of placing self interests before the common spiritual profits of man, a reader of the sagas would be led to think that the picture of Christianity given there demeans Christian thought and exalts pagan values. The evidence in Njal's Saga is heavy. Flosi measures self interests above God's judgement when he choses to burn Njal's household, for one instance. Following the course of events after the conversion, as recounted in the saga, the first miracle occurs after Ámundi the Blind, son of Höskuld Njalsson, calls upon God to judge between him and Lyting, his father's killer (Nj 106). God restores Ámundi's sight long enough for him to enact blood revenge, and then reconsigns him to darkness. This is an instance where a new God performs what the older gods were often thought no longer capable of. Shortly thereafter, a Christian Mord attempts to convert his father Valgard to Christianity, after having heard from him the advice which allows Mord to destroy the Njalssons

(*Nj* 107). Before he dies, Valgard destroys Mord's crosses, immediately after which Mord launches his project of systematic slander. After Höskuld Thrainsson's death, Flosi is incited to vengeance by Hildigunn, Höskuld's widow, who charges him with the obligation in the name of Christ--*fyrir all krapta Krists þíns*--or be called *níðingr* ("base"?), as if Hildigunn conceives of Christ as Flosi's favorite god (*Nj* 116). Later, after having heard mass, Flosi rides off to commit murder. When Flosi offers quarter to Njal and his wife, Njal says he prefers death because he feels too old and infirm to avenge his sons, and would not live in dishonour--*ek vil eigi lifa með skömm* (*Nj* 129). He faces death, then, with a pagan sense of honour rather than with a Christian hope for spiritual judgement. Nonetheless, Njal consoles the terrified women of the house by assuring them that God will not allow them to burn in both this world and the next. This may be comforting thought, but it is bad theology.[8] At the trial of the burners both Mord and Eyjolf Bölverksson swear on the Bible (*vinn eið at bók*) to defend their causes truthfully (*Nj* 142 and 143), but the truth they defend turns on legal quibbles rather than on moral justice. That Eyjolf succeeds in sabotaging justice and inciting pitched battle at the Althing does credit to his patronymic. Finally, Kari's prolongation of the feud, hunting down the Burners one by one, is motivated by a sense that his son's death has not been avenged, though curiously enough, his personal crusade of vengeance carries him closer to Rome, where his vendetta is transformed into pilgrimage. The penitence he and Flosi perform is not marked by contrition, and their final reconciliation seems more a triumph of *drengskap*, a nobility of character, than of Christian deference to status of soul.

In effect, Christian ideas as they were understood by both the characters in the sagas and by the compilers of the family sagas, strengthened native traditions. Just as Þorgeir *goði* argued that the Icelanders should believe in one god--for the good of social order--so Icelanders in the sagas seem to have welcomed Christianity as a social rather than moral value. M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij notes that nowhere in the sagas is Christianity shown to be "morally" superior to pagan beliefs,[9] and Dag

Strömbäck points out that Icelanders were in a religious mood at the time of conversion, and that belief in the pagan gods was waning.[9] Christianity then, with a fresh authority for belief rather than with a Pauline doctrine of grace, infused itself into the native tradition. It not only gave, through its transmission of the Latin writing system, a means of recording that tradition, but most likely provided a cultural impetus for literary interest in native pagan traditions. As evidence of the use of Christian material in non-Christian contexts, Strömbäck shows how the episode where Flosi recounts his dream of the Burners entering a cliff (Nj 133) derives from the Icelandic version of Gregory's Dialogues.[11] Long before the word sál was used, in the Old English fashion, for concepts of "soul", native words like gipta and hamingja were used for attributes of Christ, as if He possessed Nordic "luck". Anne Holtsmark argues that the myths of Loki have been shaped by Scripture,[12] but it is just as likely that local conceptions of Lucifer were founded on familiarity with Loki. In the Icelandic Elucidarius, Lucifer is called fyrst enn fegrste, recalling Snorri's description of Loki. Perhaps more to the point is the role Thangbrand plays in Njal's Saga as proselytizer, where he duels and kills. Thangbrand is superior to a berserk (Nj 103) because of the power his belief lends him, not because of the morality behind it. He is rendered a superior warrior in pagan conventional guise.[13]

The compatibility of Christianity with native literary conventions, then, is not so much doctrinal as topological. That is, there was a good deal of Christian lore that accorded with and re-enforced local lore. Both major conceptions of the origins of evil in Norse thought are paralleled in Scripture. The first is mis-conception or miscegenation, in Norse lore the ergi of Loki and his generating of monsters; and in Scripture this is emphasized particularly in the Old Testament. In Genesis, 6, 1-4, the sons of God cohabit with the daughters of earth to produce giants. Adam's sin is passed on to all of his progeny through the act of begetting new life. The second manifestation of evil, more immediate and socially pertinent in Iceland, is the breaking of oaths, infidelity to sworn words. Loki's lies represent this fault on a mythic level, and virtually every

saga feud is set in motion by a breach of trust. The Old Testament is a record of breaches of covenants and lapses of obedience, but Scripture is concerned largely with the breaks between men and God, while the sagas record social breaches of trust. Fame and not grace is the goal of the saga hero. When Gunnar reminds Hallgerd that hefir hverr til síns ágætis (each has his own standards of excellence, Nj 77) he is thinking of social notoriety and not Divine judgement. Höskuld Thrainsson is the only figure in the saga who values an act in spiritual context, for as he dies, he says to Skarp-Hedin, "Guð hjálpi mér, en fyrirgefi yðr" (nj 111). There is not really any saga figure who exemplifies the sin of spiritual pride, but those who reflect social arrogance are legion.

Certainly the Christian doctrine of Grace took considerable time to make inroads into Icelandic consciences. A homogeneity of local custom and belief, unlike the disparate social and religous structure of Anglo-Saxon England before its conversion, resisted a shift from social to spiritual conscience. Certainly by the end of the tenth century the famed Viking attitude of self-reliance and the convention of drengskap had fewer arenas of activity, and by the time of the writing of the family sagas, these conceptions were part of a legendary "golden" past. After the thirteenth century, when oppression under foreign rule and poverty of local social structures took their toll, the doctrine of the Church which held out a promise of spiritual consolation to follow worldly deprivation began to undermine, though never obliterate, the pre-Christian cultural legacy. Failure of the law necessitated faith in religion.

NOTES

[1]All references to the text are to the fornrit edition, Brennu-Njáls Saga, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Reykjavík, 1954. All succeeding references will be noted by chapter number in parentheses following each quotation.

[2]Cf. Isaiah, 45, 7, where God announces: formans lucem et creans tenebras; faciens pacem et creans malum.

[3]"Logðor, ein altenglisches Glossenwort", Studia Germanica Gandensis, 21 (1981), 95-125. Joseph P. Shipley, Origins of English Words, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1984, derives Loki from *leuk "light", linked with Lucina and Lucifer. Shipley's Icelandic authority is placed in doubt by his citing as Loki's family a wife Glut and daughters Eisa and Eimyrja.

[4]Myth and Religion of the North, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963, pp. 143 ff.

[5]Die germanischen Runennamen, Meisenheim an Glan: Anton Hain, 1956, 388-99. See also Helmut Arntz, Handbuch der Runenkunde, Halle/Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1944, 189-91, and R.W.V. Elliott, Runes, Manchester: University Press, 1959, p. 46. For a more skeptical view, see R.I. Page, An Introduction to English Runes, London:Methuen, 1973, 75-76.

[6]Note Cleaby-Vigfusson's claim that "this interesting word occurs in no other Teutonic language".

[7]Old High German Durs/Duris has no traditional contexts, but is found in religious writings to designate demons and magicians. The early shift in Icelandic usage of the term to refer to stupidity (heimskr sem þurs) may reflect an effort on the part of the Church to erase pagan associations from the word. To risar are attributed size, perhaps because of the poetic use of bergrisar, and to jötnar strength. Saxo in the preface and first book of Gesta Danorum probably echoes a more conservative view when he divides supernatural beings (mathematici) into two classes: giants and sorcerers, or shape-shifters.

[8]A comparable piece of faulty doctrine occurs in the edda-like Sólarljóð, where Greppur the robber has his soul saved when his sins are transmitted to the one who kills him without cause (strophes 6-7).

[9]The Saga Mind, translated from the Russian by Kenneth H. Ober, Odense University Press, 1973, p. 117.

[10]The Conversion of Iceland, translated from the Swedish by Peter Foote, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1975, p. 58.

[11] _Op. cit._, pp. 89ff.

[12] _Studier i Snorres Mytologi_, Oslo: Universitets forlaget, 1964, 65-68. See also Turville-Petre, _Myth and Religion_, p. 145.

[13] A. Margaret Arent, "The Heroic Pattern", _Old Norse Literature and Mythology_, ed. E.C. Polomé, Austin: University of Texas, p. 164, argues that Christianity works _for_ rather than _against_ pagan conceptions in Old English poetry by bringing to them a fuller mythologizing. She sees heroes such as Beowulf developing toward Christian knighthood in a process in which pagan values were made acceptable for Christianity. I see something of the reverse in the earliest Old Icelandic literature.