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Persistent Motifs of Cursing from Old Norse Literature in Buslubœn

La *Buslubœn* presenta analogie significative non solo con le maledizioni di cui abbiamo notizia dalla letteratura norrena, ma anche con generi affini ma parzialmente differenti nelle forme e nei propositi, come le formule di giuramento, la magia erotica e il *níð*. Parte della critica suggerisce che la *Buslubœn* nella sua forma attuale sia più o meno contemporanea al testo tràdito della *Bósa saga ok Herrauðz*: il parallelo con altri testi della tradizione norrena permette dunque di cogliere le affinità di carattere generale tra la *Buslubœn* e altri testi di tradizione norrena, evidenziando di conseguenza la presenza di un certo numero di peculiarità, dovute verosimilmente alla scelta da parte dell'autore di creare un testo *ex novo*, ma riutilizzando frammenti di tradizione. Da qui risulta per la *Buslubœn* una natura composita non infrequente nei testi di epoca tarda che si propongano di ricostruire un paganesimo in gran parte già dimenticato.

1. Introduction

Buslubœn ('Busla's prayer') is a sequence of nine stanzas, that are said to belong to a longer curse, comprised in *Bósa saga og Herrauðs*,¹ one of the so-called Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* or 'heroic sagas'.² It is widely agreed that the saga must have been written down after the mid-14th century even though, like most heroic sagas, it recounts events that occurred in the Scandinavian countries during the Viking Age:³ this sets

¹ The names of the characters follow Old Norse standard spelling, while all quotations follow the edition of the text used for this article; two of them, namely Tómasson (1996) and Karlsson / Sveinsson / Árnason (1992) spell the texts according to the current Modern Icelandic usage and have been quoted accordingly.

² On the definition of this group of sagas, see Kristjánsson (1997: 341-342).

³ Tómasson (1996: 48); nearly one century before, Jiriczek already concluded in his edition that the saga had been written in the second half of the 14th century, as sagas written at the beginning of the 15th century seem to have been influenced by it (1893: LV-LVI). Jiriczek argues that its oldest manuscripts, AM 586 4^o and AM 343a 4^o, have been copied in the first half of the 15th century (1893: XII), while Tómasson states that these manuscripts must, in fact, be dated to the second half of that century (1996: 66-67).

a *terminus ante quem* for the curse in its present form, but it may still be held that at least some of its material must predate the saga.⁴

The main character, Bósi, is a kind of Don Juan who repeatedly ends up in dangerous situations. In one episode, he is sentenced to death, together with his friend Herraúðr, and abandoned by his relatives and friends, with the sole exception of his foster-mother (or rather wet-nurse) Busla, who is a sorceress and convinces King Hringr (Herraúðr's father) to commute the sentence to exile by threatening him with the *Buslubæn*.⁵ The inclusion of such a curse within the saga is in accordance with the taste of the author for the obscene and the scandalous, as shown by the crude sexual episodes and the blasphemous blessing addressed to the reader by 'saint Busla' which ends the narration.⁶

This text is of great interest as far as the history of magic is concerned, as it represents a unique source of evidence of the role of the curse in Viking, pre-Christian Scandinavia. As a matter of fact, the history of medieval hostile magic has been influenced by fears about the power of such words and formulas;⁷ *Bósa saga* itself provides a telling example of such an attitude, as the author claims to have transcribed only parts of the text of the curse and advises in particular against reciting its last section after sunset.

The purpose of this article is to show how the text of the curse (excluding those parts that are directly linked to its context and thus hold no comparative value, such as the first stanza) contains elements that may be linked to different genres of religious or magical rites, two of which had an acknowledged role within Norse society – truce-oaths and defamations (*níð*) – while two others are known from literary sources – love magic, as attested in *Skírnismál*⁸ and Puríðr's *maleficium* in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*.

It has been already remarked by Jónas Kristjánsson that the text displays some similarities with at least two Eddic lays (*Skm.* and *Hel-*

⁴ Kristjánsson unequivocally states that the text must be older than the saga itself (1997: 361), and also Raudvere seems inclined to consider this possibility (2003: 141). Simek / Pálsson (1987: 49), s.v. *Buslubæn* do not believe *Buslubæn* to be older than the saga itself, but it is not ruled out that it may contain earlier material.

⁵ Ed. Tómasson (1996: 12-15).

⁶ Ed. Tómasson (1996: 17-19, 29-31, 37-38 and 45 respectively).

⁷ Lozzi Gallo (1997).

⁸ Henceforth *Skm.*, as in Neckel / Kuhn (1962).

gaqviða Hundingsbana ǫnnor) and a “recital of curses [...] reproducing a series known to him in the vernacular” in the *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus (probably 1.8.11):⁹ the latter text displays similarities mainly with curses for oath-breaking and will be examined together with them. Here the evidence provided by *Buslubæn* shall be considered in relation to all four kinds of magical rites described in our sources, highlighting those elements which appear to have influenced the author of this curse.

2. *Cursing in oath-swearing*

Truce-oaths comprise the main body of evidence for the role of the curse in Norse culture. Although an oath in itself is neither a magic nor a religious act, but rather the legal sanction of a contract, Marcel Mauss, in his study on magic, argues that when oaths contain magic or religious rituals, they must be considered also in this respect.¹⁰

This statement is reinforced by Köbler who, in his definition of the role of the oath in Germanic cultures, states: “Seinem Wesen nach wird der E[id] als bedingte Selbstverfluchung erklärt. Entsprechend das beedigte Wort nicht der Wahrheit, sollte durch übermenschliche Einwirkung den Sprecher eine ungünstige Folge treffen.”¹¹ More recently, the same concept has been expressed by Graf about classical cultures.¹²

Evidence for the importance of truce-oaths in Norse culture comes from both literary and legal texts, a constant feature being the fact that the oath is sworn on places, objects or beings regarded as *mana* – that is, possessing a supernatural power that is unleashed in the case of perjury;¹³ Beck refers to them using the generic term *Kraftzentren*.¹⁴

⁹ Kristjánsson (1997: 361-362), probably following Herrmann’s commentary (1922: 119-121), where the relation with *Buslubæn* and further with the Eddic lays is mentioned.

¹⁰ “[...] Dans la mesure où ils ont une efficacité particulière, où ils font plus qu’établir des relations contractuelles entre des êtres, ils ne sont pas juridiques, mais magiques ou religieux” Mauss (1950: 11).

¹¹ Beck / Köbler (1973: 540).

¹² Cf. Graf (1994: 233-236), where the scholar puts the stress upon the function of the ritual in lending new strength to the meaning of the oath-formulas.

¹³ Mauss (1950: 101-115).

¹⁴ Beck / Köbler (1973: 539-540).

The oldest body of evidence for the suspended self-curse involved in oath-swearing is provided by three Eddic lays: *Atlakviða inn grænlenzka*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana ǫnnor* and *Vǫlundarkviða*.¹⁵

In *Akv.*, Guðrún prays that her husband Atli might be afflicted by the self-curse he had uttered in a truce-oath sworn with her brother Gunnarr, whom he has just had killed:

*Svá gangi þér, Atli,
sem þú við Gunnar áttir
eiða oft um svarða
ok ár of nefnda,
at sól inni suðrhǫllo
ok at Sigtýs bergi,
hǫlkvi hvílbeðiar
ok at hringi Ullar.*

‘May your fate, Atli,
fit the oaths that you swore
often to Gunnarr
and pledged long ago,
by the sun southward-curving
and by Óðinn’s crag,
by the steed of sleep’s pillows
and by Ullr’s ring.’¹⁶

Guðrún is clearly recalling the *Kraftzentren* by which Atli had previously sworn: the sun, a hill sacred to Óðinn, and a ring sacred to another Norse god named Ullr, about whom very little is known,¹⁷ but the role of sacred rings in oath-swearing in Norse culture is well-established in saga literature.¹⁸ The reference to ‘the steed of the sleep’s pillows’ has been interpreted by Dronke as a *kenning* for ‘bed’; nevertheless, since this phrase (unlike the other three) is not preceded by the preposition *at*, I would suggest that it could instead be interpreted as an addition to *Sigtýs bergi*, which should then be regarded as a burial mound, where the dead metaphorically rest. Anyway, even if this suggestion is accepted, this does not mean that a medieval reader would necessarily have interpreted it thus.

Guðrún only mentions the powers on which Atli had sworn; on the other hand, in *Vkv.* these *manas* are ignored and only objects are men-

¹⁵ Henceforth abbreviated *Akv.*, *HH. II* and *Vkv.* as in Neckel / Kuhn (1962).

¹⁶ *Akv.* 30, 1-8; text and translation from Dronke (1969: 9), corresponding to Neckel / Kuhn (1962: 245).

¹⁷ Mainly on the basis of place-names, Holtsmark affirmed that Ullr’s cult must have been linked with the Svíar and their kings (1975: 280-281); since then, Simek has recommended a certain amount of caution in drawing conclusions from this kind of evidence (1993: 339-340).

¹⁸ The earliest mention of such oaths is to be found under the year 876 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Garmonsway (1972: 75 and n. 1), concerning a truce between Alfred of Wessex and a King of the Danes.

tioned when Vǫlundr compels King Niðuðr to swear the following truce-oath:

<p><i>Eiða skaltu mér áðr alla vinna, at skips borði ok at skialdar rønd, at mars bægi ok at mækis egg, [...]</i></p>	<p>‘First, you must swear to me every oath, by the side of the ship and by the rim of the shield, by the withers of the horse and by the edge of the sword, [...].’¹⁹</p>
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From this text, it is clear that the king must swear on the symbols of his warlike life: ship, shield, horse, sword; these crucial instruments will cause his defeat if he breaks his oath.

In the third Eddic instance of a truce-oath, in *HH. II* (probably a recent lay), we find mention of both the *Kraftzentren* and the objects of the oath. Here Helgi’s wife Sigrún reproaches her brother Dagr for breaking a truce with her husband and killing him, and her curse follows the truce-oath closely:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>31 <i>Þic scyli allir eiðar bíta,
þeir er Helga hafðir unna,
at ino ljósa Leiptrar vatni
oc at úrsvølom Unnar steini.</i></p> | <p>‘All oaths should bite you,
that you have sworn to Helgi
on the clear water of river Leiptri
and on the cold, damp stone in the sea!’</p> |
| <p>32 <i>Scríðiat þat scip, er und þér scríði,
þótt óscabyrr eptir leggiz;
rennia sá marr, er und þér renni,
þóttu fjáendr þína forðaz eigir</i></p> | <p>May not glide the ship that glides under you
though a favourable wind drives her!
May not run the horse that runs under you
even if you must escape your fiends.</p> |
| <p>33 <i>Þítia þér þat sverð, er þú bregðir,
nema siálfom þér syngvi um hofði.</i></p> | <p>May not bite the sword that you brandish
unless it sang on your own head!</p> |
| <p><i>Þá væri þér hefnt Helga dauða,
ef þú værir vargr á viðom úti,
auðs andvani ok allz gamans,
hefðir eigi mat, nema á hræom
spryngir.]’²⁰</i></p> | <p>Helgi’s death would then be avenged,
if you were an exile outside in the wood,
deprived of riches and of all joy,
if you had no food unless you sprang on
carrion!’]</p> |

¹⁹ *Vkv.* 33, 1-6; text and translation from Dronke (1997: 252), corresponding to Neckel / Kuhn (1962: 122).

²⁰ *HH. II* 31-33, text from Neckel / Kuhn (1962: 157). Though the text has been arranged differently, it must be noted that it shares the metre (*fornyrðislag*) with the Eddic lays quoted before.

Sigrún's curse lists three of the four elements mentioned by Völundr: ship, horse, sword. The shield is missing, and some scholars have suggested that a couple of long lines may have been lost, for instance at the beginning of stanza 33, on the ground that this stanza has six lines instead of four like the surrounding ones, so that the first two lines may belong to a different thematic unit.²¹

Almquist has been the first to notice how closely Sigrún follows the tradition of the truce-oaths.²² It may be noted that Dagr's reply: *Ær ertu, systir, oc ervita, / er þú bræðer þínom biðr forscapa; / einn veldr Óðinn qllo bqlvi, / þviat með sifiungom sacrúnar bar,*²³ clearly states that Sigrún's speech is not a direct curse. Magic terminology is carefully avoided: a phrase such as *biðr forscapa* is generic; the word *sok* 'dispute' (in the compound *sacrúnar*) pertains rather to the legal vocabulary, as it is fitting for a truce-oath.

Prose narratives provide very different evidence, undoubtedly because of a change in the religious context; while the Eddic oaths are located in a heathen past, where magic and religion mix, the ones in the sagas and in the legal code called *Grágás* are framed in the context of a mainly if not exclusively Christian society. Meulengracht Sørensen made a sharp distinction between *gríðamál* and *tryggðamál* according to their intention, to whether they arrange provisional or permanent legal settlements respectively;²⁴ this distinction is not evident in form and style, though.

The cursing element within the oath formulas preserved in *Grágás* consists of a ban from society, and God's wrath against the *gríðníðingr* ('truce-breaker'; literally 'truce-infamous'), elements which are common to all attested formulas.²⁵ One of the formulas also contains a long

²¹ Mastrelli (1982: 380, 410).

²² Almquist (1965: 202-203).

²³ 'You are insane, sister, and out of your mind / that to your brother wish misventure; / Woden alone is the cause of all evil, / because he between relatives brought runes of dispute' *HH. II* 34, 1-8; Neckel / Kuhn (1962: 157-158).

²⁴ Sørensen (1993: 95), probably following Finsen's older *Grágás* edition, based on ms. København, Det kongelige bibliotek, Gamle kongelige samling 1157, where the editor distinguished a formula for *gríðamál* (1852: 204-205) and another for *tryggðamál* (1852: 205-207); in the recent edition by Karlsson / Sveinsson / Árnason, such a distinction is blurred: *Tryggðamál og gríðamál* is a heading under which several formulas are listed (1992: 281-284).

²⁵ *Grágás, Víglóði* 121-126, ed. Karlsson / Sveinsson / Árnason (1992: 281-284).

list of all places from where the oath-breaker will be banned,²⁶ which in a way substitutes the catalogue of things on which the curse will have effect in the pagan tradition. A list very similar to this one is found in *Grettissaga*²⁷ and *Heiðarvígasaga*,²⁸ where a different feature also appears, that is lacking in the *Grágás* formulas: both lists end with a similar statement, whose meaning is that the *griðníðingr* must be kept away from every shelter except hell (*nema helvíti*).

These formulas have been taken by Kabell to be variations of the same archetype; the scholar first analyses their marked rhythmic pattern as metrical, so that he defined this formula as “Prunstück der rhythmisch allitterierenden Prosa.”²⁹ The stability of the formula is shown by its reuse in an entirely different context, within an Icelandic wedding speech from the 16th century, where it – somewhat incongruously – defines *griðníðingr* anybody who should attempt to part the happy couple.³⁰

The most evident parallel between *Buslubæn*'s first section and truce-oaths is the list of places where the curse will have effect; stanzas 5 (curse on sailing) and 6 (curse on riding) recall in expanded form *Vkv.* 33, 3 and 33, 5 and *HH. II* 32, 1-4 and 5-8 respectively; stanza 7 could in fact be connected to *Akv.* 30, 7, where a connection to the notion of ‘rest’ is evident, even if its meaning may be disputed (which needs not have concerned the medieval reader), and stanza 3 must be related to *Akv.* 30, 5, as the sun clearly symbolizes the meteorological conditions.

The prose truce-oaths have a different structure, in that they list places from where the *griðníðingr* will be banned, not a proper curse though; these texts, thanks to the doubtless influence of Christianity,

²⁶ *En ef annartveggi þeirra verður svo óður að hann gengur á gerva sætt og vegur á veittar tryggðir, þá skal sá rekinn vera frá Guði og frá allri Guðs kristni, svo víða sem menn varga reka, kristnir menn kirkjur sækja, heiðnir menn hof blóta, móðir mög fæðir, mögur móður kallar, eldar upp brenna, Finnur skríðr, fura vex, valur flýgur vorlangan dag og standi byr undir báða vængi* ‘But if one of them is so insane that he violates the convened truce and treads upon the oaths he has sworn, then he must be chased from God and all God’s Christians, as far as men chase wolves, Christians attend churches, heathens sacrifice in temples, the mother feeds her baby, the baby calls for its mother, fires burn, the Sami glides, the fir-tree grows, the hawk flies on a spring day and wind stands under his wings.’ *Grágás, Víglóði* 126, ed. Karlsson / Sveinsson / Árnason (1992: 283).

²⁷ *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 72; ed. Jónsson (1936: 231-233).

²⁸ *Heiðarvíga saga* 33, ed. Nordal/ Jónsson (1938: 312-313).

²⁹ Kabell (1978: 81-83).

³⁰ Helgason (1960: 163-165).

know only one curse, and it is indeed terrible: the truce-breaker will find no place for himself *nema helvíti*, but Hell.

A *nema*-clause that involves a worsening of conditions (instead of an exception, as is to be expected) is also to be found in *HH. II* 33, 4 and 33, 12 where the conjunction *nema* puts the stress on the misery of Dagr's future condition; in these instances, *nema*-clauses stand at the end of the sentence. In *Buslubæn* the use of the *nema*-clauses in the same position (at the end of stanzas 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 in the first section and of the only stanza of the second) has an entirely different goal: Busla wants to convince Hringr to act according to her will, so that her curse might effectively be stopped by Hringr's actions. Yet, the device is the same. Another rhetoric device is the beginning of a curse with *svá*: it is found in *Akv.* 30, 1 (and, as we will see, in Egill's first *níð*-stanza) and it is paralleled by *Buslubæn* 4, 1.

The weather-curse is known from a different temporal and geographical setting, in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, where a woman curses Hadingus the hero for killing a god:

- Seu pede rura teras, seu ponto carbasa tendas,
infestos patiere deos totumque per orbem
propositis inimica tuis elementa videbis.
Rure rues, quatere mari, dabiturque vaganti*
5 *perpetuus tibi turbo comes, nec deseret umquam
vela rigor nec tecta tegent, quae si petis, icta
tempestate ruent, diro pecus occidet algu.
Omnia praesentis sortem vitiata dolebunt.
Ut scabies fugiere nocens, nec taetrior ulla*
10 *pestis erit. Tantum poenae vis caelica pensat.
Quippe unum e superis alieno corpore tectum
sacrilegae necuere manus: sic numinis almi
interfector ades! Sed cum te exceperit aequor,
carceris Aeolici laxos patiere furores.*
15 *Te Zephyrus Boreasque ruens, te proteret Auster,
et coniuratos certabunt edere flatus,
donec divinum voto meliore rigorem
solveris et meritam tuleris placamine poenam.*³¹

³¹ *Gesta Danorum* 1.8.11, ed. Olrik / Ræder (1931:29). Translation from Fisher (1979: 29-30): 'Whether you tread the fields or set your canvas to the ocean, / to you the gods will be hostile, and throughout the whole earth / you shall find the elements of Nature thwarting all your designs. /

Herrmann had first drawn attention to the features connecting this text with *Buslubæn*, as well as with *Skm.* and *HH. II*;³² Dumézil held that this curse could not be compared with *Buslubæn* because the former only revolves around the sea,³³ and this thesis is quoted with no objection by Ellis Davidson in her recent commentary of *Gesta Danorum*.³⁴ This difference does not imply that the curses cannot be related, even though it can be assumed that two different stanzas from the ancient Scandinavian poetic tradition have been conflated by Saxo into this single Latin verse: while the second stanza (maybe corresponding to ll. 9-18) was entirely about sailing, the first one (ll. 1-8) paralleled land and sea. It is worth mentioning that the sailing motif is concordantly mentioned at first place in *HH. II, Vkv.* and *Buslubæn*, so that the two stanzas could have been easily contiguous in Saxo's model curse. Otherwise it would be impossible to explain why the author felt to put such an emphasis on sailing, even though the curse's effects are equally related to sea-faring and to lack of shelter on land, as stated by its context.³⁵ The curse can thus be regarded as an adaptation from traditional Scandinavian poetry, especially since no Latin analogues have been reported so far. On the other hand, Friis-Jensen, the scholar who has dealt the most with Saxo's verse passages, has pointed out the use of couplets and a general tendency towards parallelism, that he regards as characteristic of Saxo; like alliteration, these are nonetheless also common features in Scandinavian tradition.³⁶

Dashed down on land, tossed at sea, the perpetual companion / of your wandering shall be the whirlwind; an inflexible stiffness will never / desert your sails, if you should seek a roof for your head / it will fall struck by a tempest, and your herd will perish with cold. / Shunned like a noxious itch, no plague will ever have been / more vile than you. Such punishment the powers of heaven dispense. / For you have killed with sacrilegious hands a sky-dweller / wrapped in another body: there you stand, the slayer / of a benign deity. When you take to the waves you will feel / the frenzy of the winds upon you, let loose from their keeper's dungeon; / the West and the rushing North and the South shall sweep to crush you, / conspire together and vie to shoot forth hurricane blasts, / until with more winning prayers you appease divine severity / and, having suffered the earned punishment, offer placation.'

³² Herrmann (1922: 119-121).

³³ Dumézil (1973: 45-46).

³⁴ Ellis Davidson (1980: 34).

³⁵ *Gesta Danorum* 1.8.12, ed. Olrik / Ræder (1931:29): *Siquidem navigante eo oborta nimbi vis ingenti classem tempestate consumpsit. Naufragum hospitia petentem subita penatium strages excepit.*

³⁶ Friis-Jensen (1987: 174-175).

The structure of the Latin text also includes a sentence similar to the *nema*-clauses in *Buslubæn* (and further the *nema*-clauses in *HH. II*) introduced by *donec* (ll. 17-18) with conative function in final position.

The weather-curse and the curse on sea-faring connect this text to both oath formulas and *Buslubæn*, while the ban from other human beings (*ut scabies fugiere nocens*) and the wrath of the gods are not to be found in *Buslubæn*; nonetheless, these motifs recur in other texts, as we will later notice.

3. *Cursing as defamation*

The word *níð* ('infamy') usually refers to a rite or sequence of rites combining insult, defamation and cursing, whose main intent is to harm its victims mostly by accusations of shameful behaviour (*ergi*).³⁷ There is abundant evidence for this in saga literature;³⁸ here the examination of this genre must be restricted to exclusively consider its influence on the composition of *Buslubæn*.

Norwegian and Icelandic laws distinguish between verbal *níð* and 'carved' *níð* referring in particular to the use of the 'infamy pole' (*níðstǫng*) although both are forbidden, and their victims are entitled to react with the utmost violence.³⁹ Although verbal *níð* can be regarded as a kind of curse, it differs considerably from the curses contained in the truce-oaths described above: while the former are stereotyped, the latter springs from the imagination of the poet, whose will to harm can actually influence the real world, as is shown in the episode of the *Jarlsníð* performed by Þorleifr against jarl Hákon Sigurðarson, as narrated in *Þorleifs þátr jarlaskálds*.⁴⁰ This poem is apparently an encomium, but its three sections cause terrible effects on its victim.

Most *níð* poems are explicitly aggressive, though, combining defamation of their victim with a curse. Both 'carved' and verbal *níð* are described in details in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, where the poet Egill

³⁷ Cf. Ström (1974).

³⁸ On the definition of *níð*, see Almquist (1965: 15-16), which is still to be considered the most complete study on this subject.

³⁹ Almquist (1965: 43-44).

⁴⁰ Ed. Kristjánsson (1946: 222-223); see also Almquist (1965: 186-188).

insults king Eiríkr Blóðøx and his queen Gunnhildr, reciting an offensive stanza where he directs the wrath of the gods against the royal couple:

<i>Svá skyldi goð gjalda, gram reki þond af lǫndum, reið sé rogn ok Óðinn, rogn míns féar hǫnum; folmýgi lát flýja, Freyr ok Njǫrðr, af jǫrðum, leiðisk lofða stríði landóss, þanns vé grandar.⁴¹</i>	‘The gods should pay you back thus, may the gods chase you from the lands wrathful be the gods and Woden, against him for the looting of my riches; Let the tyrant of the people flee, Freyr and Njǫrðr, from the earth, be wrath the áss of the land against the enemy, the one that destroys sanctuaries.’
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When Egill learns that he has been banished from Eiríkr’s kingdom, he utters a second stanza, where he threatens the royal couple with revenge:

<i>Logbrigðir hefr lagða, landalfr,⁴² fyr mér sjǫlfum, blekkir bræðra sökva brúðfang, vega langa; Gunnhildi ák gjalda, greyp’t s hennar skap, þenna, ungr gatk ok læ launat, landrekstr, bili grandat.⁴³</i>	‘The outlaw has prepared, alf of the land, for myself – the bride has in her power the brother-slayer – long ways; I must pay back Gunnhildr: cruel is her nature, this, as a young man I avenged the offence quickest in the land, I destroyed with the sword’.
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These skaldic lines are much more complex than the Eddic ones quoted above; nevertheless, there are some significant analogies, particularly in the first stanza, with *Skm.*, as will be shown below.

Egill keeps on killing and looting throughout Eiríkr’s kingdom; moreover, he reinforces his threat by raising an infamy pole. The saga describes this ritual in detail:

Hann tók í hǫnd sér heslistǫng ok gekk á bergsnǫs nokkura, þá er vissi til lands inn; þá tók hann hrosshǫfuð ok setti upp á stǫngina. Síðan veitti hann formála ok mælti svá: ‘Hér set ek upp níðstǫng, ok sný ek þessu

⁴¹ *Egils saga* 56, ed. Nordal (1933: 163).

⁴² Jónsson (1912: 47) would correct it in *lindalfrs*, intended as a *kenning* for ‘warrior’: this correction would cancel a crucial parallel between the two stanzas, the call for supernatural pagan entities, which my opinion has relevance in the history of the genre, and it seems hardly required by context.

níði á hǫnd Eiríki konungi ok Gunnhildi dróttningu, – hann sneri hrosshǫfðinu inn á land – ‘sný ek þessu níði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byggva, svá at allar fari þær villar vega, engi hendi né hitti sitt inni, fyrr en þær reka Eirík konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi’. Síðan skýtr hann stǫnginni niðr í bjargrifu ok lét þar standa; hann sneri ok hǫfðinu inn á land, en hann reist rúnar á stǫnginni, ok segja þær formála þenna allan.⁴⁴

‘He took a hazelnut pole and climbed on a rock protruding towards the mainland. Then he took a horse’s head and stuck it on the pole. Then he uttered this formula and said: “Here I raise a pole of infamy, I turn this infamy against king Eiríkr and queen Gunnhildr – he then turned the horse’s head towards the mainland – I turn this infamy against the spirits of the land, that inhabit this land, so that they all loose their way, do not reach nor find rest until they have driven king Eiríkr and queen Gunnhild from this land”. Then he put the pole in a cliff of the rock and let it stand. He turned the head towards the mainland and carved runes on the pole, and they say this whole formula.’

Even though it is necessary to have caution in interpreting the evidence provided by this episode,⁴⁵ it can still be used as a source of information. The horse in *níð* literature must be interpreted as a symbol of supposed unmanly activities. The accusation of homosexuality is highly dishonourable in Norse medieval culture: a man is even entitled to kill to avenge such an offense as being called *sorðinn*, *stroðinn* or *argr*, words which refer to a male that has engaged in sodomy.⁴⁶ As the stallion is the symbol of male sexual power, the mare becomes the symbol of passive sexuality;⁴⁷ passive sexuality is then equated with lack of manliness, and this explains the use of the word *merr* as an insult, like in *Vatnsdæla saga*, where Jökull calls for Bergr to engage in a duel ‘if you have a man’s spirit and not a mare’s’;⁴⁸ in Snorri’s *Edda*, there is a reference to a mare’s heart concerning the enormous golem Mǫkkurkál-

⁴³ *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 57, ed. Nordal (1933: 165).

⁴⁴ *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 57, ed. Nordal (1933: 171).

⁴⁵ Simek warns the reader of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, that this episode might be “eher gelehrte Konstruktion als ein Beleg für praktische Magie” (2003: 220).

⁴⁶ For references in laws and in fiction see Ström (1974) and Gade (1986: 132-133).

⁴⁷ On the cult of the stallion’s sexual power see for instance the grotesque *Vǫlsa þátrr*, ed. Vigfússon (1860: 133-138) where a horse’s phallus is used as an amulet.

⁴⁸ ‘[...] ef þú hefir heldr manns hug en merar’ *Vatnsdæla saga* 33, ed. Sveinsson (1939: 88).

fi, that was due to help the giant Hrungr against Þórr the giant-slayer: but of course a mare's heart is too timid and the golem shamefully displays its fear as soon as the god appears.⁴⁹

Regarding the parallels between *Buslubæn* and verbal *níð*, first it must be noted that *Buslubæn* is divided into three sections in order of effectiveness, like the *Jarlsníð*; two further elements must be mentioned: firstly, the invitation to the *vættir* to lose their path also to be found in another curse from roughly the same time, *Allra flagða þula* in *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs*,⁵⁰ considered by Almquist as a typical feature of *níð*;⁵¹ secondly, the obscene element in the phrase *hestar streði þik* seems more appropriate to an insult than to a curse, but it would have serious social consequences, implying that Hringr could face being called a *stroðinn* and a mare and this would cause him to lose his social status, like the wish that Hringr become impotent, which is actually closer to Skírnir's curse than to *níð*.

Finally, in *Buslubæn* different kinds of supernatural creatures (among them the *hrímþursar*) are conjured up against Hringr, like the heathen gods in Egill's *níð* stanzas: the conjuration of supernatural powers occurs in the Latin curse mentioned by Saxo (*infestos patiere deos*) and also in *Skm.*, as we will notice.

4. *Cursing as love-magic*

Unlike the former two curse-types, the text which we shall be considering now is a purely literary product, with no demonstrable correspondence with usage in real life: the episode of Skírnir's wooing of Gerðr on account of Freyr, in the Eddic lay called *Skm.* (or, following the manuscript heading, *Fqr Skírnis*), where the servant has to threaten the giantess with a powerful curse before she agrees to marry the god, thus entering the clan of her enemies. The occurrence of a curse as a magical means of winning the love of a maiden must not surprise us; in European medieval tradition, love magic is mostly regarded as black

⁴⁹ *Snorra Edda, Skáldskaparmál* 17, ed. Faulkes (1998: 20-22).

⁵⁰ *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* 27, ed. Loth (1964: 66-68); a parallel between *níð* and *Buslubæn* in this respect had already been traced along these same lines by Ström (1952: 25-27).

⁵¹ Almquist (1965: 92-95).

magic, since its purpose is to influence a person's free will.⁵² In a similar way, love charms are part of the Odinic knowledge in Norse heathen culture, as shown in the so-called *Ljóðatal* section of *Hávamál*.⁵³

The dialogue between Skírnir and the giant-maiden can be divided into three phases (Klingenberg describes it as "ein taktischer Dreischritt"): ⁵⁴ first, the servant offers gifts, then he threatens the maiden with his sword, and finally he resolves to curse her, until she finally consents to marry Freyr. The curse is to be found in stanzas 26-36; this sequence of stanzas has also been divided into three sections by Dronke, that follows Neckel-Kuhn's edition but for minor details: at first (stanzas 26-28) Skírnir threatens Gerðr that she will be subject to his will thanks to his 'taming stick' and is going to be confined in Hel or its whereabouts; moreover, she will become monstrous to look at and shunned by all.⁵⁵ In the second section (stanzas 29-31) he doubles his efforts and describes the tortures she will have to endure in the kingdom of giants (depicted as at least contiguous with Hel, but probably as a part of it) where she will be at the mercy of a hideous giants. Lastly (stanzas 32-36), Skírnir proceeds to act with his magic twig,⁵⁶ by conjuring the gods' wrath, adding further description of the tortures and humiliations she will have to endure at the hands of her giant master,⁵⁷ finally carving hostile runes (whose names are revealing indeed: *Purs ríst ek þér / ok þriá stafī, / ergi ok æði / ok óþola*),⁵⁸ even though he careful-

⁵² Flint draws a sharp distinction between heathen love magic, generically frowned upon to some extent (1991: 231-239) and other kinds of what she regards as "Christian love magic", that enjoyed a higher degree of acceptance (1991: 290-301).

⁵³ On Skírnir's Odinic role, see Klingenberg (1996: 49).

⁵⁴ Klingenberg (1996: 26).

⁵⁵ In von See (1997: 113-114) *Skm.* 28, 5-7 is interpreted as a reference to Heimdallr; the verb *gapa* in line 7 is thus difficult to explain; Dronke's explanation, that Gerðr will look like a monstrous figure-head (such as those found on ships), clearly fits better into this context (1997: 409). It is also possible, in my opinion, to compare Gerðr's attitude with the infernal watchdog Garmr: about this creature see Simek (1993: 100, s.v. *Garmr*).

⁵⁶ Further considerations and references concerning the word *gambanteinn* are to be found in von See (1997: 128).

⁵⁷ Interestingly enough, Skírnir does seem to make a distinction between *jotnar* and *hrímþursar*, but this distinction is hardly clear, as in most sources – on the problem of giant races, see Motz (1987).

⁵⁸ "Ogre" I carve for you / and three characters: / "Lust" and "Burning" / and "Unbearable Need" *Skm.* 36, 1-4, edited and translated by Dronke (1997: 384). It is uncertain whether *Purs* is to be considered as a rune repeated three times (one for *ergi*, the second for *æði*, the third for *óþoli*) or as a rune itself followed by three other distinct runes; on the question cf. See (1997: 135-136),

ly adds that they may still be erased. Then Gerðr abruptly changes her behaviour and welcomes her guest with a formal greeting, offering mead in a costly goblet.⁵⁹

In von See's commentary, the occurrence of a large number of rare words and *hapax legomena* is registered, leading to this conclusion: "hier kommt eine sonst nicht in die literarische Überlieferung gedrungene Schicht des a[lt]nord[ischen] Wortschatzes zum Vorschein";⁶⁰ this original character would be consistent with the occurrence of *galdralag* and *fornyrðislag* in a lay otherwise almost entirely in *ljóðahátttr*.⁶¹

Lieberman seems to reach an entirely different conclusion: "*Skírnismál* is an unnatural (and rather inept) blend of both plots: winning a heroic maiden and taming the shrew, a blend that could appeal only to people with 'decadent' tastes",⁶² and the late date is agreed upon by most scholars who have studied this lay in recent years.⁶³ This, anyway, need not be in conflict with von See's conclusion on the traditional character of this curse: it may well have been composed re-using heathen elements that the author must have known (or at least presumed to know) much better than we do.

Thus, two elements connect *Skm.* to *Buslubœn*. The first is the threat of an unhappy sexual life, as in stanzas 34-35, where the giantess is threatened with lack of sexual pleasure but within the giant community, thus stressing the role of giants, and especially frost-giants, in love-magic against women: and the fundamental role of giants in this curse is summarized by Skírnir's carving of a *Purs*-rune. Literary sources depict giants as permanently attracted to gods and human beings as sexual partners (especially male giants to female goddesses), but they are usually met with revulsion and refusal:⁶⁴ a curse suggesting such a

where a parallel with a magic formula on a runic stick from the excavations in Bergen can be easily drawn: the curse revolves essentially around the loss of modesty and rationality; for further discussion and references see Lozzi Gallo (2001: 147-148).

⁵⁹ *Skm.* 37, 1-3, ed. Dronke (1997: 384).

⁶⁰ Cf. von See (1997: 59).

⁶¹ Cf. von See (1997: 58).

⁶² Lieberman (1996: 117).

⁶³ Cf. Bibire (1986: 21); Klingenberg (1996: 42); von See seems himself to favour a dating "in nachheidnischer Zeit, vielleicht erst im 12. / 13. Jh." (1997: 64-65). For a different view cf. Dronke (1997: 400-402).

⁶⁴ See especially Clunies Ross (1994: 95, 107-127) and Motz (1996: 76-77).

union would thus be extremely fearful for the female victim, even if she is of giant stock herself.⁶⁵

The second element of connection with *Buslubæn* is the conjuration of the wrath of supernatural creatures against Gerðr. In this Eddic lay the god who will hate Gerðr is, understandably, Freyr himself, but she will incur the wrath of the other deities as well (stanza 33); the motif of supernatural wrath recurs in Egill's invocation and in the curse mentioned in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* as well as in Busla's threat, where it is referred to giants instead of gods.

5. Cursing as physical attack

Lastly, we shall analyse another account of cursing, found in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, that is currently dated to the 14th century, even though stories about Grettir were in oral circulation before.⁶⁶ Grettir's enemy, Þorbjörn ǫngull, asks his fostress Þuríðr to help him to prevail over Grettir. Þuríðr had been instructed in pagan magic in her youth, and was considered an evil person. She begins by cursing Grettir in front of him, thus conjuring ill luck upon the hero:

*Nú mæli ek þat um við þik, Grettir, at þú sér heillum horfínn, allri gipti ok gæfu ok allri vörn ok vizku, æ því meir, sem þú lifir lengr. Vænti ek, at þú eigir hér fá gleðidaga heðan frá en hingast til.*⁶⁷

'Now I utter this against you, Grettir: may you be abandoned by fortune, by all good gifts, by all resources and from your senses, always more and more, as long as you live. I believe that you will have less glad days from now on, than you have had until now.'

Grettir reacts by railing at Þuríðr, calling her a *gørningavættir* 'witch' and finally throwing a large stone at her which breaks her thigh bone. She later takes her revenge by carving a rune-inscription on a tree root, which she reddens with her own blood while reciting a *galdr* 'charm' and per-

⁶⁵ For further discussion and reference, see Lozzi Gallo (2001: 144-146).

⁶⁶ Kristjánsson (1997: 234).

⁶⁷ *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 78, ed. Jónsson (1936: 247-248).

forming other rituals and *ummæli* ('cursing').⁶⁸ While the simple utterance of the curse seems to have had little effect on Grettir, the carved root will cause the hero to injure himself while trying to hack it off, leaving a wound that will never heal and will ultimately cause his death.

This episode shows the violent reaction of the male opponent to a female magic-user; after the first section, Hringr attempts to react in a similar way, as he calls Busla *vánd vættr* and threatens to let her be mistreated by his servants. This conduct is prevented through Busla's powers, as she magically succeeds in blocking Hringr and imposing a magic torpor on his servants, much like a *mara* (a malignant being who may also be a witch or shape-shifter and who 'rides' people in their sleep).⁶⁹ The text bears no resemblance to the ones examined until now for its simplicity. What is most noticeable, though, is the final carving of the runes: as in *Skm.* and in Egill's *níð*, it marks the climax and the conclusion of the ritual.

6. *Conclusions: Buslubœn in context*

Taken as a whole, *Buslubœn* may be interpreted as a sort of *pot-pourri* of ancient curse formulas derived from such diverse sources as truce-oaths, verbal *níð* and some accounts of hostile magic in the sagas. It shares with them both stylistic and thematic features, but integrated into a new system, together with elements that are only pertinent to its context, and others that have been adapted to fit therein; the complete stanzas 1, 2, 4 and 9 have no close parallel within Norse literature: even though this can be easily understood in case of the first two stanzas, that are entirely functional to the context, stanzas 4 and 9 might show evidence of traditional features, but the great variety of curses does not encourage to support this theory.

McKinnell has recently enclosed the episode of Busla's cursing in a series of similar stories where a *völva* is facing an "unjust patriarch", found in such different sources as *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Saxo's *Gesta*

⁶⁸ *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 79, ed. Jónsson (1936: 249-250).

⁶⁹ For a fuller exposition of the characteristics of the *mara* and its similarities with *incubus* see Raudvere (1993: 71-93).

Danorum and Snorri's *Ynglinga saga*, in the story of Vanlandi's killing by a saami witch already alluded to by Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni in his *Ynglingatal*; the scholar concludes: "they [*scilicet* "these different episodes"] probably reflect traditional (and perhaps related) story patterns".⁷⁰ If Busla's cursing must be regarded as a story pattern, *Buslubæn* can hardly have been part of it from the beginning in its actual form: in fact, most episodes paralleled by McKinnell mention hostile magic, but there is no evidence of similar verbal curses.

Maybe the most striking feature taken from the Christian tradition of truce-oaths is a phrase in *Syrpuvers*: *sál þín / sökki víti* 'may your soul / sink into damnation'. This is definitely out of place in a heathen curse, since both *sál* and *víti* are Christian words⁷¹ (the latter usually found in the compound *helvíti* 'hell');⁷² although here *víti* could be assumed to be synonymous with the pagan *Hel*, its use in this context must have been inspired by oath formulas such as those found in *Grettis saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*, where the oath-breaker is condemned to hell.

The absence of any conjuration of heathen gods may also be ascribed to the influence of Christian tradition, as found in the Latin curse, in Egill's *níð* and in *Skm.*, though the character of Busla is presented as heathen. Such conjuration is not found in the first *ummæli* by Þuríðr, that takes place in a Christian context; but it is also far too short to draw significant parallels. Busla conjures the wrath of the giants against Hringr, instead of that of the gods; in my opinion, this could be regarded as a synthesis of two motifs, that of divine wrath and that of the malignant (and originally libidinous) giant.

A very important element connecting *Buslubæn* to Egill's *níð*, to Þuríðr's cursing ritual and to Skírnir's curse is the carving of the runes as the climax of the ritual, after the third section (the only one to have a name: *Syrpuvers*, i.e. 'The witch's verse') has been uttered.⁷³ Busla's

⁷⁰ McKinnell (2003: 128; see also 118-122; 126-127).

⁷¹ On *sál*, see Haugen (1976: 218); cf. also Blöndal Magnússon (1989: 319, 793) s. vv. *helvíti*, *sál*.

⁷² Here *víti* probably stands for *helvíti* because the word *hel* occurred two lines above.

⁷³ The word *syrpa* is one of many *heiti*'s for 'woman'. Cleasby / Vigfússon interprets it negatively as 'dirty woman' (1957: 614, s.v. *syrpa*); in a younger version of *Snorra Edda*, the so called *Edda Laufassina*, edited by Faulkes (1979: 291) *syrpa* is mentioned in a list of words for 'giantess, (bad) woman'. According to de Vries, the word is etymologically connected with Old Norse *sorp* 'rubbish, waste' (1977: 574, s.v. *syrpa*).

curse will only have effect if a condition is fulfilled, if Hringr solves the riddle or if he gives in, as he eventually will do. The riddle introduces an interesting Odinic feature in this charm, which is not at all unsuited to the aim (Óðinn's connections with magic are well-known).⁷⁴

The runic sequence at the end of *Syrpuvers* is well known from archaeological discoveries: the solution currently accepted reads **roþkmu iiiiii ssssss tttttt iiiiii llllll**, to be read *ristill*, *øystill*, *þistill*, *kistill*, *mistill*, *vistill*⁷⁵. Similar sequences have been found in a number of runic inscriptions, although their interpretation is controversial: while *mistill* ('mistiltoe') is a plant of relevance within Old Norse mythology, playing a major role in the killing of the god Baldr⁷⁶, and *þistill* ('thistle') is mentioned in Skírnir's curse,⁷⁷ the other words pose greater difficulties, and Thompson advises against any attempt to interpret them.⁷⁸

This gibberish procedure is easily grouped together with the formulas that Ohrt called *lønord* (known as *Ephesian letters* in classical terminology);⁷⁹ these place strong emphasis on the value of numbers: it is worth noting in this context that six could be regarded as a negative number in Christian tradition, because of its supposed connection with the Antichrist.⁸⁰

The parallels I have been considering have in part been noted before,⁸¹ but a careful study has allowed us to discern that the similarities are less profound than we might have expected: *Buslubæn* does not appear to be genuinely heathen magic, though it certainly includes some features of the magic texts we know from literary tradition and therefore would have been familiar to the author and his audience.

Buslubæn, much like *Skm.*, must rather be regarded as a fictional

⁷⁴ McKinnell has treated of the Odinic character of the wisdom or riddle contest (1994: especially 95-98); here it is no question of a contest, but there are two opponents facing and the riddle is used as the 'final weapon' to victory. For a thorough survey of Óðinn's roles see Simek (1993: 240-246).

⁷⁵ First proposed in Thompson (1978).

⁷⁶ See Simek (1993: 30, s.v. *Baldr's death*).

⁷⁷ On this subject, see Harris (1975).

⁷⁸ Thompson (1978: 54).

⁷⁹ Ohrt (1922: 12); for some Norse instances, see Moltke (1985: 104, 487, 496).

⁸⁰ For an analysis of the symbol of the Antichrist in *Revelation* 13: 18, see Renoir (1913).

⁸¹ The most recent instance being in a paper presented by Rose (2003) at the Saga Conference in Bonn, which was mainly devoted to the study of the combined function of speech and action in the *tryggðamál* and in *Skm.*

curse, made up with different elements of magic literature, heavily re-worked in style, so that very few lexical or stylistic features recall heathen magic, and depurated from potentially dangerous features such as the conjuration of the heathen gods; yet, it is to be considered invaluable evidence in the study of Old Norse heathenism.

It must be clear that no magic text could be quoted by someone who entirely believed in its power, since the mere act of pronouncing or writing those magic words might unleash their effects; we have noted that even the author of *Bósa saga*, in creating this fictional curse, exercises a certain amount of caution, in catering to his audience's (and his own) 'decadent' taste, much like the one Liberman attributed to the (earlier) audience of *Skírnismál*, together with an antiquarian interest in the heathen past that has given origin to the *fornaldarsögur* as a genre.

*Appendix: the episode of the cursing in Bósa saga*⁸²

<i>Þetta kveld hið sama kom Busla í það herbergi, sem Hringur konungur svaf í og hóf upp bæn þá er síðan er kölluð Buslubæn og hefir hún víðfræg orðið síðan og eru þar í mörg orð og ill, þau sem kristnum mönnum er þarfleysa í munni að hafa, en þó er þetta upphaf á henni:</i>	That same evening, Busla came to the room where king Hringur was sleeping and began the prayer that has since been called <i>Buslubæn</i> , and has become famous; there are many ill words in it, that for Christians are improper to recite; nevertheless, this is the beginning:
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<i>‘Hér liggur Hringur konungur hilmir Gauta, einráðastur allra manna. Ætlar þú⁸³ son þinn</i>	‘Here lies king Hringur, prince of the Geats, the most stubborn of all men. Do you plan to murder
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⁸² The text follows Tómasson (1996: 12-15), based on Jiriczek (1893), but variant readings by Finnur Jónsson (1915: 350-353) have been marked, unless the difference is merely one of spelling. I chose to match the text with a more literal translation than the one proposed by Pálsson / Edwards (1985: 205-208), whose main purpose is apparently to present the readers with an attractive text.

⁸³ Omitted by Jónsson (1915: 350).

*sjálfur að myrða?
Þau munu fádæmi
fréttast víða.*

your own son yourself?
This incredible mischief
will be widely known.

*Heyr þú⁸⁴ bæn Buslu,
brátt mun hún⁸⁵ sungin
svo að heyrast skal
um heim allan,
og⁸⁶ óþörf öllum
þeim sem⁸⁷ á heyra
en þeim⁸⁸ þó fjandlegust
sem eg vil fortala.⁸⁹*

Hear Busla's Prayer,
quickly will it be sung,
so that it will be heard
all over the world,
and unpleasant to all
those that listen,
but most hostile to the one,
that I want to persuade.

*Villist vættir,
verði ódæmi,
hristist hamrar,
heimur sturlist,
versni veðrátta,
verði ódæmi,⁹⁰
nema þú⁹¹ Hringur konungur
Herrauðfriðir
ok honum Bósa⁹²
þjargir veitir.*

May the *vættir* go astray,
may a prodigy happen
may the hammers shake
may the world quake
may the weather worsen
may a prodigy happen
unless you, Hringur
protect Herrauður
and on Bósi
bestow your help.

*Svo skal eg þjarma
þér að brjósti,
að hjarta þitt
höggormar⁹³ gnagi,
en eyru þín
aldregi heyri
og augu þín
úthverf snúist*

Thus I shall hit
you in your breast,
that vipers may
gnaw you heart,
and your ears
never hear
and your eyes
turn to the inside,

⁸⁴ Omitted by Jónsson (1915: 350).

⁸⁵ Omitted by Jónsson (1915: 350).

⁸⁶ Omitted by Jónsson (1915: 351).

⁸⁷ Jónsson instead of *þeim sem* has *þeim* (1915: 351).

⁸⁸ Omitted by Jónsson (1915: 351).

⁸⁹ This line in Jónsson reads *þeim vilk fyrir telia* (1915: 351).

⁹⁰ Jónsson: *órói* (1915: 351).

⁹¹ Omitted by Finnur Jónsson (1915: 351).

⁹² Jónsson instead of *honum Bósa* has *Bögu-Bósa* (1915: 351).

⁹³ Jónsson: *höggormr* (1915: 351).

*nema þú Bósa*⁹⁴
*björg*⁹⁵ *um veitir*
*ok honum*⁹⁶ *Herrauð*
heift upp gefir.

unless you on Bósi
bestow your help
and to Herrauð
offer revenge.

Ef þú siglir,
slitni reiði
*en af stýri*⁹⁷
stökkvi krókar,
rifni reftar,
*reki*⁹⁸ *segl ofan*
en aktaumar
allir slitni,
*nema þú*⁹⁹ *Herrauð*
heift upp gefir
*og svo Bósa*¹⁰⁰
biðir til sátta.

If you sail,
may the equipment break
and from the rudder
may the crooks break
may the sheets tear,
may the top sail untie
and the braces
all break,
unless you to Herrauður
offer revenge
and thus to Bósi
propose an agreement.

*Ef þú ríður,*¹⁰¹
raskist taumar,
heltist hestar
en hrumist klárar
en götur allar
og gagnstígar
*troðist allar*¹⁰²
*í tröllhendur*¹⁰³ *fyrir þér,*
*nema þú Bósa*¹⁰⁴
bjargir veitir
og Herrauð
heift upp gefir.

If you ride a horse,
may the reins break,
may the saddle horses become lame
and the carthorses become ill,
and all roads
and short cuts as well
may be followed
to your ruin,
unless you on Bósi
bestow help
and to Herrauður
offer revenge.

⁹⁴ Jónsson instead of *þú Bósa* has *Bogu-Bósa* (1915: 351).

⁹⁵ Jónsson: *bjargir* (1915: 351).

⁹⁶ Omitted by Jónsson (1915: 351).

⁹⁷ Jónsson: *styrir* (1915: 351).

⁹⁸ Jónsson: *rekisk* (1915: 351).

⁹⁹ Omitted by Jónsson (1915: 351).

¹⁰⁰ Jónsson instead of *svo Bósa* has *Bogu-Bósa* (1915: 351).

¹⁰¹ Jónsson: *ríðir* (1915: 352).

¹⁰² Jónsson: *tvéfaldr* (1915: 352).

¹⁰³ On such expressions as *að senda í tröllhendur* see Fritzner (1973: 722, s.v. *troll*).

¹⁰⁴ Jónsson instead of *þú Bósa* has *Bogu-Bósa* (1915: 352).

*Sé þér í hvílu
sem í hálmeldi
en í hásaeti,
sem á hafbáru.
Þó skal þér seinna
sýnu verra
en ef þú¹⁰⁵ vilt við meyjjar
manns gaman hafa,
villist þú þá vegarins.¹⁰⁶
Eða viltu þulu lengri?’*

*Þá svarar konungur: ‘Þegi þú,
vond vættur, og vert í burtu elle-
gar mun eg láta meiða þig fyrir
forbænir þínar’. ‘Svo höfum við
nú fundist’ segir Busla ‘að við
munum eigi skilja fyrr en eg hefi
minn vilja.’*

*Konungur vildi þá upp standa og
var hann þá fastur við sængina,
en smásveinar vöknudu eigi.*

*Busla lét þá frammi annan
þriðjung bænarinnar, og mun eg
láta það um líða að skrifa hann
því það er öllum þarfleysa að
hafa hann eftir en þó má svo síst
eftir hafa hann að hann sé eigi
skrifaður, en þó er þetta þar up-
phaf á:*

*‘Tröll og álfar
og töfurnornir,
búar, bergrisar
brenni þínar hallir,
hati þig hrímþussar
hestar streði¹⁰⁷ þig,
stráin stangi þig
en¹⁰⁸ stormar æri þig*

May it be in your rest
as in a fire of dry twigs
and on the high-seat
as on a sea-wave.
Though it will later
become clearly worse
and if you want with maidens
have a male’s pleasure,
may you than loose your path.
Do you still want a longer list?’

The king then said: ‘Be silent, you wicked witch and go away, or I will have you mistreated for your curses.’ Busla replied: ‘We have now met and we must not part, until I get what I desire.’

The king wanted to rise up, but he was stuck fast to his bed and his servants did not wake.

Busla then uttered the second section of the Prayer, and I will omit to write it down, because it is for all improper to repeat it, though I can repeat a part so little that it will be not written; anyway, this was the beginning:

‘May trolls and elves
and magic norns,
spirits, mountain-giants
burn your palace,
may frost-giants hate you,
may horses rape you,
may the straw prick you,
and storms pursue you closely,

¹⁰⁵ Jónsson instead of *en ef þú* has *ef* (1915: 352).

¹⁰⁶ Jónsson: *vegar* (1915: 352).

¹⁰⁷ Jónsson: *troði* (1915: 352).

¹⁰⁸ Omitted by Jónsson (1915: 352).

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