

*Constructions of
Monstrosity in the
Eddukvæði*

An Analysis of the Construction and Function of Monstrosity in Selected Eddic

Poetry



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning	Pages
Lks.	Lokasenna	18, 19, 22-24, 26, 27, 40, 54, 61, 72, 73
Þkv.	Þrymskviða	23-26, 38, 69, 72, 73, 74
Vsp.	Vǫluspá	28, 29, 31-40, 69, 72
Vsk.	Vǫluspá hin skamma	8, 39-41, 46, 69, 72
Hlj.	Hyndluljóð	39, 40
Skm.	Skírnismál	28, 47, 48, 50-52, 71, 72
Hym.	Hymiskviða	42-45, 69, 71
Hkh.	Helgakviða Hundingsbana I	54-58, 61, 72, 73
Hks.	Helgakviða Hiǫrvarðssonar	54, 58-61, 71-73
Rgm.	Reginismál	63-64, 68
Fnm.	Fáfnismál	64-68
Sdm.	Sigrdrífumál	67-69

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I. INTRODUCTION

Monsters are one of the most reliably present archetypes of characters in many genres of literature, be it minotaurs thousands of years ago in classical antiquity or modern stories of zombies and vampires. While the appearance of any monster in a period of literary history is practically certain, the characteristics associated with monstrosity are certainly not stable. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen points out in his book “Monster Theory : Reading culture,” monstrosity is a literary construct that exists in the liminal space between the fully inhuman and ordered human society.¹ It seems to serve as a vehicle for discourse on what is and is not human and normative; it is the ‘Other,’ the primordial deviant. This has included different categories of beings throughout times and cultures, be it cultural dissimilarity, ‘abnormal’ sexuality or ‘deformed’ bodies. Monsters threaten the human societal through their refusal to be properly classified, and thus become enemies. Cohen assumes a need for a ‘hybrid body’,² which inherently is not fully human, but this does not seem to be accurate when looking at portrayals of monstrosity in a medieval Norse context, as Rebecca Merkelbach points out.³ The majority of monstrosity presented in the *Íslendingasögur* is described as a ‘social’ monstrosity, meaning a monstrosity assigned to a character by society, not an inherent quality – contrast the ‘monstrosity’ presented in many racist tropes.⁴ Much of the modern research on Old Norse texts in this tradition has focused on analysing specifically prose texts,⁵ while both skaldic and eddic poetry

¹ Cf. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory : Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6-7, 16-20.

² Cf. *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³ Rebecca Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society : Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland* (Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

⁴ Cf. Peter Holtz and Wolfgang Wagner, "Essentialism and Attribution of Monstrosity in Racist Discourse : Right-wing Internet Postings about Africans and Jews," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 19 (2009); Sweta Rajan-Rankin, "Beyond Scientific Racism : Monstrous Ontologies and Hostile Environments," in *Monstrous ontologies : politics ethics materiality*, ed. Caterina Nirta and Andrea Pavoni (2021).

⁵ Cf. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature : Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 59-78; Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society : Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland*; Rebecca Merkelbach and Gwendolyne Knight, eds., *Margins, Monsters, Deviants : Alterities in Old Norse Literature and Culture*, The North Atlantic World : Land and Sea as Cultural Space, AD 400-1900 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020).

have largely remained passing remarks.⁶ While individual types of monsters in eddic poetry have been the subject of much research,⁷ there is a lack of research seeking to apply Cohen's theory broadly to these texts.

This thesis aims to deconstruct – text by text – the way the creators of the poems we today summarize under the term 'eddic poetry' use monstrosity and what the function of these monsters seems to be from a narrative perspective. I am following theoretical and practical approaches laid out by Cohen, Merkelbach, Bödl, Turner and others as elaborated in chapter II, with a focus of answering the following questions for each text:

1. What is a monster?
2. How are they differentiated from the normative 'human'(-like) characters?
3. What is the narrative function of the monsters within the text?

For this, I will analyse several texts from corpus selected by me with respect to their general prominence regarding research, their length and whether the analysis thereof offers new perspectives instead of restating previous points. This selection is necessary due to the spatial constraints of this format.

In a final step, I will compare the different analyses to assess whether a common thread of characterisation of monstrosity can be found while focusing on the following questions:

4. Do the analysed texts offer similar or equal understandings of monstrosity?
 - a. If so, are they used in similar narrative functions or do they differ?

⁶ One exception to this is Werner Schäfke, who analyses bodily monstrosity in his 2016 article. Werner Schäfke, "Auf den Leib geschriebene Rollen und eingefleischte Eigenschaften : Körpersymbolik und soziale Rollensysteme in altnordischer Dichtung und Prosa," *Mediaevistik* 29 (2016).

⁷ For example, Loki and the 'giants' more broadly have been discussed at length. Cf. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, "Gods and Giants in Old Norse Mythology," *Temenos* 26 (1990); Katja Schulz, *Riesen : von Wissensbütern und Wildnisbewohnern in Edda und Saga*, ed. Klaus von See and Julia Zernack, *Skandinavistische Arbeiten*, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2004). Folke Ström and Jens Peter Schjødt, *Loki - Ein mythologisches Problem*, ed. Soenke Schenk, *Forschungen zum Heidentum*, (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz Verlag, 2018); Anna Birgitta Rooth, *Loki in Scandinavian mythology*, *Acta Regiae Societatis humaniorum litterarum Lundensis*, (Lund: Gleerup, 1961).

5. Are similar characteristics used in the construction of monstrosity?

With this, I aim to offer a systematized overview over the kinds of monstrosity invoked in these Eddic poems, and how they function from a narrative point of view, as has been done for other genres in the Old Norse corpus.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Firstly, a few words on source selection for this thesis: eddic poetry, as used in research today, can refer to a large selection of texts which are preserved in several different forms. It is distinct from other forms of Old Norse literature, like the other primary genre of poetry, skaldic poetry, and prose. The distinction between it and other Old Norse poetry lies mainly in metre, intent, and content, with eddic poetry largely focusing on mythological and heroic narratives.⁸ The primary source of these texts is the so-called ‘Poetic Edda’, which is a compilation of eddic poems written circa 1275,⁹ mainly preserved in the so-called *Codex Regius* manuscript (GKS 2365 4^{to}). There are several eddic poems which are found in other medieval sources, like the 14th century *Hauksbók* (AM 544 4^{to}) and *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.), or in later early modern sources.¹⁰ Since this thesis cannot go into full detail for every poem classified under eddic poetry, I will be limiting myself mainly to the texts found within *Codex Regius*, with the exception of the so-called *Völuspá hin skamma*, which is contained in within *Hyndluljóð*, which is found in *Flateyjarbók*. *Vsk.* has a strong thematic connection to the *Völuspá*, which is preserved in *Codex Regius*. Furthermore, I will be limiting myself to texts that contain monstrosity with a strong enough prominence that allows me to either offer comparative analysis or avoid merely restating previous points. As such, this analysis is not a comprehensive overview of all uses of monstrosity within eddic poetry. Instead, I have selected texts that exemplify different constructions of monsters and different functions of monstrosity within this corpus.

The main editions used for this analysis will be those contained in the highly detailed *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, for which the late Klaus von See laid the groundwork in the end of the

⁸ Cf. Kurt Schier, “Edda, Ältere,” in *Germanische Altertumskunde Online : Kulturgeschichte bis ins Frühmittelalter - Archäologie, Geschichte, Philologie*, ed. Sebastian Brather, Wilhelm Heizmann, and Steffan Patzold (Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2011-2022); Peter Hallberg, “Eddic Poetry,” in *Medieval Scandinavia : an encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano et al. (New York & London: Garland, 1993).

⁹ Cf. Bernt Ø. Thorvaldsen, “The dating of eddic poetry,” in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry : Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 72.

¹⁰ Cf. Schier, “Edda, Ältere.”

1990's.¹¹ In addition, I will be providing translations from Carolyne Larrington's recently published translation, which I will supplement with my own translations where necessary.¹² Note that Larrington tries to keep some of degree of poetic metre active in her translation and thus is not word-for-word accurate in all places – the inclusion of her translation is mainly meant to improve readability of this thesis.

One of the most prominent and influential works on monster theory is Cohen's "Monster Theory : Reading Culture", specifically his essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)".¹³ His focus lies on delineating the monstrous and why humans tend to create monsters: The monstrous, according to Cohen, is the 'Other', a cultural construct to deal with that which is forbidden, unnatural, alluring, but yet out of the scope of what is considered 'normal'. The monster becomes as such the primordial deviant; be it cultural dissimilarity, 'abnormal' sexuality, a 'deformed' body: It lives in the permanently liminal space between the normative idea of a human and a 'demon,' it defies classification and threatens the idea of an ordered world. It is important to note that when we talk about 'monstrosity' in the context of Cohen's work, we are referring to the modern conception of a monster, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines broadly as either "Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening." or "A creature of huge size." or "A person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman; a monstrous example of evil, a vice, etc." or even "An ugly or deformed person, animal, or thing."¹⁴ This is not equivalent to the medieval concept of the monster as presented e.g. in the *Physiologus* or

¹¹ Klaus von See et al., eds., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 7 vols. (2000-2019).

¹² "The Poetic Edda," ed. and trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹³ Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, 3-25.

¹⁴ "monster, n., adv., and adj." "OED Online," in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press., March 2021).

in the writings of Pliny and Augustine, which presented the monster as a miraculous being created by God to demonstrate certain things.¹⁵

Rebecca Merkelbach builds upon these theses and seeks to adapt them from the generality sought after by Cohen to a specific tool to look at the monsters of the *Íslendingasögur* and thus, presumably, of the medieval Icelandic society. For her, certain aspects of Cohen's theory, like a definite need for a hybrid body in a monster, seem not to be applicable, especially since the Old Icelandic word *troll* / *troll* can be applied to otherwise normal humans, who become monsters through social perception. Merkelbach follows the intense work done by Ármann Jakobsson on the topic.¹⁶ Ármann has written extensively on *troll* and connecting concepts, like *berserkir* and shapeshifters, *ergi*¹⁷ and its connection to the use of magic and revenants. His work is often built upon and provides a good overview over the use of these concepts within *Íslendingasögur*. He shows that the Old Icelandic word *troll* is a very loose categorization of a person or a being as socially disruptive to a point that humanity is lost. This is often associated with supernatural qualities, like the ability to shapeshift or to use magic.¹⁸ Stemming from this observation, Merkelbach formulates the need for a spectrum of monstrosity, from the normatively human, to the human-become-monster through anti-social actions, to the final stage of monstrosity, the furthest removed from humanity like the wondrous races of Pliny and Augustine.¹⁹ The Icelandic saga canon seems to be more populated by those lying

¹⁵ For Plinius work see: Pliny, "Natural History," (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938-1962). For Augustine see: Saint Augustine, "Concerning the city of god against the pagans," (London: Penguin Books, 1984). Cf. Rudolf Simek, *Monster im Mittelalter: die phantastische Welt der Wundervölker und Fabelwesen* (Köln: Böhlau, 2015), 17-41.

¹⁶ For example: Ármann Jakobsson, "The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch : Meaning of troll and ergi in Medieval Iceland," *Saga-Book* 32 (2008); Ármann Jakobsson, *The troll inside you : paranormal activity in the Medieval north* (Santa Barbara: punctum books, 2017); Ármann Jakobsson, ed., *Nine Saga Studies : The Critical Interpretation of the Icelandic Sagas* (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2013).

¹⁷ The concept of *ergi* is prominent in both Old Norse literature and legal culture and describes a complex set of societal expectations around the performance of gender roles and sexuality, where non-compliance was met with harsh social (and legal) consequences. For an excellent discussion of the term and the cultural concepts behind it, cf. Sebastian Thoma, *Unmännlichkeit in den Isländersagas : Zur narrativen Funktion von ergi und nið*, ed. Sebastian Brather, Wilhelm Heizmann, and Steffan Patzold, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, (Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2021).

¹⁸ Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, "The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch," 44-55.

¹⁹ Cf. Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society : Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland*, 13-20.

in the middle: outlaws, revenants, the sexually deviant, *berserker*, magicians and other human monsters, though the supernatural variety of non-human monsters also make appearances.

Also important to this theoretical complex are the ideas of Victor W. Turner laid out in his “The Ritual Process : Structure and Anti-Structure”.²⁰ He analyses the societal structure of African tribes and generalizes his findings into theory of the inner machinations of human society: The main spheres in which humanity seems to divide the world are the Structure, meaning the ordered, hierarchical society with all its rules, rituals and fixed spaces and the Chaos, everything outside of this space shaped by humans. But since the Structure is only immutable on a very small timescale and has and will change over time, there is also the Anti-structure, or *Communitas*, a space lacking hierarchy and order, in which change is created through exchange that is normally taboo. That space is inhabited by outcasts and those undergoing change in social status, so the liminal. Turner later added in his essay “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual : An Essay in Comparative Symbolology”,²¹ that there is not also the temporary state of liminality one enters while undergoing a transitional ritual, but also the permanently liminal, the liminoid, inhabited by actors not wholly part of the chaotic *Communitas* and not really part of the Structure either. This space is home to social deviants, those with roles deemed somehow stained, yet necessary, like undertakers, executioners, or latrine workers.

The human monsters of the family sagas inhabit this liminoid space in between the sphere of Structure and Chaos, a dichotomy that highly present in Old Norse literature. Klaus Bödl’s extensive “*Eigi einhamr* : Beiträge zum Weltbild der *Eyrbyggja* und anderer Isländersagas“ shows a great example of this dichotomy, something that he calls the *miðgarðr-útgardr* complex, which *Eyrbyggja saga* supposedly presents.²² According to Bödl, the central theme of *Eyrbyggja saga* is the conflict between the ordered world of humanity (and Christianity) and the chaotic, unordered (and pagan)

²⁰ Victor W. Turner, *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure*, The Lewis Henry Morgan lectures, (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969).

²¹ Victor W. Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual : an Essay in Comparative Symbolology," *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies* 60, no. 3 (1974).

²² Cf. Klaus Bödl, *Eigi einhamr : Beiträge zum Weltbild der Eyrbyggja und anderer Isländersagas*, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, (Boston / Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 117-24.

Supernatural world of the untamed nature of Iceland. The infamous revenant Þórólfr *bægifótr* is prime representation of that supernatural world, both as such and in his ‘reincarnation’ as Glæsir, the diabolic bull.²³

Building on this previous research, I will show in this thesis how monstrosity is constructed in each analysed text from the corpus and seek to show parallels and differences in those constructions between the different texts. I will argue that the monstrosity presented in these texts is constructed in a multifaceted manner, incorporating mental conceptions of social and inherently present monstrosity – while being distinct from the monstrosity presented in the *Íslendingasögur*. Since previous research has largely focused on the prose texts of the *Íslendingasögur*, which are by nature more narrative than the eddic poems written in verse and thus contain more direct methods of characterisation, it is necessary to adapt the way monstrosity is used to identify monsters in eddic poems. Since eddic poetry contains mythological elements, inherent²⁴ monstrosity plays a more prominent role than in the more naturalistic *Íslendingasögur*.

When describing any given monster, it is useful to look at two distinct spectra on which the monstrosity of the character lies: Firstly, the spectrum proposed by Merkelbach between a fully socially designated monster and an entirely inherently monstrous being, is useful to distinguish between different modes of monstrosity. Secondly, a spectrum of monstrosity versus ‘humanity’ – note that here we need to understand gods as a type of human, because, while that might not line up with the religious understanding of a god, they are constructed as a sort of human in these texts and parallel the human-monster dichotomy – is useful to gain an understanding of how monstrous certain action or attributes seem to be in the world presented in the texts.²⁵ When searching for

²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 92-98, 117-24.

²⁴ I am using inherent monstrosity to mean “defined through fixed bodily and/or mental characteristic assigned by the text” in this context. For an in-depth analysis of the attribution of monstrosity through bodily features as presented in eddic poetry, cf. Schäfke, “Auf den Leib geschriebene Rollen und eingefleischte Eigenschaften : Körpersymbolik und soziale Rollensysteme in altnordischer Dichtung und Prosa.”

²⁵ Cf. Margaret Clunies Ross, “The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry,” in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry : Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 20. John Lindow, “Eddic poetry and mythology,” in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry :*

portrayals of monstrosity it is necessary to be precise in deciding what counts as monstrous and what does not. Here, we cannot rely on previously laid out characteristics that are present in different genres, since we are dealing with texts that contain multiple different layers of narration stemming from different times and thus it cannot be presumed that moral judgements from, e.g., the *Íslendingasögur* or *Fornaldarsögur* are active in these texts. We also cannot presume the individual texts of the Poetic Edda to be a homogenous moral landscape since the texts are merely compiled together and do not necessarily have shared origins.²⁶ Therefore, we need to find clear markers of a character being constructed as a monster, be it socially assigned or inherently monstrous. To this end, I have devised categories with which both monsters and their usage can be categorized and then systematically compared along these lines:²⁷

Monstrous categories (MCat)

1. Direct linguistic markers, like terms clearly referring to non-human beings. E.g.: *troll*, *vættr*, *íotunn*, *þurs*, animal names²⁸, etc.
 - a. Direct linguistic markers for semi-human monstrous entities, e.g. witch.
2. Acts of clear opposition towards the human order, clear and extreme acts meant to meaningfully disrupt or destroy society that results in reactive defensive action by the attacked social structure.
 - a. Acts of clear violation of the order designed by the gods, in the case of mythological matters being the foundational “society” by a given text, which results in reactive defensive action by the attacked social structure

Myth and Legends of Early Scandinavia, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 129-30. Brittany Schorn, "Divine Semantics : Terminology for the Human and the Divine in Old Norse Poetry," *Scripta Islandica* 64 (2013): 67-70.

²⁶ Cf. Schier, "Edda, Ältere."

²⁷ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir similarly taxonomizes the ‘monstrous women’ of the *Fornaldarsögur*, though less systematically. Cf. Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature : Bodies, Words, and Power*, 59-78.

²⁸ Note that some terms referring to animals have a different meaning when applied to a human, like *vargr* (Cf. "*vargr sb. m.*," in *ONP Online : A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, ed. Aldís Sigurðardóttir et al. (København: Københavns universitet, 2010-2022).), which do not necessarily signal monstrosity.

3. Acts of clear excommunication from a group, meaning acts which mark a character as incompatible with existence in human society as judged by a community, e.g., outlawry.
4. Inherent monstrosity, which be grouped in two different 'genres':
 - a. The 'classical' monsters presented by in the learned tradition (e.g., Augustine and Pliny); the 'wonderous people,' most of which diverge from regular humans in a bodily manner.
 - b. Non- 'classical' inherent monstrosity:
 - i. Hybrid bodies like shapeshifters, characters with partly animalistic body parts, human-supernatural-creature-hybrids, berserkers²⁹, etc.
 - ii. Strongly deformed or mutilated bodies, if otherwise characterised negatively.³⁰
 - iii. Revenants.
 - iv. Fully diverging bodies or the transformation into such.
 - v. Fully animalistic bodies or the transformation into such.

In addition to these direct criteria that are strong signals for an interpretation of a character as monstrous, there are also weaker signals that should not be used as singular arguments for a monstrous interpretation, but instead should serve as supporting arguments:

1. Strong association of a character with animals or animalistic traits that go further than more regular attributes like 'strong like a bear' or similar.
2. Strong association of a character with supernatural forces or beings like magic (*seiðr*), *troll*, *iqtnar*, *vǫlur* and the like.
3. Strong characterisation of a character as a foreign to a place and incompatibilities associated with that.

²⁹ As Ármann Jakobsson elaborates in his article, there seems to be at least a partly understanding in 13th century Iceland that Berserkers were some sort of shapeshifter, or closely related to them. Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, *Nine Saga Studies: The Critical Interpretation of the Icelandic Sagas*, 143-47.

³⁰ It remains very important to not conflate physical disability with monstrosity without such a connection being made explicit in the analysed text.

4. Strong characterisation of a character as anti-social and disruptive.
5. Strong characterisation of a character as ‘deviant,’ if used in clearly negative contexts, for example insults
6. Invocation of monstrous ancestry.

Based on these markers, we can place a character along the two previously proposed spectra; human–monster and corporeal–social. For this analysis, it is helpful to assess the texts individually and keep interpretations as close to the text as possible, since the focus of this work is primarily on the constructions of monstrosity within the genre of the *Eddukvæði*. Interpolating information from sources such as Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*, *Ynglinga saga* or skaldic poetry to a point where the interpretation meaningfully changes the meaning of the text and becomes central to the argument made, has the potential to shift said focus away from the texts themselves and instead create broader analysis about general cultural concepts, which is not the aim of this thesis. There are, however, cases where such additional information is necessary for a productive analysis, for example to resolve *kennningar*, *beiti* or *pulur*, or to offer potential interpretations for unclear or incomplete passages.

The second aim of this text in analysing monstrosity in this corpus is trying to qualify the narrative function of monsters in these texts and categorize their usage. For this, I will place each depiction of monstrosity within the following categories, which is partly based on Kathryn Hume’s work, but adapted to fit the constraints of the genre:³¹

Monstrous function categories (MFCat)

1. Monstrosity as defamation
2. Monstrosity as classification
3. Monstrosity as ambiguity

³¹ Cf. Kathryn Hume, "From Saga to Romance : The Use of Monsters in Old Norse Literature," *Studies in Philology* 77, no. 1 (1980): 3-7.

Category 1 mainly appears in sections where adversarial dialogue between two characters appears, where the goal of portraying the adversaries' negative character is the primary goal of the invocation of monstrosity. Since the "actual" characteristics of a character are not of relevance for this insult-based use of monstrosity, it can be understood as either partially or wholly socially assigned – depending on who is accused. Through the inherently temporary nature of the dialogues that contain these insults, it is very possible and frequent for the accusations of monstrosity to only exist within the context of such a verbal conflict. This in turn means that the insult itself may or may not have an impact on a character's characterisation outside of that context.

Category 2 describes monstrosity as invoked by a text in an essentialist manner, meaning as a core characteristic of a given character. This could be through invocation of ancestry or membership in a "race" of monsters as presented in the text, or through ascribing characteristics that are equated to monstrosity. As such, the type of monstrosity used in this context can be both inherent and/or social. This category can appear in different contexts, from cosmogonic descriptions of the denizens of the world being narrated by a text to negative characterisation of fiends to be overcome by a hero or god. Since this use of monstrosity can be invoked in both purely descriptive and judgmental contexts, each depiction must be analysed individually to ascertain whether it uses monstrosity to negatively portray characters.

Category 3 describes the portrayals where neither previously mentioned category neatly applies. A multitude of factors can cause unclarity in this regard, for example unreliable narration – is a character actually monstrous or is the narrator focalised on a character and thus biased? –, unclear characterisation – does the text clearly ascribe monstrosity, or does it just imply it? – or competing characterisations of a single character within a text can all cause the function of any given instance of monstrosity to be unclear. Similarly, the nature of the texts I am analysing in this thesis, can give rise to "blind motifs," meaning motifs that are included as part of a continuing narrative tradition but that have lost their original meaning over time and are thus without function in that version of the text. These uses of monstrosity, where form and function of the usage are unclear, can vary drastically

from each other and form less of a coherent category than the previously outlined categories and, as such, must be examined more closely and individually.

In the following analysis, my goal lies in creating a systematic overview of the occurrences – or lack thereof – of the outlined categories of monsters and assessing how they used by sorting them into the established function categories. I am taking this systematic approach to create a comprehensive view of the use of monstrosity used in eddic poetry as it pertains to Cohen's monster theory.

III. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

III.1. Lokasenna

When writing about monsters in the eddic poems, one cannot avoid talking about perhaps the most famous deviant of Norse culture, Loki. While the character itself has taken on a life of its own in popular media depictions, such as in Marvel’s movies and TV shows featuring their interpretation of the character,³² or depictions ostensibly more grounded in “Norse mythology”, like in the TV show Vikings,³³ his actual presence in Old Norse texts is rather sparse. *Lks.* is among the more famous invocations of the character, which, as I will show, is focused on his deviance in a negative light. When analysing Loki’s portrayal in this and other texts, we must keep in mind that we are dealing with different instances of what had become a literary trope by the 13th century and not “descriptive” mythological representation. As such any singular portrayal does not necessarily inform any other texts portrayal and cannot be assumed to be “canon” to any other text. Researchers have speculated in the past about who wrote Lokasenna with what intention and it remains unclear what function the text is supposed to serve – nor does this particularly matter in this analysis.³⁴ As my analysis will show, *Lks.* is mainly concerned with socially constructed monstrosity that does rely more on the judgement of individual action than innate characteristics, placing Loki, who is the primary character being constructed as monstrous, firmly on the social end of the inherent-social axis (MCat 2a, 3). His placement on the monster-human axis remains far less clear, as I will show.

The main actor in the text is Loki, who gets cast out from a feast held by Ægir after killing Fimafengr, one of Ægir’s servants, as narrated by the prologue. The text immediately gives a sense of Loki’s antisocial nature, as the feast is described as *griðastaðr mikill* (“great sanctuary”). As von See et al. point out, *grið* is a legal concept that refers to a place of temporary peace between e.g., two warring

³² E.g. cf. Michael Waldron, “Loki,” (United States of America: Disney Platform Distribution, 2021).

³³ Cf. Michael Hirst, “Vikings,” (Canada / Ireland: MGM Television, 2013).

³⁴ For an extended discussion: Klaus von See et al., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda Bd. 2 Götterlieder: (Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða)* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1997), 365-68.

parties.³⁵ Violation of that *grið* is thus analogous to breaking a ceasefire, making Loki’s action particularly deviant. Outside of the hall, he speaks with Eldir, the other servant of Ægir, who tells him that he has no friends *í oðri* (“in words”) among the gods and elves sitting in Ægir’s hall. It is unclear why Eldir is adding that specification, though it could be entirely for metric reasons, since *oðri* is likely a stave.³⁶ Loki announces in *Lks.* 3 that he wishes to sow discord among the gods, and then enters the hall. At first, he is not granted a seat among them, but reminds Óðinn of their status as blood-brothers and that he once swore to not accept drink if Loki was not also served. Óðinn thus commands Víðarr to make room, who obliges. Loki speaks a toast to the gods, but explicitly excludes Bragi, which has been interpreted to mean that Bragi is the speaker in *Lks.* 8 which is not marked in *Codex Regius*, since otherwise it is a blind motif. Óðinn offers restitution for Bragi’s insult against Loki to save the peace, but Loki does not seem to care and starts his insults:

Iós ok armbauga	munda æ vera	Both horses and arm-rings you’ll
beggia vanr, Bragi:		always be short of, Bragi;
ása ok álfa,	er hér inni ero,	of the Æsir and the elves who are in here,
þú ert við víg varastr		you’re the wariest of war
ok skiarrastr við skot.		and shyest of shooting.
	(<i>Lokasenna</i> 13) ³⁷	(Larrington) ³⁸

This first insult sets the tone for the insults against other male gods that follow. He describes Bragi as a poor fighter and as lazy, essentially attacking his masculinity. Bragi reacts in a typically masculine fashion, threatening to behead Loki. Loki calls this out as empty words and switches his target to Iðunn, Bragi’s wife, after she tries to calm him down. He insults her as *allra kvenna vergi[ð]rn[u]st*³⁹ (“most man-crazy of all women”)⁴⁰ and accuses her of embracing her brother’s murderer. He thus

³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 373, 89.

³⁶ The word choice in this sentence is rather peculiar, but metric convention forces the creator to use a stave in roughly this position, meaning, in this case, a word starting with a vowel sound. This could have caused the creator to use this phrasing, but it also may have very well been the intent to communicate exactly this phrasing, though the meaning is somewhat oblique. Cf. *Ibid.*, 392.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 408.

³⁸ "The Poetic Edda," 83.

³⁹ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 414.

⁴⁰ Cf. "vergiarn," in *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis: Ordbog over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*, ed. Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson (2., København: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1931).

insults her femininity by accusing her of excessive lust to point where she does not even mind breaking her brother's honour by sleeping with his killer. This also serves as a template for the insults he levies against the female gods in the following stanzas.

Loki's main approach to insulting the gods seems to be accusing them of *ergi*, i.e., behaviour that, e.g., violates gender norms in a way that it disturbs the social stability.⁴¹ Even the insults that outwardly seem to deviate from that pattern, like the insult against Óðinn in Stanza 24, which accuses him of practising magic, still pick at the same wound: Magic is clearly associated with femininity in the 12th century North, as Ármann shows, and thus a male god practising magic is *argr*.⁴² There is a link between the concept of *ergi* and the social category of *troll* in the *Íslendingasögur*, as Ármann points out, which means that failure to perform social (gender) norms could serve to call a character's humanity into question. We cannot outrightly assume that this connection is also present in the morality of the eddic poems, but since both text genres were written down at similar times in Iceland, it can serve as a pointer. Initially, the text does not seem to necessarily draw a parallel between *ergi* and social monstrosity, instead showing that connection clearly only in the last Stanzas when Þórr arrives. The first hint at this are the insults levied against Loki by the other gods, for instance by Óðinn:

Veiztu, ef ek gaf skylda, inom slævorom, sigr: átta vetr kýr mólkandi ok kona, ok hefir þú þar [þörn] borit, ok hugða ek þat argi aðal.	þeim er ek gefa ne vartu fyr iqrð neðan	You know, if I gave what I shouldn't have given, victory, to the faint-hearted, yet eight winters you were, beneath the earth, a milchcow and a woman, and there you bore children, and I thought that the hallmark of a pervert.
	(<i>Lokasenna</i> 23) ⁴³	(Larrington) ⁴⁴

As discussed by von See et al., there is a lack of linguistic clarity in the formulation *kýr mólkandi*, since it can be read as both “a milked cow” or “a (female) cow milker.” This uncertainty might very

⁴¹ Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, "The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch," 55-58.

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴³ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 427.

⁴⁴ "The Poetic Edda," 84.

well be intentional and could serve to hint at a non-human quality of Loki. Up until this point, the text is showing points 4 and 5 from my list of weaker signals, so mainly implying monstrosity instead of explicit construction.

Þórr is the first character to actively refer to Loki as both *argr* and non-human, by calling him *rogg vætr*.⁴⁵ The Old Norse word *vætr* is cognate with the English ‘wight’ and can similarly refer to a supernatural being.⁴⁶ Loki is viewed by Þórr not as a god or being on par with the gods, but instead as a fiend to be destroyed. The fact that Þórr is the god to have that view of Loki is especially powerful since he is the god most often associated with slaying monsters,⁴⁷ the primary instance of which was *Iormungandr*, the world serpent and Loki’s child. While there is a clear link between a character’s status as *argr* and socially assigned monstrosity, it needs to be clearly stated that they are not equivalent here. We need to keep in mind that monstrosity is largely a socially constructed, externally applied identity that can levied against a human (or human-like character like a god), as Merkelbach points out.⁴⁸ Thus, the simple presence of certain characteristics which might be understood to be monstrous in certain contexts is not sufficient to describe a character as a monster. Since it is externally applied, it is relevant here who is levying the accusations against a character. With this in mind, it is understandable why Loki’s repeated accusations of almost all gods present being in some way *argr* does not seem to have any impact on their social standing and why Þórr’s seems to be all the more potent. Loki is characterised as having a low social status. Through his actions in the prologue, he is immediately marked as a deviant and dangerous to the social order, whereas Þórr is the strongest

⁴⁵ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 494. Note that *ragr* is a metathesis of *argr* with the same meaning.

⁴⁶ Cf. “*vætr sb. f.*,” in *ONP Online*.

⁴⁷ “Mythologically, the main stress is on Þórr’s martial function. Most myths relate his battles against giants and other beings representing chaos, such as the serpent *Miðgarðsormr*, which he fights on more than one occasion [...] .” Jens Peter Schjødt, “Þórr,” in *Medieval Scandinavia : an encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano et al. (New York & London: Garland, 1993), 672.

⁴⁸ Cf. Rebecca Merkelbach, “*Dolgr í byggðini : Meeting the Social Monster in the Sagas of Icelanders*,” in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150-1400*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd (Boston / Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 267, 71-72.

among the gods and is known to preserve the social order, e.g. fighting the *Miðgarðsormr* or *brímpursar*⁴⁹ (MFCat 2a).

The fact that Loki is repeatedly called *argr* by the other gods for acts that parallel the characteristics associated with *ergi* in the *Íslendingasögur* and that this category is then closely associated with him being declared monstrous serves as a pointer that this attribute can be understood as code for monstrosity. It is also important to note that, since it is a socially constructed attribute when applied to human or human-like characters, monstrosity-humanity is not a binary system but instead a spectrum upon which a character is placed based on their perceived attributes. The threshold for monstrosity is thus quite fluid and cannot be assumed to be the same even within the same narrow genre of text. What can be said is that at least in Lokasenna, the social values regarding sexuality and gender roles seems to mirror that which is presented in the *Íslendingasögur*: Acts that violate the expectation of moderated sexuality and the performance of gender stereotypes (i.e. chaste housewife; strong, virile, fighting husband), i.e. those that threaten the pervading social order by disrupting it, can make a character be considered monstrous when they exceed a threshold set by the social system of which they are part.

Functionally, Loki's characterisation of others as monstrous clearly falls within MFCat 1, as it follows the described pattern of monstrosity invoked during a verbal fight. Yet, his own characterisation seems to be best classified as MFCat 2/3, since many of the insults brought against him seem to be true outside of the exchange and directly result in him leaving the company of the gods under threat of death – though it is unclear which insults are based in truth and which are slander.

Looking back at the research questions I posed at the beginning, this analysis helps find an answer to the first two questions, which ask what a monster in this literary context is and how it is differentiated from the normative 'human.' *Lks.* shows that 'monster' can be a socially assigned characteristic in these texts, in this case due non-acceptable levels of sexual deviance and gender non-conformity. The

⁴⁹ Cf. Schjødt, "Þórr," 672.

text also exhibits the application of a dehumanizing term, *vætrr*, and active expulsion from a social group as part of this phenomenon.

III.2. Þrymskviða

Þrymskviða offers an ensemble of characters similar to that of *Lks.*, though greatly reduced. The text tells the tale of Þórr's hammer *Miðlnir* being stolen by the *íotunn* Þrymr, who hides it in the ground and demands the goddess Freyia as his wife to give it back. Loki acts as a divine messenger, with him flying to *Íotunheimr* to hear Þrymr's demand. Freyia rejects Þórr's demand of her to marry Þrymr thusly in *Þkv.* 13:

Reið varð þá Freyia allr ása salr stókk þat it mikla 'Mik veiztu verða ef ek ek með þér	ok fnásaði, undir bifðiz, men Brísinga: vergiarnasta, í íotunheima. (<i>Þkv.</i> 13) ⁵⁰	Furious then was Freyia and snorted in rage, the whole hall of the Æsir trembled at that, the great necklace of the Brisings fell from her: 'You'll know me to be the most man-mad of women, if I drive with you to the land of giants.' (Larrington) ⁵¹
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She alludes here to the same attribution of overt lust she gets accused of by Loki in *Lks.*, both denoted by the superlative adjective form *vergi[ρ]rn[u]st* ('most man-crazy'). This time, she is concerned with her perception by others as deviant, instead of being accused of such misconduct directly. Nonetheless, the attribute seems to be entirely a socially constructed quality, which is externally applied through reputation and not necessarily linked to actual personal attributes. Heimdallr, who is described as equipped with precognition *sem Vanir aðrir* ("like the other *Vanir*"),⁵² suggests that Þórr himself should be the one to don the wedding veil, which results in him protesting due to the act potentially resulting in him being called *argr* by the Æsir.⁵³ Loki reminds Þórr that the giants would potentially be able to attack *Ásgarðr* should they not recover the hammer, which makes Þórr agree to the plan.⁵⁴ Loki also announces that he will cross-dress to appear as "Freyia's" bridal maid.⁵⁵ The pair travels to Þrymr, who does not see through the ruse, and proceed with the wedding. Þórr eats great amounts of food and drinks great amounts of mead which makes Þrymr suspicious, since

⁵⁰ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 543.

⁵¹ "The Poetic Edda," 94.

⁵² von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 547.

⁵³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 547-52.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 553.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 555.

he has not seen a woman capable of that feat.⁵⁶ He also notices Þórr's unsightly expression, both of which Loki, in the disguise of the bride maid, explains with "Freyia" not having slept or eaten in the past eight days out of excitement for the wedding.⁵⁷ Þrymr calls for *Miðllnir* to be brought to bless the marriage, which is placed in Þórr's lap, who uses it to kill Þrymr and his old, unmarried sister, who had asked for the dowry.⁵⁸ The poem ends here after 32 stanzas.

A few critical observations can be made from this short lay: As can be clearly seen in the role of Loki in this lay in contrast to *Lks.*, we are not dealing with a single character Loki, whose character gets fleshed out by different narratives. Instead, the names of the gods are stand-ins for character archetypes, which are typically associated with certain qualities and objects and have long since lost their sacral function, having been reduced to literary characters. Each text uses these characters in different manners and for different narrative purposes, thus creating vast differences in the portrayal of a "single" character between different texts.

Furthermore, there seems to be no direct link between a deviant action and status as non-'human' or monstrous. The lay does not imply – directly or indirectly – that Loki's behaviour is considered deviant or shameful, even though the accusations of similar actions against him in *Lks.* seem to assign a level of monstrosity to his character. One critical difference between the two portrayals of Loki in these texts is Loki's relation to the other gods, who are chiefly the protagonists of this narrative. In *Lks.*, Loki exists at the fringes of 'godhood' and embraces his status as an outcast in actively antagonizing the gods, whereas in *Þkv.*, he is working with the gods against the active threat of the *þursar*. Both texts contain depictions of monstrosity, with *Lks.* focusing more on the question of permissible behaviour and social consequences of deviancy and *Þkv.* focusing on inherent or eschatological monstrosity: Both stories seem to indicate that the chief characteristic of monstrosity within these texts is anti-social behaviour that threatens the 'natural order' of the gods. A character's position in that conflict of – in the case of the gods –, eschatological consequence in part determines

⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 556-62.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 563-66.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 567-74.

the moral quality of an action and thus, since it is social category, whether it is deemed monstrous or ‘human.’ The *pursar/igtunar*⁵⁹ are a sort of embodiment of the disordered chaos that lies outside of the gods’ order and as such can only be monstrous (MCat 2a). As *Þkv.* presents Loki as somewhat separated from this group: He dwells with Þórr in *Ásgarðr* and helps the gods in their quest for the hammer and is the one to warn Þórr of the threat of the *igtunar* assaulting *Ásgarðr* with the hammer. Simultaneously he acts as the mediator between the gods and *igtunar*, both in his role as the ‘divine messenger’ and as Þórr’s handmaiden: He is the one allowing communication between the gods and the *pursar*.

As Frog points out, *Þkv.* can be read as a reflex of the folk tale type ATU 1148B, the theft of the thunder instrument.⁶⁰ The tale type includes a character acting as an adversary of the thunder-god, which Frog refers to as a ‘devil’ and seem to generally be of a corporeally monstrous quality.⁶¹ The *pursar* in *Þkv.* thus seem to be a reflex of this core element of the myth, specifically Þrymr himself, whereas Loki’s role seems to largely be an innovation of the creator of *Þkv.*, with only his role at the wedding being part of the generally assumed structure of the tale.⁶² With this analysis, we can try to at least somewhat understand why Loki’s actions are not directly qualified as deviant or bad, whereas both Freyia and Þórr are very concerned with not being ‘sexually humiliated’, as Frog puts it:⁶³ The central conflict of the underlying folk tale is the struggle between the thunder-god – Þórr in this reflex – and his adversaries over who gets to control the thunder-instrument and, thus more broadly, the weather. Since the adversaries directly oppose the gods in their actions and seek to wrestle control over an integral part of nature, threatening the divinely upheld order, they become otherized to the greatest extent and thus the reflexes of the tale use cultural understandings of extreme monstrosity to signify the stakes of the conflict. *Þkv.* is consequently more concerned with the sexual humiliation of

⁵⁹ Note that the text uses *purs* and *igtunn* interchangeably.

⁶⁰ Cf. Frog, “Germanic traditions of the theft of the thunder-instrument (ATU 1148B): An approach to *Þrymskviða* and Þórr’s adventure with Geirrøðr in Circum-Baltic perspective,” *Folklore Fellows Communications* 307 (2014): 120-22.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 123-25, 45.

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, 123-25.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 142.

the characters that are fully considered gods since their position is already being threatened by the monstrous ‘other.’ Loki’s deviant nature is of no greater consequence to the narrative since his role is not anchored in the underlying folk tale. The creator of *Þkv.* perhaps felt that Loki’s unclear status – both in terms of divinity and in terms of gender – made for an interesting way to have the *þursar* and gods interact. Perhaps we can even assume a comedic intent since there is a certain humour in Þórr’s inability to perform femininity.⁶⁴

One final observation can be made that can serve to build a final picture of the function of monstrosity in this lay: While there is a case to be made that the archetype of *þursar/iqtnar* immediately would have invoked an image of physically big and monstrous humanoid giants in any contemporary recipient, the physical appearance of the *þursar* is not described at all. Their monstrosity is thus, at least partly, defined through their action opposing the gods, which in-turn means their monstrosity in this text is largely social (MCat 2a, MFCat 2).

In conclusion, *Þkv.* is, as likely a reflex of a much older folk tale, mainly concerned with the portrayal of the conflict between the gods and their foes – structure and chaos – and as such neatly separates the human-like gods from the monstrous *þursar*, which Loki’s position remaining somewhat ambiguous, but clearly on the side of the gods. This text can show how potent the observation of monstrosity as a socially assigned category is as an analytical tool: Similar sexual ambiguity to that which *Lks.* uses to otherize and ultimately dehumanize Loki is not an immediate reason to assume similar judgement here, since no other characters or the narrator seem interested in assigning any judgement to his actions. His assistance to the gods seems to free him from said judgement, while the *þursar*’s theft of the hammer and demands to marry a goddess add to their assumed monstrosity, which is punished by death.

Regarding my research questions, this analysis broadens the concept of the monster to the antagonistic *iqtnar/þursar*, who are differing in their characterisation, as they are not defined

⁶⁴ Both Jan de Vries and Helen Damico reach similar conclusions. Cf. James Frankki, "Cross-Dressing in the Poetic Edda : Mic muno Æsir argan kalla," *Scandinavian Studies* 84, no. 4 (2012): 426-27.

through deviant sexuality or gender expression, but antagonism towards the gods and their order. The social aspect of monstrosity found in *Lks.* is present as well and shows that monstrosity is not only depended on actions but also the reaction to those actions.

III.3. Völuspá

*Völuspá*⁶⁵ is of particular interest to this analysis since it deals with cosmogonic matters and mythological conflicts. Because the text lays out a specific view of the world and its underlying structures, we can find many ideas about monstrosity and social order spelled out very explicitly. In the following analysis, I will argue that the text offers a view of the world as originally unordered chaos, in which the gods have erected a divine order, which is threatened by non-human forces that oppose the gods (MCat 2a). These forces constitute a sort of ‘*Ur*-monstrosity’ to which other ideas about monstrous actions or characteristics can be related, since they represent the most clearly monstrous narrative element. In the case of *Vsp.*, these are the *iqtnar/(hrím-)þursar*.⁶⁶ I will show that this monstrosity is constructed mainly in social terms with very little invocation of physical characteristics to either show or emphasise monstrosity.

It is worth keeping in mind that this idea of a fundamentally chaotic universe, which had to be ordered by the gods and whose creation will eventually end in calamity, is hardly unique to North Germanic peoples. The word ‘chaos’ itself is descended from the Ancient Greek *χάος*, which denoted the primordial abyss that existed before creation.⁶⁷ Both the Ancient Babylonians and Ancient Egyptian people believed the world to have sprung a chaotic primordial ocean which got ordered by the gods.⁶⁸ A similar idea to the Greek *χάος* is expressly mentioned by the text in *Vsp.* 3:

Ár var alda vara sandr né sær iqrð fannz æva gap var ginnunga	þar er Ýmis bygði, né svalar unnir, né upphiminn, en gras hvergi (<i>Völuspá</i> 3) ⁶⁹	Early in time Ymir made his settlement, there was no sand nor sea nor cool waves, earth was nowhere nor the sky above, a void of yawning chaos, grass was nowhere (Larrington) ⁷⁰
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⁶⁵ While there are differences between the version of *Vsp.* that are preserved in Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4^{to}) and Hauksbók (AM 544 4^{to}), they are not relevant to the content of the analysed passages herein.

⁶⁶ The text itself seems to conflate these two groups, while they are still very clearly delineated in *Skm.* and other texts.

⁶⁷ Cf. "OED Online," chaos, n.

⁶⁸ Cf. Olaf Almqvist, *Chaos, Cosmos and Creation in Early Greek Theogonies: An Ontological Exploration* (London / New York / Oxford / New Delhi / Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 21-46.

⁶⁹ Klaus von See et al., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda Götterlieder Teil I: Völuspá [R], Hávamál/ Teil II: Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Völuspá [H], Zwergenverzeichnis aus der Gylfaginning*, 1. ed. (2019), 86.

⁷⁰ "The Poetic Edda," 4.

Whether these ideas are reflexes of genuine, North Germanic pre-Christian beliefs or influence by classical or other allochthonous sources, is immaterial to this analysis. Nonetheless, they establish similar spatial constructions fundamental to the view of creation as presented in the text: *Miðgarðr*, *Ásgarðr* and the other realms of ordered society – be it godly, otherworldly, or human – need to first be created by the gods and are thus delineated from the chaotic, primordial places and their inhabitants. As von See et al. point out, this initial section also resembles the creation story in the Abrahamic tradition and Ovid’s *Metamorphōsēs*, both of which were definitively available to scribes in northern Europe at the time of the creation of the versions of *Vsp.* which have been preserved.⁷¹ When we analyse the worldview presented in the text itself autonomously, a super-structure like the one proposed by Bödl emerges, which seems to reflect the observations made by Turner, as will be shown in the following section. This super-structure consists of the godly creation, their realms, those of the *alfar* (“Elves”)⁷² and humans, which can be understood as the “structure,” if we use Turner’s terminology, and the underworld, where the *iqtnar*, *dvergar* (“dwarves”)⁷³ and the dead dwell, which can be understood as Turner’s “chaos.” This parallels the *miðgarðr-útgarðr* dichotomy present in skaldic poetry and, as Bödl observes, *Eyrbyggja saga*.⁷⁴

As outlined by the previously quoted verse, *Vsp.* 4, the primordial existence of the world as conveyed by the text, is one of chaos, without any concrete, ordered thing in it. The *iqtnar* are already present at this stage. The primordial time is presented as the *ár* [...] *þar Ýmir bygðir*,⁷⁵ and the first memory of that time that the narrator, the *völva*, mentions is that of the *iqtnar*.⁷⁶ The *völva* herself claims to have been raised by the *iqtnar* in the previous verse: *Ek man iqtna, / ár um borna, / þá er forðom mik / fædda þqfðo; [...] fyr mold neðan*.⁷⁷ It remains unclear if she herself is a *iqtunn* or was merely raised

⁷¹ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 86-88.

⁷² Cf. “*alfr sb. m.*,” in *ONP Online*.

⁷³ Cf. “*dvergr sb. m.*,” in *ONP Online*.

⁷⁴ Cf. Bödl, *Eigi einhamr*, 92-95.

⁷⁵ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 86. (“Early in time Ymir made his settlement”, “The Poetic Edda,” 4.)

⁷⁶ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 88. („I remember giants born early in time / those nurtured me long ago; [...] below the earth.”, “The Poetic Edda,” 4.)

by them. We can, nonetheless, see a certain theme being set up here: The *íotnar* are denizens of the primordial chaos that preceded the ordering of the world by the *Burs synir* (“sons of Burr”)⁷⁸ and are likewise associated with the underworld. They are described to reside “below the earth” (*fyr mold neðan*).⁷⁹ As Klaus Bödl points out, this distinction perhaps goes beyond a mere mythological conception of the *íotnar* as beings of an otherworldly underworld. There seems to be a conception of space itself being ordered both horizontally and vertically in the Middle Ages in general, with *Yggdrasil* and the *Miðgarðr-Útgarðr*-complex present in Skaldic poetry being reflexes of this perceived structure within Norse culture, according to Bödl. He argues convincingly that the *Miðgarðr-Útgarðr*-complex is reflective of a general perception of the space as separated into a dichotomy between ‘culture’ versus ‘nature, or ‘order’ versus ‘chaos.’⁸⁰ This seems to be rather pervasive and mentally linked to the concept of the *garðr*, the fenced off domain of humans, as Bödl shows.⁸¹ Thus *Útgarðr*, which is supposedly located in the underworld in a mythological sense, becomes the domain of all chaotic things which stand in opposition to the human made order, just as the *íotnar* stand against the gods-made order in the framework of the mythological lays of the *Eddukvæði* (MCat 2a).⁸²

The next verse states that *Burs synir* (“Burr’s sons”) lifted the earth and thus *miðgarðr*, marking the entire space as creation of the gods and ordered. Von See et al. point to an interesting conflict in the text’s logic here: The only being mentioned to have existed before this act of divine creation are the *íotnar*, with the *æsir* notably absent. Furthermore, there is evidence that *Burr*, father of Óðinn, was himself thought to be a *íotunn*.⁸³ The text itself does not seem concerned with this question of lineage, so there is a case to be made that a *áss* is perhaps more of a social quality than usually assumed. It is worth bearing in mind that, thus far, no explicit attempt has been made to otherize the *íotnar*,

⁷⁸ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 95.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 88.

⁸⁰ Cf. Bödl, *Eigi einhamr*, 92-98.

⁸¹ Cf. Ibid.

⁸² Cf. Leander Petzold, “Riesen,” in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (2., Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 603.

⁸³ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 95-99.

apart from their domain being beneath the earth. The act of lifting the earth itself – though it is unclear from what it is being lifted in the context of this specific version of events presented in *Vsp.* – can be interpreted through the lens of a vertically ordered world as proposed by Bödl, and as such is higher in physical elevation and thus, conceptually, more ordered, and divine than what came before it.

The association between the divinely ordered space and the acts of human culture and cultivation is strengthened when the gods are described to be engaging in acts of settlement in *Vsp.* 7:

Hittoz æsir	á Íðavelli	The Æsir met on Idavoll Plain,
þeir er hǫrg ok hof	hátimbroðo	high they built altars and temples;
afla lǫgðo	auð smíðoðo	they set up their forges, smithed precious
tangir skópo	ok tól gærðo	things
	(<i>Völuspá</i> 7) ⁸⁴	shaped tongs and made tools.
		(Larrington) ⁸⁵

Vsp. 8 portrays the gods as engaging in regular human behaviour such as playing boardgames, suffering no scarcity until the arrival of three *þursar meyar*.⁸⁶ The said *þursar* seem to be disruptive to the divine order. *Vsp.* 9 seems to either be a *non-sequitur* or we are lacking context to understand the connection fully, since there the gods react by deliberating who is to create the *dverga drót[t]in[n]*.⁸⁷ It remains unclear if there is a connection between the *þursar* and the *dvergar* in this conflict.

Vsp. 17 and 18 tell of the creation of the first humans, Ask and Embla, who get supplied with attributes alluded to be the basic elements of the human condition: *Qnd gaf Óðinn, / óð gaf Hænir, / lá gaf Lóðurr / ok lito góða*.⁸⁸ Of interest here is the inclusion of two undoubtably human qualities that yet do not seem particularly fundamental to human nature: Deliberately aestheticized looks and poetry. This shows a focus in the construction of human identity on culture and not primarily on

⁸⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁸⁵ "The Poetic Edda," 4.

⁸⁶ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 122.

⁸⁷ Cf. Ibid., 128.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 186. („[...] breath gave Odin, spirit gave Hænir, blood gave Lodur, and fresh complexions,” "The Poetic Edda," 6.)

the basic physical qualities of a human; this points towards the category of human seemingly being socially defined.

The figure of *Gullveig*, mentioned in *Vsp.* 21, presents a conundrum: She is connected to the first war – the implication being that her attempted killing caused the war between *æsir* and *vanir* – and seems to possess some supernatural power which allows her to survive being speared and subsequently burned three times by the gods. The text yet offers no clear explanation of her transgressions against the gods or what “race” she belongs to. While the assumption of her being a *þurs* seems to be somewhat grounded in the text itself, attempts to identify her with Freyia seem contradictory, according to von See et al.⁸⁹ The text clearly shows her to be monstrous to the gods, as evidenced by their actions (MCat 2a), but the reasoning behind this categorization remains elusive. Her supernatural powers certainly seem related to this, especially when accepting the reasonable assumption, that the *Heiði hána hétó*⁹⁰ in *Vsp.* 22 refers to *Gullveig*. There, she is presented as a *völ[va]* *velspá*⁹¹ (‘well-(far)seeing seeress’) who was using her magic in unspecified, nefarious ways: [...] *seið hón leikinn, / æ var hón angan / illrar brúðar*.⁹²

Likewise unexplained are the second genus of gods, the *vanir*. Ultimately, the identities of these characters remain elusive, thus making potential statements about their characterisations and the implications for the construction of monstrosity within the text thereof very limited. The text offers no explanation for their differentiation from the *æsir*, which has led to many theories.⁹³ There remains uncertainty about the war described in *Vsp.* 24, which Snorri Sturluson’s *Ynglinga saga* and *Skáldskaparmál* interpret as the war between the *æsir* and *vanir*.⁹⁴ There are logical inconsistencies in the generally accepted interpretation, for example the mention of Freyia, a *vanr*, being given to the

⁸⁹ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 206-12.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 215.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. (“[...] *seið* she performed as she liked, / she was always a wicked woman’s favorite,” “The Poetic Edda,” 6.)

⁹³ Von See et al. discuss this problem at length. Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 234-37.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4; *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 4 (57); *ibid.*, 234.

pursar.⁹⁵ It can be said though that if we accept von See et al.'s reading of the *vanir* being a supportive force within the context of the first war, we can make no argument for a negative delineation of the *vanir* from the *æsir* at this point. This interpretative decision could be significant in its narrative impact since we must assume a degree of otherization of the *vanir* otherwise – though this otherization, should it occur here, is not explored further in *Vsp*.

Loki's characterization in the text is somewhat unclear, but ultimately negative. Sticking with a strictly close reading of the text, it is merely implied, through sequence, that the chained Loki in *Vsp*. 35 is the *Baldrs andskot[i]*⁹⁶ ('Baldr's enemy')⁹⁷ in *Vsp*. 33 who is in turn implied to be Baldr's killer. *Vsp*. 35 also mentions that Sigyn, Loki's wife, is no longer *velglýjgð*⁹⁸ ('well gleeful')⁹⁹ about her husband, implying either sexual dissatisfaction – and thus a potential hint towards a characterisation of Loki as *ergi* – or malcontent with her husband's murder of Baldr. While he is not directly characterized as monstrous, the text certainly hints at monstrosity through the punishment by poisoning, which bears resemblance to several different punishments from Old Norse literature involving poison and snakes.¹⁰⁰ Even intuitively, there is an exceptionally cruel quality to dying by poison – and as such, in great pain –, let alone constantly living through that dying state. This severe punishment thus suggests severe transgression on Loki's part, assuming that *Baldrs andskoti* refers to him very likely. This could certainly be read to fulfil M_{Cat} 2a, since both transgression and reaction are present, yet it remains unclear if Loki is truly stripped of social standing or merely being punished. The spatial dimension of Loki being contained below the earth, away from the realm of ordered society, and his involvement in causing natural disasters can be read as otherization and thus perhaps support the former – and thus a monstrous interpretation.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibid*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 286.

⁹⁷ Cf. "andskoti *sb. m.*," in *ONP Online*.

⁹⁸ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 286.

⁹⁹ From simplex, cf. "glýjaðr," in *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis*.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Motifs Q418, Q418.2, Q465.1, S111, Inger M. Boberg, *Motif-index of early Icelandic literature*, vol. 27, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana (Copenhagen, 1966).

Some scholars have suggested that the following verses continue to describe enemies of the gods and dangerous places, but this can only be partially confirmed by a close reading of the text, as von See et al. note:¹⁰¹ While *Vsp.* 37 names *Niðavellir* as the initial location, thus evoking themes of darkness and the underworld, we can see no such dark themes in the halls located therein.¹⁰² *Vsp.* 38 in contrast then describes a clearly dangerous and underworldly place, the hall at *Náströnd*. The place itself is quite clearly constructed to be antithetical to the gods and their realms:

Sál sá hón standa	sólo fiarri,	A hall she saw standing far from the sun,
Náströndo á,	norðr horfa dyrr;	on Corpse-strand; its doors look north;
fello eitrdropar	inn um líóra,	poison-drops fall in through the roof-vents,
sá er undinn salr	orma hryggjom.	the hall is woven of serpents' spines.
	(<i>Völuspá</i> 38) ¹⁰³	(Larrington) ¹⁰⁴

The place itself, presumably still located in *Niðavellir* or another underworldly realm, is far from the sun (*sólo fiarri*¹⁰⁵), has the doors oriented to the north, from where the sun cannot be seen,¹⁰⁶ is associated with death (*Náströnd*¹⁰⁷, 'corpse-beach'), has poison falling into its chimney (*fello eitrdropar / inn um líóra*¹⁰⁸) and is woven from serpent skin (*sá er undinn salr / orma hryggjom*¹⁰⁹). This is in contrast with both the halls described in *Vsp.* 37 and the description of the life of the *æsir* before the arrival of the *þursar meylar* in *Vsp.* 7-8,¹¹⁰ which are associated with gold, tools, and prosperity. While the halls in *Vsp.* 37 are associated with owners, the text does not give insight into who resides in said hall, though an association with *Hel* through the underworld and death seems at least somewhat plausible. *Gylfaginning* identifies the hall at *Náströnd* as one of the places where murderers and perjurers are punished after *ragnarök*, while *Vsp.* itself only identifies *Gimlé* as such a

¹⁰¹ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 294-96, 98-300.

¹⁰² Cf. *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁰⁴ "The Poetic Edda," 8.

¹⁰⁵ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 304.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 115-22.

place.¹¹¹ The punishment referred to in *Gylfaginning* is mentioned in *Vsp.* 39, but Snorri places *Niðhoggr* in *Hvergelmir*.¹¹² We can see a deliberate construction of this underworld as dangerous and torturous, with this part belonging to dead. This may be a different conception than that of the part of the underworld associated with *iqtnar* (and *dvergar*?¹¹³), with both places associated with opposition to the *æsir* but distinct from each other. The description of acts which result in one's placement into this hall at *Náströnd* offer a view of particularly impermissible behaviour – murder and perjury –, which can point towards a moral framework along which social monstrosity could be constructed.

Vsp. 40 further strengthens the negative depiction of the *þursar* if we understand *austr*¹¹⁴ to allude to the general literary association of the giants with the East,¹¹⁵ and therefore the *in aldna* to be a *þurs*. Since she is raising “Fenrir’s children” (*Fenris kindir*)¹¹⁶ – which here seems to refer to *Sköll* and *Háti*, the wolves said to swallow sun and moon at *ragnarök*¹¹⁷ – she is actively participating in the destruction of the world and thus in extreme opposition to the gods. Additionally, *Vsp.* 40 contains one of very few uses of the word *troll*, which is frequently used in the *Íslendingasögur* to refer to a host of different, monstrous characteristics,¹¹⁸ here being directly attributed to the consumption of the celestial bodies. The nuance of *í trollz hamr*¹¹⁹ (“in a troll’s form”)¹²⁰ seems to imply both a physical transformation in conjunction with the antagonistic act, as well a certain physical appearance to be associated with the word *troll*, though this is not elaborated further. *Vsp.* 41 further elaborates on this apocalyptic wolf, describing him as devouring either the dead, or those destined to

¹¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 304-05.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 305.

¹¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 298-302.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 317; Ármann Jakobsson, “Where Do the Giants Live?,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 121 (2006).

¹¹⁶ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 315.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 315-17.

¹¹⁸ For an extended discussion cf. Ármann Jakobsson, “The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch.”

¹¹⁹ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 315.

¹²⁰ Cf. “hamr,” in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, ed. Richard Cleasby, Guðbrandur Vigfússon, and George Webbe Dasent (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874).

die, reddening, meaning likely covering in blood, the seats of the gods.¹²¹ Seemingly because of this clearly monstrous action – M^{Cat} 1, 2a, 4bv are clearly fulfilled – the sun turns black, and the weather becomes dangerous, reinforcing the disruption caused by this violation.

The text conceptualises the end of the world through imagining societal depravity, similar to the description of the biblical Revelations. This points to conceptions of a causal relationship between moral decay and the doom (and subsequent rebirth) of the godly creation, though the direction of this implied causality is not clear. Reading the text chronologically seems to imply the behaviour being partly to blame for *ragnarøk*, since it stands at the beginning, but the text alone cannot clear this uncertainty up.¹²² In any case, this causal link infers a monstrous aspect to the behaviour deemed morally depraved, since they indirectly disrupt creation – and thus fulfil M^{Cat} 2a. In *Vsp.* 45, the text spells this out as such:

Brœðr muno beriaz muno systrungar hart er í heimi skeggöld, skálmöld, vindöld, vargöld, mun engi maðr	ok at þonum verða, sifiom spilla; hórdómr mikill, - skildir ro klofnir - áðr veröld steypiz; qðrom þyrma. (<i>Völuspá</i> 45) ¹²³	Brother will fight brother and be his slayer, sister's sons will violate the kinship-bond; hard it is in the world, whoredom abounds, axe-age, sword-age, shields are cleft asunder, wind-age, wolf-age, before the world plunges headlong; no man will spare another. (Larrington) ¹²⁴
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Here, we can see two main components of societal decline as imagined by the creator of the text: Sexual deviance (in this case *hórdómr mikill*¹²⁵ ('great whoredom') and incest) and kin slaying. The way the verse presents these acts seems to imply that these acts exemplify the extremes of abhorrent behaviour and thus represent clear monstrous action (M^{Cat} 2). This quality then remains unassigned to any character or group of characters, but rather seems to judge humanity in general be sinful in this future time. This is, again, reminiscent of Christian eschatological myths, with the sinful

¹²¹ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 322.

¹²² Cf. Ibid., 341-43.

¹²³ Ibid., 341.

¹²⁴ "The Poetic Edda," 9.

¹²⁵ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 341.

remaining on a hell-on-earth and the faithful being sent to the bliss of heaven – a biblical influence on the text here seems likely.

In *Vsp.* 50 and 51, the text tells of Loki and the *Muspellz* [...] *lýðir*¹²⁶ ('people of *Muspell*')¹²⁷ taking the ship *naglfar* to sail from the east to wage war against the gods.¹²⁸ *Vsp.* 52 mentions Surtr coming from the south, *gífr*¹²⁹ ('witches')¹³⁰ walking around, men 'walking the *helveg[r]*'¹³¹ – likely meaning dying, or, as some have suggested, returning from *hel* to fight against the gods – and the sky being split. The latter harkens back to the primordial elements of creation and thus points to the extreme, cataclysmic events taking place, as von See et al. note. This 'un-making' of the god's creation being either committed or simply used by the previously mentioned actants cements their role as the ultimate evil. While it remains somewhat unclear if the *Muspellz lýðir* and Surtr can be counted among the *iqtnar/pursar*, they and Loki seem to fulfil their role as the primary antagonists of the gods and, thus, of creation and order itself. They are both associated with destruction and death, as well as with magic – note the roaming *gífr!* – and are thus otherized to an extreme degree; seemingly presenting the greatest degree of monstrosity (MCat 2a).

Monsters stand the focal point of the final battle of the gods: Surtr fights *bani Belia* ("Belia's bane")¹³² - it remains unclear which god is meant here¹³³ -, Óðinn fights the wolf – presumably Fenrir or his offspring,¹³⁴ and Þórr slays the *Miðgarðsormr*, with Óðinn and Þórr perishing.¹³⁵

Ultimately, it can be shown that the concept of monstrosity is central to much of *Vsp.*'s narrative, with the central components of the monstrosity being opposition to the order created by the gods,

¹²⁶ Ibid., 368.

¹²⁷ Cf. "lýðr sb. m.," in *ONP Online*.

¹²⁸ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 368.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 380.

¹³⁰ Cf. "gífr," in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*.

¹³¹ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 380.

¹³² Ibid., 388.

¹³³ Cf. Ibid., 391-92.

¹³⁴ Cf. Ibid., 388-89.

¹³⁵ Cf. Ibid., 388, 94, 96.

hostile actions against the gods and association with death (MFCat 2). It is certainly noteworthy that the text is very minimally interested in physical descriptions, neither the gods, the *igtmar/pursar* or the *dvergar* are described in their appearance, apart from very broad adjectives like *biartr*¹³⁶, with the categories mainly being differentiated through their relationships with each other. It will likely remain impossible to ascertain if this is the result of very close physical conceptions between these groups – or even ancestral relationships between the *asir* and *igtmar* – or if the creator of the text assumed concrete images of these groups being present in the recipient. The world of *Vsp.* is also spatially constructed in a way that clearly groups its inhabitants along axes of monstrosity: The gods sitting on top and living in the light, and the monsters relegated to below the earth. What can be said, though, is that the text is barely concerned with inherent monstrosity – only animalistic corporeal monstrosity is made explicit in the case of Fenrir and his kin and the *Miðgarðsormr* – and generally reinforces monstrosity through social and spatial qualifications of the monsters present, which are mainly the *pursar*, Loki, and his offspring.

Looking at my research questions, we can both confirm similarities in the construction and usage of monsters in *Vsp.* and *Đkv.*, as both texts deal with giants opposing the gods and construct their monstrosity in similar, socially assigned ways. *Vsp.* deepens this concept by introducing eschatological elements and thus higher narrative stakes.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 388.

III.4. Vǫluspá hin skamma

While *Vǫluspá hin skamma* shares its name with *Vǫsp.* in modern usage, its overlap with the more famous text is certainly limited. The poem is only preserved as part of so-called *Hyndluljóð* today, with a singular verse also being quoted by Snorri Sturluson in his so-called ‘Prose Edda.’¹³⁷ As it is preserved today, the poem mainly seeks to explain the origin of various mythological characters and types of people or creatures. It offers no narrative, and, as such, its invocation of monstrosity differs from that of its ‘relative’, *Vǫsp. Vsk.* uses monstrosity mainly as form of delineation: It identifies the gods and their adversaries and makes clear that said adversaries are monstrous and repulsive. This could potentially aid a narrative framework, but the text does not reach this point. This exploration of the origins of certain beings or classes of people is similarly explored in *Rígsþula*, *Alvíssmál* and *Vafþrúðnismál*.¹³⁸

The first clear example of such intention is presented in *Vsk. 5*:¹³⁹

Ero vǫlor allar	frá Viðólfi,	All the seeresses are descended from Vidolf,
vitkar allir	frá Vildmeiði,	all the wizards from Vilmeid,
[en] ⟨seið⟩berendr	frá Svarthofða,	and the <i>seið</i> -practisers from Svarthofdi,
iǫtnar allir	frá Ymi komnir.	all the giants come from Ymir.
	(<i>Hlj. 33/ Vsk. 5</i>) ¹⁴⁰	(Larrington) ¹⁴¹

While alleged ancestor of the various magic users mentioned here do not seem to refer to known characters,¹⁴² the ancestor is identified as Ýmir; paralleling *Vǫsp.* The placement of both *iǫtnar* and those associated with forms of magic here implies a connection between both types of monsters – inherent and social (MCat 4b, 1). The structure of the poem here creates a clear dichotomy: Two verses – *Vsk. 1* and *2* – about the *æsir* are followed by a quick interjection – *Vsk. 3* – and then two

¹³⁷ Cf. Klaus von See et al., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda Bd. 3 Götterlieder: (Vǫlundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Baldrs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasǫngur)* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000), 773.

¹³⁸ Cf. Ibid.; von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*.

¹³⁹ *Hlj. 33. Vsk.* begins at verse 29, thus the numbering in this chapter. Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar III*, 773.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ "The Poetic Edda," 249.

¹⁴² Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar III*, 786-87.

verses (partly) about giants.¹⁴³ The following section is constructed very similarly: An interjection followed by the description of a powerful, divine being – an unnamed god¹⁴⁴ – by nine mothers, followed by an interjection and a description of Loki bearing a wolf – probably Fenrisúlfr –, Sleipnir and every *flagð* ('evil being, witch, monstrous female [being]'):¹⁴⁵

Ól úlf Loki en Sleipni eitt þótti skars þat var bróður frá	við Angrboða, við Svaðilfara; allra feiknast, Býleizt komit. (<i>Hlj.</i> 40 / <i>Vsk.</i> 12) ¹⁴⁶	Loki got the wolf on Angrboda, and he conceived Sleipnir by Svadilfari; one witch seemed the most sinister of all, she was descended from Byleist's brother. (Larrington) ¹⁴⁸
Loki [át] af hiarta fann hann hálfsviðinn varð Loptr kviðugr þaðan er á foldo	lindi brendo, hugstein ko(n)o; af kono illri; flagð hvert komit. (<i>Hlj.</i> 41 / <i>Vsk.</i> 13) ¹⁴⁷	Loki ate some heart, roasted on a linden-wood fire a woman's thought-stone, that he found half-singed; Lopt was impregnated by a wicked woman, from whom every ogress on earth is descended. (Larrington) ¹⁴⁹

The text thus contrasts the birth of a divine being with the birth of beings associated with the end of the world and female deviance. The depiction of Loki as a gender-bending deviant mirrors both *Lks.* and *Vsp.* Here, he is even 'elevated' to the primary ancestor of all female deviants. Interestingly, the text 'degrades' Loki here so much, that the role of ancestor is only directly attributed to the *kon[a] ill* and describes the woman as impregnating him – thus completely reversing the gender roles, both socially and sexually. The text then ends with a short description of *ragnarøk*, directly implying that this deviance is monstrous enough to cause the end of the world.

In summary, *Vsk.* offers a condensed version of *Vsp.*, and this is reflected in its usage of monstrosity as tool to delineate the good and divine from the evil and unnatural. It groups inherent and social

¹⁴³ *Vsk.* 4 does not directly reference giants in name, but as von See et al. point out, the name *Hrímnir* is used exclusively for giants in Old Norse literature. Cf. *Ibid.*, 784.

¹⁴⁴ Snorri cites a supposed *Heimdallargaldr* in his *Gylfagynning*, in which Heimdallr claims to be born of nine mothers, paralleling this section. If the quote is authentic, this would make the god's identity here also likely Heimdallr. Cf. *Ibid.*, 789.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. "flagð *sb. n.*," in *ONP Online*; von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar III*, 806-07.

¹⁴⁶ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar III*, 799.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 803.

¹⁴⁸ "The Poetic Edda," 250.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

monstrosity and seems to not differentiate between these categories internally – a monster is a monster because it opposes the gods, no matter how that opposition manifests. Functionally, their monstrosity exists entirely for this reason, since their monstrosity seemingly causes *ragnarok*, which can be understood as the conclusion to the broader mythological narrative (MFCat 2).

Regarding my research questions, *Vsk.*'s shorted form and formulaic construction offers clear confirmation of a blending of the mental conception behind monstrosity as its clear grouping of social and inherent monsters together against the gods confirms that the functionality of these monsters is not dependent on their nature.

III.5. Hymiskviða

Hymiskviða offers a complex construction of monstrosity, which blends both social and inherent monstrosity (MCat 1, 2a, 4bii,iv). Many researchers have read the text as being constructed from several underlying myths¹⁵⁰ and this is also reflected in the monsters that are used throughout the narrative. Primarily, the text follows Þórr and Týr's travels to claim a gigantic kettle from the giant Hymir, which leads to Þórr accidentally fishing up the *Miðgarðsormr* and slaying Hymir to take the kettle. As with several other texts analysed here, the primary function of the monstrosity use throughout is presenting a sufficiently strong antagonist to match Þórr's strength (MFCat 2).

The primary antagonist of the text is the titular Hymir, whom Týr describes thusly:

Býr fyr austan hundvíss Hymir, á minn faðir, rúmbrugðinn hver,	Élivága at himins enda; móðugr, ketil, rastar díúpan. (<i>Hym.</i> 5) ¹⁵¹	To the east of Elivagar, lives Hymir the very wise, at the sky's end; my father, the brave man, owns a cauldron, a capacious kettle, a league deep. (Larrington) ¹⁵²
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This initial characterisation seems somewhat positive, as Hymir is both described as *hundvíss* ('very wise')¹⁵³ and *móðugr* ('brave').¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Hymir is described as *móðugr* and *mærr* ('famous')¹⁵⁵ in *Hym.* 21, where he catches whales.¹⁵⁶ This is certainly not an irregular description of a powerful *íqunn*,¹⁵⁷ and likely both follows literary conventions and serves the previously mentioned purpose of creating a fitting antagonist that both clever and powerful – which implies Þórr to be even more clever and powerful, since he is able to best the giant. Another recurring motif in this description is physical location of Hymir [...] *fyr austan Élivágar at himins enda* ('at the sky's end'),¹⁵⁸ which aligns

¹⁵⁰ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 259-69.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁵² "The Poetic Edda," 75.

¹⁵³ Cf. "hund-víss," in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. "móðugr," in *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquae Linguae Septentrionalis*.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. "mærr *adj.*," in *ONP Online*.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 320.

¹⁵⁷ As Cleasby and Guðbrandur point out, the adjective 'hundvíss' is often used in direct reference to *íqtnar*. Generally, several such character are described as wise in some way. Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar I*, 1000.

¹⁵⁸ "The Poetic Edda," 75.

with contemporary sources placing giants often in the North and East – though not exclusively, as Ármann Jakobsson shows in his 2006 article “Where Do the Giants Live?”.¹⁵⁹ This liminal placement adds a certain level of otherization to the characterisation here, since Hymir’s hall is presumably far away from the rest of the realm of the gods.¹⁶⁰

After the protagonists arrive at Hymir’s hall, the characterisation of Hymir becomes conclusively negative. This is first expressed through the description of his mother who is described as Týr’s grandmother:

Mogr fann qmmo, hafði hqfða En qnnor gekk, brúnhvít, bera	miqk leiða sér, hundruð nío. alfullin, fram, biórveig syni: (<i>Hym.</i> 8) ¹⁶¹	The lad found his grandmother, very ugly she seemed to him, nine hundred heads she had; and another woman, all gold-decked, walked forward with shining brows, bearing beer to her boy. (Larrington) ¹⁶²
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Here, the text presents an interesting dichotomy, which von See et al. and John McKinnell identify as two clashing tropes: The old, ugly giantess and the young, beautiful giantess.¹⁶³ The grandmother, meaning Hymir’s mother, is his direct ancestor and thus directly informs his characterisation, whereas his wife does not seem to be blood relative and is thus less relevant for his own characterisation. The text might invoke her beauty here to ensure Týr’s characterisation does not suffer too much from that of his father, but this is left rather unclear. Hymir’s mother is certainly monstrous (MCat 4biv), as she has *hqfða hundruð nío* (‘nine hundred (of) heads’) – which is certainly physically deviant and appears in several texts as a feature of giants¹⁶⁴ – and is *miqk leið* (‘very

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Jakobsson, “Where Do the Giants Live?,” 101-12.

¹⁶⁰ We can interpolate from *Hym.* 7 that this place is understood to be at least a day’s (fast) travel away from Ásgarðr, which strengthens this reading. Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 290-91.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 292.

¹⁶² “The Poetic Edda,” 75.

¹⁶³ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 292.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Ibid.

disgusting’)¹⁶⁵ to even her own grandson.¹⁶⁶ This negative characterisation based on physical deviance is also applied to Hymir himself in *Hym.* 10.¹⁶⁷

Hymir is presented as both anti-social and very powerful, starting in *Hym.* 12 with his reaction to his wife introducing the newly arrived guests:

<p>‘Séðu, hvar sitia svá forða sér, Sundr stökk súla enn áðr í tvau</p>	<p>und salar gafli, stendr súl fyrir.’ fyr sión iqtuns, áss brotnaði. (<i>Hym.</i> 12)¹⁶⁸</p>	<p>‘See where they sit under hall-gable, they protect themselves so with a pillar in front of them.’ Asunder the pillar splintered at the giant’s gaze, just before the cross-beam broke in two. (Larrington)¹⁶⁹</p>
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Here, his power is strong and frightening enough that even Þórr has to cower behind a pillar, and even that splits apart at his mere gaze. Association of the gaze with sorcery is certainly present in Old Norse literature, which supports a reading of this verse as showing Hymir’s capability to use magic – in turn supporting a socially-monstrous reading.¹⁷⁰ He is also implied to be an anti-social, anti-*æsir* force through this verse, since he invokes this power unprovoked against guests who are *æsir*, one of which being his own son. In *Hym.* 13, the text even describes one of the guests, presumably Þórr, as his *annskoti* (‘enemy’);¹⁷¹ directly spelling out the intention behind the narrative construction at play here. Interestingly, the text seems very uninterested in further exploring this dynamic, since most interactions between Þórr and Hymir described hereafter are mildly rude at best, until Þórr leaves the

¹⁶⁵ Cf. "leiðr *adj.*," in *ONP Online*.

¹⁶⁶ The grammatical construction *Moggr fann qmmo miok leiða sér*, directly translated, means: “The lad found the grandmother very disgusting.” Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 292.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 296.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁶⁹ “The Poetic Edda,” 75.

¹⁷⁰ Leszek Gardęła argues that the prominence of beheading in Old Norse literature connected with supernatural beings and in archaeological evidence points towards a cultural fear of the power of the gaze of supernatural being. See also the powerful gaze of the sorcerer Stígandi in *Laxdœla saga*. Cf. *Laxdœla saga*, ch. 37, 38; Leszek Gardęła, “The Headless Norsemen : Decapitation in Viking Age Scandinavia,” in *The Head Motif in Past Societies in a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Leszek Gardęła and Kamil Kajkowski (Bytów: Muzeum Zachodniokaszubskie w Bytowie, 2013), 96-101; von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 304.

¹⁷¹ Cf. “andskoti *sb. m.*,” in *ONP Online*.

hall after having struck Hymir with his goblet. *Hym.* 35 describes Hymir marching after the gods with army of many-headed giants.¹⁷²

Unconnected to Hymir himself, the text lets Þórr face another monster, even if very briefly: During a fishing trip the two opponents undertake together, Þórr fishes up *Iqrmungandr*, the world-serpent:

Egndi á ǫngul, orms einbani, gein við ǫngli, umgiqrð neðan	sá er ǫldom bergr, uxa hǫfði; sú er goð fiá, allra landa. (<i>Hym.</i> 22) ¹⁷³	The protector of humans, the serpent's sole slayer, baited his hook with the ox's head. The one whom the gods hate, the All-Lands-Girdler from below gaped wide over the hook. (Larrington) ¹⁷⁵
Dró diarfliga orm eitrfán hamri kníði ofliótt, ofan	dáðrakkr Þórr upp at borði; háfiáll skarar, úlfs hnitbróður. (<i>Hym.</i> 23) ¹⁷⁴	Then very bravely Thor, doer of great deeds, pulled the poison-gleaming serpent up on board. With his hammer he violently struck, from above the hideous one, the wolf's intimate-brother's head. (Larrington) ¹⁷⁶

Again, the text uses this monster to antagonize Þórr and simultaneously to demonstrate his heroic qualities. The serpent itself is characterised as monstrous through both its poison breath (MCat 4biv) and its identity as *sú er goð fiá* ('the one whom the gods hate')¹⁷⁷ (MCat 2a). Since Loki is described as the father of the serpent in several texts, perhaps *Hym.* 37 can be read as connecting to this short bout with the serpent, which otherwise seems more like a deus-ex-machina.¹⁷⁸

Overall, *Hym.* offers clear evidence of a mental connection between social and inherent monstrosity – the presence of a monstrous body seems to indicate the presence of monstrous mind. It also offers a good example of one of the primary uses of monsters within this corpus: A strong and frightful opponent for the divine protagonist to overcome. Viewing this in the context of the questions I

¹⁷² *Hym.* 36 likely describes Þórr killing these giants, though there are discussion about the correct reading of that verse. Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 349, 51, 52.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹⁷⁵ "The Poetic Edda," 77.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 352-57.

posed at the beginning of this thesis, this not only shows that *Vsk.* combinatory approach to inherent and social monstrosity exists across texts but also that this is done for very similar reasons.

III.6. Skírnismál

Skírnismál is a particularly relevant text to this analysis, since it shows a version of mythological conceptions in which the concepts of *iqtunn* and *þurs* are not merged, as they have in other texts analysed in this thesis. Generally, it will be shown that the *iqtnar* and *þursar* are not only differentiated but have different functions in the world presented by this specific text. There has been much speculation as to why this merger is present in most texts but is not in this text and few others. Terry Gunnell favours the age of the underlying matter as his argument, arguing that *Skm.* is either an older text – which Daniel Sävborg convincingly argues against¹⁷⁹ – or is based on older material and is thus an argument that differentiation is an older conception that gradually changed over time to conflate *iqtnar* and *þursar*.¹⁸⁰ Scepticism of this view is certainly warranted, since the dating of the eddic poems and their proven (and alleged) sources alone presents an enormous problem which the field still has not solved.¹⁸¹ No matter the reasons for this non-present merger of the *iqtnar* and the *þursar*, I will show in the following that the function of the *þursar* as monsters in this text does not seem equivalent to the monstrous nature of the *iqtnar/þursar* of the previously analysed poems.

From the beginning, the text shows clear distinctions in the conceptions of the *iqtnar* and *þursar*, which constructs only one group – the *þursar* – as clearly monstrous -, while the *iqtnar* remain ambiguously otherized. The text opens with Freyr being described as sitting on *Hliðskiálf*, a throne overlooking *heima[r] alla[r]*¹⁸² ('all worlds'), and falling in love with a *mey fagra*¹⁸³ ('fair maiden') living in *Iqtunheimr*.¹⁸⁴ The prose prologue initially doubles the prose prologue in *Gímnismál*, as

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Daniel Sävborg, "Love among gods and men : Skírnismál and its tradition," in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives : Origin, changes, and interactions*, ed. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006).

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¹⁸¹ Dating eddic poetry, Larrington (Ed)

¹⁸² von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 66.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid.

von See et al. point out: *Óðinn ok Frigg sátu í Hliðskjálfu ok sá um heima alla*.¹⁸⁵ *Hliðskjálf* itself is usually associated with *Óðinn* but an assumption of Freyr improperly taking possession or similarly behaving outside of his station is not necessary since one could very well assume differing narrative traditions placing different gods at the head of the ‘pantheon’.¹⁸⁶ The prologue thus immediately clarifies that the *iǫtnar* are likely not understood as monsters in this text, since Freyr, a *vanr* and, thus, a god, can fall in love with a female *iǫtunn* who is described as beautiful. They are nonetheless somewhat otherized through the implied distance between *Jǫtunheimr* and the realms of the gods – both through the necessity of using *Hliðskjálf* and Freyr’s immediate reaction being sorrow rather than traveling to the maiden. Freyr is described as sorrowful – with the implication being that the absence of that maiden in his life – which causes Niǫrðr to send Skírnir, a servant, to talk to Freyr. Skaði then speaks in *Skm.* 1.¹⁸⁷ Freyr explains the reason for his sorrow to Skírnir, during which he makes an interesting delineation: In *Skm.* 7, he mentions that he wants the maiden more than all others, specifically *en mann[i] hveim, / <u>ngom, í árdaga; / ása ok álfa* [.]¹⁸⁸ Setting aside the grammatical problems discussed by von See et al.,¹⁸⁹ the phrasing *ása ok álfa* seems peculiar. Not only does he not mention the *vanir*, but he also omits the *iǫtnar*. Interpreting this phrasing is difficult since it could potentially point towards a general, previous reluctance on Freyr’s part to find mates among his own kin and the somewhat otherized *iǫtnar*. As von See et al. point out though, *ása ok álfa* is not only a reoccurring phrase in other poems, but it also contains two initial staves. This could mean the omission occurred not for narrative but instead for metric reasons. Nonetheless, it strengthens the reading of the *iǫtnar* as non-monstrous since they are capable of being more beautiful

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. (“Odin and Frigg sat in Hliðskjálf and looked into all the worlds.”, “The Poetic Edda,” 48.)

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Terry Gunnell, “Pantheon? What Pantheon? Concepts of a Family of Gods in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions,” *Scripta Islandica* 66 (2015): 55-76.

¹⁸⁷ There has been debate about who is supposed to be the speaker of *Skm.* 1 since according to other preserved texts Skaði is not the mother of Freyr, but, as von See et al. point out, there might be numerous reasons why the creator of the text might have chosen her to speak as his mother here. Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 69.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 78. (“[...] than any girl to any young man, in bygone days, of all the gods and elves, [...]”, “The Poetic Edda,” 58.)

¹⁸⁹ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 78.

than even the *æsir* and *álfar*. Seemingly, this general appreciation for the ‘form’ of the *iǫtnar* does not imply too great a kinship between the groups: Skírnir responds to his lord’s request as follows:

<p>Mar gefðu mér þá myrkvan beri, vísan vafrloga, ok þat sverð, við iǫtna ætt.</p>	<p>þann er mik um er síálft vegiz (<i>Skírnismál</i> 8)¹⁹⁰</p>	<p>Give me that horse which will carry me through the knowing, dark flickering flame, and that sword which will fight by itself if he who wields it is wise. (Larrington)¹⁹¹</p>
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Two elements are of note here: Firstly, the text establishes a spatial separation between the realm of the gods and Iǫtunheimr with the *vafrlog[i]*¹⁹² (‘flickering fire’)¹⁹³ that goes beyond mere physical distance. The motif of the *vafrlogi* comes up in several Old Norse texts, specifically *Svipdagsmál*, *Vǫlsunga saga* and *Skáldskaparmál*, Old English texts and the Old High German Siegfried-matter, though, as von See et al. elaborates, the motif itself seems to be at least as old as Antiquity and is not properly traceable.¹⁹⁴ Many of these previous uses of the motif similarly separate regions with the barrier often separating the world of living from the afterlife, while the Old Norse examples otherwise exclusively use the *vafrlogi* as a peril separating the hero from the ‘damsel in distress’.¹⁹⁵ The usage of the motif here seems to combine these ideas, with the barrier both serving as a clear demarcation of the boundaries of the gods’ power and as the barrier to be crossed with a horse – like in *Vǫlsunga saga* and *Svipdagsmál* – to reach the female object of desire.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, Skírnir asks for a sword to fight the *iǫtnar* with which fights on its own. The text otherizes the *iǫtnar* further through these elements since they live clearly outside of the godly domain and require Skírnir fighting them. It is somewhat unclear if the *þursar* already are mentioned in the text in contrast to the *iǫtnar* in the first part of the poem. The problem lies in a difference between two primary versions of the text, often

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 79.

¹⁹¹ "The Poetic Edda," 58.

¹⁹² von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 79.

¹⁹³ Cf. "vafr-logi," in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 80-82.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid.

referenced as **R** and **A** (*Codex Regius* [GKS 2465 4^{to}] and AM 748 I a 4^{to})¹⁹⁷, with **A** rendering *Skm.*

10 as follows:

Myrkt er úti, úrig fiqll yfir, þ(urs)a þjóð yfir; báðir vit komomk, sá inn ámátki iqtunn.	mál kveð ek okr fara eða okr báða tekr (<i>Skm.</i> 10, A) ¹⁹⁸	It is dark outside, I declare it's time for us to go over the dewy mountain, through giant realms; we'll get both get there or the all-powerful giant will seize us both. (Larrington) ¹⁹⁹
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As von See et al. elaborate, 10⁴ is rendered differently in **R** (*þyria þjóð yfir*).²⁰⁰ Von See et al. see **A** as the more sensible version, citing syntax and metre as well as unclarity, since in **R**, it remains unclear who the *þjóð* ('people') refers to (*fara* [...] *þyria þjóð yfir* ["travel [...] through the people"] versus *fara* [...] *þvrsa þjóð yfir* ["travel [...] through the giant²⁰¹-folk"]).²⁰² Additionally, this verse is the only verse in which the text seems to perhaps conflate *iqtnar* and *þvrsar*. This is only the case for the variant presented in **A**. There, *Skírnir* describes the perilous journey as going through the *þvrsar*'s (land), but also fears being taken by the 'all-powerful *iqtunn*' should they not reach their destination. There is seemingly no way to decide what the intended meaning is here, so, whether the text conflates the *þvrsar* and *iqtnar* for a single verse or if these represent separate threats.

The clear delineation between *þvrsar* and *iqtnar* is made exclusively by *Skírnir* in his threats against *Gerðr*, after she refuses to be with *Freyr*, disregarding both the gifts and death threats brought by

¹⁹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5,9,47.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁹⁹ "The Poetic Edda," 59.

²⁰⁰ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 85-86.

²⁰¹ Translating *þvrs* in this passage is particularly challenging, since translating both *iqtunn* and *þvrs* as giant misses the general presence of the lack of a merger between those two categories within this text, but choosing a translation like 'ogre,' as Carolyne Larrington does for later verses, ignores the fact that in this particular verse the split might not be present. I have chosen to align with Larrington here, choosing to translate *þvrs* as giant only in this verse – to reflect the uncertainty about the absence of the merger – and ogre as the general translation for later verses. Cf. "The Poetic Edda," 59-63.

²⁰² Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 85-86.

Skírnir.²⁰³ He threatens to use magic to make her a slave to the (hrim-)þursar, who are described as corporeally deviant (MCat 4biv):

Með þursi þríhöfðoðom eða verlaus vera; þi(k) geð grípi, ver þú sem þistill í önn ofanverða.	þú skalt æ nara, þik morn morni! sá er var þrunginn (Skm. 31) ²⁰⁴	With a three-headed ogre you shall linger out your life, or else be without a man! May your spirit be seized! May pining waste you away! Be like the thistle which is crushed at the end of the harvest! (Larrington) ²⁰⁵
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This description serves to strongly otherize the þursar in two ways. Firstly, they are clearly differentiated from the normative ‘human’ through physical alterity (þríhöfð[a]ð[ir] [“three-headed”]). This is then marked as clearly monstrous through the second component of their otherization: Explicit ‘non-humanity’ (MFCat 2). Skírnir curses Gerðr to be with this physically monstrous þurs, but still states her to be *verlaus* (‘without a man’), which clearly separates þursar from ‘humans’. Here we can clearly see the difference in construction (and conception) between *iqtnar* and þursar as made by the text: While the *iqtnar* are certainly otherized, as shown previously, and even dangerous at times, the text still uses one of them as a love interest for a god based solely on appearance and does not explicitly condemn them in any way. The (hrim)-þursar in contrast are clearly used as monstrous others: They are both physically deviant and marked as clearly separate from ‘humans’ in category.

The context in which this distinction is made should give us pause when trying to ascertain markers of monstrosity: Skírnir’s behaviour during his so-called *galdr*-speech amounts to a rape threat – if not directly through himself, rape by the þursar seems to be the implication. We know from both contemporary literary and legal sources that rape was certainly viewed as a heinous offence,²⁰⁶ even if

²⁰³ Cf. Ibid., 100-05.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 118.

²⁰⁵ "The Poetic Edda," 62.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, eds., *Laws of early Iceland: Grágás: the Codex Regius of Grágás with material from other manuscripts*: 2, vol. 5, University of Manitoba Icelandic studies (Winnipeg, Man: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), 69.

our modern definition of what constitutes ‘non-consent’ is certainly different from people’s definition at that time, as Merkelbach points out.²⁰⁷ The text makes no attempts to hide this very explicitly sexual theme in his threat, for example the magic wand he threatens to use against her is described as such: *Til holtz ek gekk / ok til hrás viðar, / gambantein at geta, / gambantein ek gat.* (*Skm.* 32)²⁰⁸ As evidenced by the peculiar phrasing of *hrá[r] við[r]* (‘sap-rich tree’),²⁰⁹ the wand symbolically (or perhaps literally?) is a phallus. These phallic themes are certainly also present with Skírnir’s special sword. His threats against her have clear sexual connotations,²¹⁰ and Freyr’s question in *Skm.* 40, at the end of the poem, whether Skírnir had achieved “[his] desire or [Freyr’s]”²¹¹ directly implies that Skírnir had hoped she would refuse in order to have a “reason” to rape her. The problem now arises if we try to ascertain whether the text views this behaviour as monstrous, or as a despicable act at the very least, or if this is judged to be appropriate or at least tolerable behaviour. From our modern perspective his behaviour certainly amounts to sexual exploitation or maybe human trafficking, but the text itself does not give us enough information to ascertain what judgement the text expects from a recipient. While Gerðr herself asserts her wish to not be coerced before Skírnir starts his curse,²¹² she barely reacts to the curse other than accepting her fate.²¹³ The style of the poem itself would allow for the narrator offer any judgement or pushback against Skírnir, especially in the prose section after *Skm.* 39.²¹⁴ Since we can only guess at the judgement a contemporary recipient would have passed – which certainly would not have been uniform between different groups – we will have to be satisfied with classifying this portrayal as ambiguous.

In summary, while the titular character of *Skm.* remains ambiguously characterised and cannot be counted as monstrous, he uses monsters, namely the *pursar*, to use as a violent and sexual threat

²⁰⁷ Cf. Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland*, 110-15.

²⁰⁸ von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 126. (“I went to the forest, to the sap-rich tree, to get a magic twig; a magic twig I got,” “The Poetic Edda,” 62.)

²⁰⁹ Cf. “The Poetic Edda,” 62.

²¹⁰ Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 107, 14-18.

²¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 146. “The Poetic Edda,” 64.

²¹² Cf. von See et al., *Edda-Kommentar II*, 105.

²¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 138.

²¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 146.

against his adversaries (MCat 2, 4biv). Their monstrosity is clearly anchored in physical monstrosity, which sets this text apart from previously analysed texts in the *Eddukvæði*, both in differentiating *þursar* and *iqtnar* and using physical descriptions as part of a monstrous characterisation.

This observation is particularly interesting when reflecting on my research questions, as this offers a clearly focused example of a construction of monstrosity based in physical alterities and a perhaps more familiar ‘body horror’, which had not been present in other texts thus far. Still, this text offers yet another example for the connection of social and inherent monstrosity and strengthens the argument for the presence a common conception across these texts.

III.7. Helgakviða Hundingsbana I (Völsungakviða) and Helgakviða Hiǫrvarðssonar

For the following analysis, I am grouping two texts together which, in addition to *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, which does not feature monsters, are often referred to as the *Helgi lays* or *Helgi poems*.²¹⁵ While the *hundredsbani*-poems tell of the same characters and roughly the same events, *Hks.* acts like a doublet, as Larrington notes.²¹⁶ The story of Helgi is also part of other Old Norse texts, such as *Völsunga saga* and *Nornagests þáttur*, as well as the Latin chronicle *Gesta Danorum*.²¹⁷ As I will show, both texts analysed here use invocations of monstrosity in very similar ways during verbal fights (MFCat 1), similar to the usage in *Lks.*

Both texts include monstrosity only through accusations made in verbal fights between two characters. In *Hkb.*, this is a dispute between Guðmundr, whose identity is not mentioned in the text itself,²¹⁸ and Sinfiotli/Sinfiöll, Helgi's brother.²¹⁹ They meet in battle and, throughout their fight, reveal that they have known each other for a long time. Their usage of monstrosity as a way to dehumanize their opponent falls very clearly into MFCat 1, with the accusations on both sides existing only within the limits of the conflict itself, having no effect on previous or following passages of the text. Since no other part of the text includes these characteristics for either character, we can assume them to be rhetorical strategy and not reflective of actual characteristics of either Guðmundr or Sinfiotli. The fight itself spans *Hkb.* 32–44, with both participants exchanging insults, which can be broadly split in two underlying accusations: *ergi* and *vargr*.

²¹⁵ For further reading cf. Heinz Klingenberg, "Helgi Poems," in *Medieval Scandinavia : an encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano et al. (1993).

²¹⁶ Cf. "The Poetic Edda," 119.

²¹⁷ Cf. Klaus von See, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda Bd. 4 Heldenlieder : Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, Helgakviða Hiǫrvarðssonar, Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004), 114-33.

²¹⁸ As von See et al. point out, Guðmundr's identity is stated in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, but *Hkb.* does not feature any introduction or explanation for whom Sinfiotli is fighting with in this passage. The section itself is a non-sequitur, which lends itself to the assumption that the compiler of *Codex Regius* only had access to fragmentary version of the poem. *Hkb. II* explicitly mentions a source, *Völsungakviða in forna*, which is not extant in any known manuscripts today. Cf. *Ibid.*, 150-63, 277.

²¹⁹ Cf. *Hkb.* 8, *ibid.*, 201.

Firstly, they each accuse the other of being *ergi*, by insinuating that their opponent:

1. Lives as a woman
2. Is associated with the supernatural
3. Has partaken in passive (homosexual) sexual intercourse

These accusations are core examples for the literary understanding of *ergi*, with the failure to perform gender expectations and the assumption of “opposite” gender and sexual roles constituting one of the core aspects of the insult.²²⁰ Both characters use the accusations to insinuate the inhumanity of their respective opponent, since they fail to perform their societally assigned gender roles. The terms they use to insult each other also point to this desire to assign inhumanity in this context. Sinfiotli insults Guðmundr as follows:

<p>Þú vart vǫlva skollvís kona, kvaztu engi mann segg bryniaðan,</p>	<p>í Varinseyio, bartu skrök saman; eiga vilia, nema Sinfiotla! (<i>Hkb.</i> 37)²²¹</p>	<p>You were a sorceress on Varins-island, a deceitful woman, you made up slander; you said that you did not want to have any warrior in his armor except Sinfiotli. (Larrington)²²³</p>
<p>Þú vart in skœða, qtol, ámátlig, mundo einheriar svévís kona,</p>	<p>skass, valkyria, at Alfǫður; allir bariaz, um sakar þínar! (<i>Hkb.</i> 38)²²²</p>	<p>You were a harmful creature, a witch, a valkyrie, horrible, unnatural, with All-Father; all the Einheriar had to fight, headstrong woman, on your account. (Larrington)²²⁴</p>

He does not merely insult his opponent as a woman, he also uses terms that imply a connection to the supernatural. A *vǫlva* (“seeress”)²²⁵ would likely be assumed to use some form of magic, while a *valkyria* (“valkyrie”) can be classified as a mythological being entirely. The usage of the latter as condemnation is certainly interesting in the context of the work itself, since the love interest of the

²²⁰ Cf. Thoma, *Unmännlichkeit in den Isländersagas: Zur narrativen Funktion von ergi und níð*, 19-35.

²²¹ von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 290.

²²² Ibid., 293.

²²³ “The Poetic Edda,” 115.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Cf. “vǫlva *sb. f.*,” in *ONP Online*.

titular hero Helgi is also a valkyrie.²²⁶ Sinfiotli's choice of descriptors contextualizes the attributes here associated with valkyries: *skæðr* ("dangerous, harmful")²²⁷, *skass* ("witch")²²⁸, *atall* ("cruel")²²⁹ and *ámáttligr* ("frightful, horrible, loathesome").²³⁰ Von See et al. discuss at length how this pejorative usage of the archetype of the valkyrie fits into the broader literary context.²³¹ We can make a few observations here: Both Óðinn and the archetype of the valkyrie are treated as nefarious in this context. While we cannot ascertain the intention behind both using the valkyrie-archetype as insult and love interest, the text certainly remains clear in the association of the valkyrie with the inhuman and magic. In combination, this insult is thus an excellent example of *ergi*, as it combines both accusations of failure to perform gender norms with accusations of sorcery. Sinfiotli finishes his point by assigning a female sexual role to Guðmundr – clearly meant to humiliate – and claims he fathered nine wolves with him.²³² Guðmundr responds with similar gender-based insults:

<p>Faðir varattu qllom ellri, sízt þik geldo þursa meyar</p>	<p>fenrisúlfa, svá at ek muna, fyr Gnipalundi á Þórsnesi! (<i>Hkb.</i> 40)²³³</p>	<p>You were not the father of Fenrir-wolves, older than them all, as far as I can remember, after the giant girls castrated you on Thorsness by Gnipalund. (Larrington)²³⁵</p>
<p>Þú vart brúðr Grana gullbitluð vart hafða ek þér móðri svangri und sǫðli,</p>	<p>á Brávelli, gǫr til rásar, mart skeið riðit simul, forbergis! (<i>Hkb.</i> 42)²³⁴</p>	<p>You were Grani's bride on Bravoll plain, a gold bit in your mouth, you were ready to leap; I've ridden you to exhaustion over many a stretch of road, a jaded hack under my saddle, down the mountain. (Larrington)²³⁶</p>

He accuses Sinfiotli both of having lost his manhood (*þik geldo* [...] *þursa meyar* "pursar-maidens castrated you") and, implicitly, of having taken the sexual role of a woman – both with himself and

²²⁶ While *Hkb.* itself does not call Sigrún a valkyrie, *Hkb.* II does, and Sigrún as a known valkyrie-name. If Bugge's emendation of *Hkb.* 54 (von See 361) holds, then Sigrún's description as a "troll-woman" seemingly confirms this.

²²⁷ "skæðr *adj.*," in *ONP Online*.

²²⁸ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 294.

²²⁹ Cf. "atall *adj.*," in *ONP Online*.

²³⁰ Cf. "ámáttligr *adj.*," in *ONP Online*.

²³¹ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 294-301.

²³² Cf. *Ibid.*, 304.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 307.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 314.

²³⁵ "The Poetic Edda," 115.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

with the horse Grani.²³⁷ He thus uses the same insult Sinfiqtli used against him, with the clear intent being to have Sinfiqtli portrayed as a sexual pervert, instead of the more gender role focused approach of Sinfiqtli. Interestingly, he uses a linguistic marker, to show that he doesn't view Sinfiqtli as (fully) human in this exchange: *simul* ("troll-woman, giant-woman").²³⁸ This, in combination with the repeated sexual associations with animals, shows a clear intent to establish Sinfiqtli as less than human and thus, monstrous (while not fully fulfilled by this alone, this points towards MCat 2).

The second broader category of insults used in this exchange are accusations of extreme violations of the social order, associated with wolves, through the quasi-legal concept of *vargr*.²³⁹ They are brought exclusively by Guðmundr. He opens with one of these insults in *Hkb*. 36:

Fátt mantu, fylkir, er þú qðlingom Þú hefir etnar ok bræðr þínom opt sár sorgin hefr í hreysi	forna spialla, ósonno bregðr! úlfa krásir at bana orðit, með svqlom munni, hvarleiðr skriðit! (<i>Hkb</i> . 36) ²⁴⁰	Little must you recall, lord, the old stories when you taunt the princes with untruths; you have eaten wolves' corpse-leavings and were the slayer of your brother, often you've sucked wounds with a cold snout; hated everywhere, you've slunk into a stone tip. (Larrington) ²⁴¹
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This passage strongly otherizes his opponent, accusing him of grave crimes against social norms and humanity:

1. Kin slaying
2. Cannibalism
3. Consumption of corpses

As per MCat 2, these accusations are meant to dehumanize Sinfiqtli, by both claiming that he is not capable of acting within human norms and simultaneously likening him to a wolf, which were culturally associated with the concept of outlawry. He repeats these accusations in *Hkb*. 41.²⁴² Here,

²³⁷ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 314.

²³⁸ Cf. "simul," in *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquae Linguae Septentrionalis*.

²³⁹ Cf. Jesse L. Byock, "Outlawry," in *Medieval Scandinavia: an encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano et al. (1993), 460-61.

²⁴⁰ von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 286.

²⁴¹ "The Poetic Edda," 115.

²⁴² Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 309.

the text comes again close to asserting actual monstrosity of a character but falls short of directly assigning such a quality.

In summary, while neither character is being directly accused of being fully non-human,²⁴³ both certainly bring forth arguments for the monstrous nature of their opponent. If the exchange had not been cut short by Helgi's interjection in *Hkb.* 43,²⁴⁴ perhaps such direct accusations could have followed. While *Sinfjötli* broadly focuses on attacking *Guðmundr*'s masculinity, *Guðmundr* attacks *Sinfjötli* with accusations of failure to perform gender roles and strong anti-social character. These themes are highly characteristic of socially assigned monstrosity and are thus well suited to the type of exchange present in this section of the text. Since the insults seem to have no effect outside of this verbal fight – and are thus likely not based in fact – it is easier to accuse the other of behaviour that would make a character monstrous in the eyes of society, rather than asserting monstrous physicality or ancestry – especially since the characters are related.

While *Hkj.* is constructed as a sort of doublet of the *Hkb.* material, its usage of monstrosity is somewhat different. Firstly, the text very briefly invokes monsters in a prose section, where it uses the mention of a slain *igtunn*, *Hati*, to demonstrate Helgi's capability: [...] *Hann drap Hata igtun er hann sat á bergi nøkkoro.*²⁴⁵ This use broadly falls into MFCat 2, since this monster sees no usage or description outside of this context and thus serves only as an obstacle for the hero to defeat. Even though no actual attempt at characterising *Hati* is made, we can suppose that *igtun[n]* here is meant to refer to monstrous giants, since he is immediately killed with no other reason given. Directly after this brief mention, a verbal fight breaks out which lasts from *Hks.* 12 to 23, at which point the conversation starts to shift in tone. The scene is set up in a similar manner to the fight between *Sinfjötli* and *Guðmundr*, as two parties, which do not include the titular Helgi, meet at sea and insult each other. Here, the participants are *Hrímgerðr*, *Hati*'s daughter, and *Atli*, a companion of Helgi.

²⁴³ Unless valkyries can be counted as non-human in the context of a human/monster dichotomy, which is not clear from the text.

²⁴⁴ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 319.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 473. („He killed the giant *Hati*, who was sitting on a certain cliff,” “The Poetic Edda,” 122.)

Atli starts the fight when he replies to Hríngerðr's question, asking who his king is, by responding thusly:

<p>Helgi hann heitir, vinna grand grami, iárnborgir ro knegot oss fálör fara.</p>	<p>en þú hvergi mátt um qðlings flota, (Hks. 13)²⁴⁶</p>	<p>Helgi is his name, and you can never bring harm to the prince; iron plates protect the prince's ships, no troll-woman can attack us. (Larrington)²⁴⁷</p>
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He accuses her of wanting to cause his king harm and indirectly calls her a *fála*, which is a term used for “hostile or dangerous (female) beings.”²⁴⁸ We can assume that Atli can either tell from her physical features that she is not human or seeks to deliberately antagonize her for some reason. The pace and quality of insults that he levies against her in the following verses suggest that he is very certain that Hríngerðr is a monstrous being of some sort. Since she does not indicate this through any behaviour, we can assume that this likely means the former is true. While Hríngerðr initially tries to be diplomatic, Atli continues with a similar barrage of insults as can be seen in the conflict between Guðmundr and Sinfiqtli. He calls her, directly and indirectly, a *gífr*,²⁴⁹ a *kveldriða* (‘[fem.] evening-rider, →troll-woman)²⁵⁰, a *hála nágráðug* (‘corpse-greedy hag’)²⁵¹ and, again, a *fála* (pointing towards M_{Cat} 2).²⁵² While Atli does not similarly tries to assign her an inverted gender role, femininity is still clearly a part of the insults and seemingly has negative connotations. His insults focus on her being a *iq̄tunn*, clearly differentiating her from humans, associating her with magic and corpse consumption. After she announces that she is the daughter of the slain giant Hati, he threatens to kill her and sink her corpse. This simultaneously strengthens the usage of monstrosity – since her mere existence is enough to legitimize her murder – and builds a parallel to a recurring way of

²⁴⁶ von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 479.

²⁴⁷ "The Poetic Edda," 122.

²⁴⁸ For longer discussion of the term, cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 481-82.

²⁴⁹ Cf. “gífr,” in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*.

²⁵⁰ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 486.

²⁵¹ "The Poetic Edda," 122.

²⁵² Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 485-89.

executing magic-users in the sagas, drowning them.²⁵³ In *Hks.* 20 the text then explicitly confirms that *igtnar* are here thought of as physically deviant from a normal human:

<p>Gneggia myndir þú, Atli, brettir sinn Hríngerðr hala! Aptarla hiarta þótt þú hafir hreina rödd!</p>	<p>ef þú geldr né værir: hygg ek at þitt, Atli sé, (<i>Hks.</i> 20)²⁵⁴</p>	<p>You'd neigh, Atli, if you hadn't been gelded, Hrimgerd's raising up her tail; I think your heart, Atli, is in your hindquarters, though you have a stallion's voice. (Larrington)²⁵⁵</p>
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As such, Hríngerðr is characterised as monstrous through both her ancestry – and thus physical appearance – and the accusations of depraved behaviour by Atli.

Hríngerðr herself also retaliates by reversing Atli's insults and attacking his masculinity by claiming he is castrated (*geldr*) and insinuating that he enjoys being the passive partner in sexual intercourse – which would make him *argr*.²⁵⁶ Still, she barely seems interested in actively fighting with Atli, instead seeking repayment for the death of her father in the form of intercourse with Atli.²⁵⁷ Atli first proclaims her to be *leið* [...] *mannkyni* ('hated (by) mankind'),²⁵⁸ but then briefly feigns wanting to reconcile.²⁵⁹ The last verse of the exchange then reveals his intentions with the fight:

<p>Dagr er nú, Hríngerðr, Atli til aldrлага; hafnar mark þars þú í steins líki stendr.</p>	<p>en þik dvalða hefir þykkir hlægligt vera, (<i>Hks.</i> 30)²⁶⁰</p>	<p>It's day now, Hrimgerd, Atli has kept you talking until you laid down your life; as a harbour-mark you look hilarious, standing there transformed into stone. (Larrington)²⁶¹</p>
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²⁵³ Cf. Leszek Gardela, "The Dangerous Dead? Rethinking Viking-Age Deviant Burials," in *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Leszek Stupecki and Rudolf Simek, *Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia* (Wien: Fassbaender, 2013), 105-07.

²⁵⁴ von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 499.

²⁵⁵ "The Poetic Edda," 123.

²⁵⁶ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar IV*, 499.

²⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 510.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 512.

²⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 516-20.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 529.

²⁶¹ "The Poetic Edda," 125.

This makes the question of functionality rather complex, since even the surface level of the exchange has multiple layers. Both MFCat 1 and 2 somewhat apply: Atli seeks establish Hrímgæðr as an othered being through pointing to her non-humanity. Simultaneously, the insults are exchanged in the context of the verbal fight and, as such, their validity outside of the conflict is questionable. Since Hrímgæðr is implied to die after the fight has concluded and is not mentioned afterwards, this cannot be ascertained. Her insults against Atli very clearly fit into category 2, since even she herself does not seem invested in her accusations throughout the whole fight. This gets further complicated by the fact that Atli claims to have been mainly aiming to distract her long enough to kill her, making the sincerity of his accusations even more questionable.

In summary, *Hks.* seems both interested in replicating the social monstrosity in the context of a verbal fight presented in *Hkb.* (MCat 2) and showing the hero fight – both verbally and physically – inherent monsters (MCat 4). It thus differentiates itself from *Hkb.* by adding an additional element to the exchange which it mirrors, creating a more complex interaction with conceptions of monstrosity.

Both texts use monstrosity to delineate permissible behaviour and the interactions of heroism and masculinity. Masculinity is questioned and failure to perform gender expectation is linked with the loss of one's humanity. Monstrosity thus becomes a weapon or threat of sorts, both for characters in the text and for recipients. With the research questions in mind, this offers another example of parallels in construction and usage of monsters since these texts' use is certainly reminiscent of *Lks.*'s. In addition to the common, gender- and sex-focused insults present here, *Hkb.* and *Hks.* introduce inherent, animalistic monstrosity to this usage type.

III.8. Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigdrífumál

The poems analysed in the following are all part of the so-called ‘Niflungar-cycle’, which spans the majority of Codex Regius’ heroic lays – especially when considering that the so-called ‘Great Lacuna’ likely contained a lost *Sigurðarkviða in meiri*.²⁶² While the plot centres around Sigurðr Sigmundarson and the cursed hoard of the *Niflungar*-house, monstrosity – especially animalistic monstrosity (MCat 4bv) – is used as a recurring element throughout the narrative. The function of the different occurrences of monsters in these texts varies, but – as I will show – they are most often used to either disempower a character by dehumanizing them or as great obstacles for the hero Sigurðr to overcome.

The first text of the ‘trilogy’ of sorts that narrates the life of Sigurðr is *Reginsmál*. The text mainly uses monstrosity in the context of transformations of humanoid characters into (monstrous) animals. The first mention of monsters even precedes the text itself in the compilation of Codex Regius, in *Grípisspá*, where Grípir, Sigurðr’s uncle, predicts Sigurðr’s future thusly:

Mundu einn vega	orm inn frána,	You alone will kill the shining serpent,
þann er gráðugr liggr	á Gnitaheiði;	the greedy one who lies on Gnita-heath;
þú munt báðom	at bana verða,	you will be the killer of both Regin and Fafnir;
Regin ok Fáfnir;	rétt segir Grípir.	Gripir tells what is true.
	(<i>Grípisspá</i> 11) ²⁶³	(Larrington) ²⁶⁴

As Larrington points out, *Grípisspá* likely was written as a short preview for the poems of the *Niflungar*-cycle and as such, it here sets the tone for the type of monsters and their function in the text analysed in the following: Transformed, inherent monsters that need to be overcome by the protagonist(s), in order to show their strength and create danger to keep narrative tension. (MCat 4biv,4bv; MFCat 2)

²⁶² Cf. C.M. Sperberg-McQueen, "Sigurðarkviða in skamma," in *Medieval Scandinavia: an encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano et al. (1993), 585-86.

²⁶³ Klaus von See, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda Bd. 5 Heldenlieder: Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigdrífumál* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2006), 159.

²⁶⁴ "The Poetic Edda," 140.

Rgm. follows this tone very closely. The prose section opening the poem tells of the dwarfs Andvari and Otr, who both transform into aquatic animals – a pike and an otter, respectively. Both suffer physical threats from the *æsir* – Óðinn, Hœnir and, Loki²⁶⁵ – with Loki first killing Otr – which is seen as great fortune by the *æsir* – and then ‘shaking down’ Andvari for the gold they now own in reparations to Otr’s family.²⁶⁶ While the text does not comment on why Otr transforms into an Otter,²⁶⁷ Andvari actively laments his shapeshifting:

<p>Andvari ek heiti, faðir, margan hefi ek fors um farit; aumlig norn árdaga at ek skyldi í vatni vaða.</p>	<p>Óinn hét minn skóp oss í</p>	<p>Andvari is my name, Oin was my father’s name, I’ve swum through many a fall; a wretched norn shaped my fate in the early days, that I must wade in the water.</p>
<p>(<i>Rgm.</i> 2)²⁶⁸</p>		<p>(Larrington)²⁶⁹</p>

The text seemingly uses these forced bodily transformations as disempowerment. Both Otr and Andvari become powerless to resist the whims of the gods in their animalistic forms and get treated as less-than-human. While Otr pays with his life, Andvari uses the limited power he has to curse the treasure Loki extorts from him. This is interesting for two reasons: Firstly, it further otherizes Andvari through making him capable of using magic. Secondly, it creates a monstrous object of sorts that both causes the plot of the cycle itself and creates similar disruption to a proper monster. Andvari’s disruptive influence is thus felt throughout the following texts, even if he himself it not mentioned beyond this interaction with Loki. While this cursed treasure hoard itself can’t be properly regarded as a monster, its curse does seem to cause monstrosity in those affected by it.²⁷⁰ The first victim of this Hreiðmarr, the father of the dwarfs Reginn and Fáfnir, who gets murder by said

²⁶⁵ While Loki would not get counted among the *Æsir* in most texts, *Rgm.* seems to refer to all three gods with this term.

²⁶⁶ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 275.

²⁶⁷ Otr is Old Norse for ‘Otter,’ which is a common attribute for shapeshifters. Cf. Kveld-Úlfr in *Egils saga* (Ármann)

²⁶⁸ von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 285.

²⁶⁹ “The Poetic Edda,” 148.

²⁷⁰ This perhaps is similar to the way interactions with monsters seem to ‘taint’ characters in *Íslendingasögur*. Cf. Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland*, 43-44.

brothers because he refuses to give them a part of the treasure he got from the *æsir*.²⁷¹ Fáfnir then takes all the treasure for himself, causing Reginn to plot his murder as well.²⁷² Fáfnir is then mentioned to be transformed into a dragon, though the text doesn't directly state that this is caused directly or indirectly by the treasure.²⁷³ Here, the transformation acts in the opposite way of the two previously mentioned ones: Fáfnir gains great power through transformation into a dangerous monster, which now is a great obstacle for the hero to overcome (MFCat 2). This gets intensified further through the mention of him possessing another disruptive object of great power, the *Ægishjálmr* ('helm of terror'): *bann átti ægishjálms, er ǫll kvikvendi hræddoz við*.²⁷⁴ ("he had a helmet of dread which all living creatures were terrified of.")²⁷⁵ While the text is not explicit about this, we can still see the mental conceptions which lie behind the usage of monstrosity here. The treasures curse is meant to cause social disruption, as per Andvari's words.²⁷⁶ This curse then affects Fáfnir, which is implied to cause him to act in anti-social ways (kin-slaying, denying his brother his rightful share). This anti-social trait then gets manifested through him physically turning into a dragon and holding a powerful, seemingly evil object to guard his ill-gotten gains. Reginn also seems to be affected by the curse, as he grooms Sigurðr to kill his brother in order to gain the treasure for himself.²⁷⁷

Here, *Rgm.* ends and the narrative continues in *Fnm.* The opening prose again reinforces the function of Fáfnir's monstrosity in this narrative, as Sigurðr is described assassinating Fáfnir by digging a hole and stabbing the dwarf-turned-serpent from below.²⁷⁸ Before the dragon succumbs to his wounds, the two exchange several lines of dialogue.²⁷⁹ As a short prose insert clarifies, Sigurðr is

²⁷¹ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 303.

²⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, 308-15.

²⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 315.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ "The Poetic Edda," 150.

²⁷⁶ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 291.

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 315.

²⁷⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 395.

²⁷⁹ *Rgm.* 1-22, cf. *Ibid.*, 398-451.

afraid of the power of the words of a dying man. This leads to him introducing himself in a rather peculiar manner:

Göfugt dýr ek heiti,	en ek gengit hefki	“Pre-eminent beast” I’m called, and I go about
inn móðurlausi mögr;		as a motherless boy;
föður ek ákka	sem fira synir,	I have no father, as the sons of men do,
[æ] geng ek einn saman.		I always go alone.
	(<i>Fnm.</i> 2) ²⁸⁰	(Larrington) ²⁸¹

Here we can see a rare case of deliberate dehumanisation of a character by themselves. Much has been written about internal consistency of Sigurðr calling himself fatherless and then revealing his name and his father’s in *Fnm.* 4,²⁸² but I want to focus on the dehumanizing aspect here: Sigurðr – even if only briefly – assumes an animalistic identity here and declares that he is without parents. If this would be an external identification places upon him by others, this could certainly be read as a deliberate act meant to otherize and ‘monsterize’ him. Yet, we cannot fully ascertain Sigurðr’s intention from the text alone. Does he seek to cast himself as a monster as a way to depersonalize and thus detach this murder from his actual persona, or does he merely intent to obfuscate his identity as much as possible to guard against the potential curse? Both assuming a different identity to distance oneself from one’s actions and taking on animal-monikers are not unheard of, both today and in Old Norse literature.²⁸³ Perhaps the only indication of intention may lie in the word choice *göfugt* (‘noble, esteemed’),²⁸⁴ which could certainly be read to point towards the latter interpretation of the verse. While the function remains uncertain here, this verse can still serve as an example of the invocation of dehumanizing characteristics without necessarily invoking monstrosity.

Sigurðr gets further otherized as the poem progresses, but this is seemingly not meant to portray him as monstrous. In the aftermath of the killing of Fáfnir, Sigurðr gains the ability to understand the

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 401.

²⁸¹ “The Poetic Edda,” 154.

²⁸² For an extended discussion, cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 401-02.

²⁸³ Cf. Thorsten Andersson, “Personennamen,” in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 601.

²⁸⁴ Cf. “*göfugr adj.*,” in *ONP Online*. Magnus Olsen discusses this word choice, cf. Magnus Olsen, “Göfugt dýr (Fáfnismál),” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 67 (1952).

language of the birds through the consumption of Fáfnir's blood.²⁸⁵ While this certainly confers some animalistic quality to the hero, the text makes no attempt at otherizing Sigurðr along this specific line. Yet, Sigurðr remains in a liminoid position, removed from social relations other than to Reginn, whom he kills.²⁸⁶ Instead of being compelled by the curse of the treasure, Sigurðr is egged on by the birds, whose language he now understands, to kill Reginn before the dwarf kills him to gain the treasure for himself alone.²⁸⁷

When trying to understand the function of Sigurðr's otherization through continued killing, possession of a cursed treasure and the power to communicate with animals gained by consumption of monster-blood, it is helpful to look to Klaus von See's 1993 article "Held und Kollektiv",²⁸⁸ in which he discusses the inherent conflict between the individualistic nature of heroism and the wants and needs of society in literature. He argues that the narrative interest in heroes can be understood to come from their boundary-crossing behaviour that offers an individualistic, egoistic fantasy, detached from the constraints placed on ordinary people.²⁸⁹ Here, we can see this fantasy in Sigurðr's unrestrained ability to murder those who present a threat to him, without having to deal with the regular societal rules surrounding killing. He can fully act in his own self-interest, but through these actions becomes himself incompatible with society at large. The narrative uses the curse of Andvari's treasure to necessitate this behaviour, should Sigurðr want to survive. Sigurðr himself also presents his own actions in the explicit light of heroism:

Hugr er betri
hvars reiðir skolo vega,
þvíat hvatan mann
með slævo sverði sigr.

en sé hiqs megin,
ek sé harliga vega
(*Fnm.* 30)²⁹⁰

Courage is better than the power of a sword,
where angry men have to fight;
for I've seen a brave man, fighting strongly,
conquer with a blunt sword.
(Larrington)²⁹²

²⁸⁵ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 466.

²⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 478.

²⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 468-76.

²⁸⁸ Klaus von See, "Held und Kollektiv," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 122, no. 1 (1993).

²⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 21-35.

²⁹⁰ von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 463.

²⁹² "The Poetic Edda," 158.

Hvǫtom er betra í hildileik hafaz; glöðom er betra hvat sem at hendi kǫmr.	en sé óhvǫtom en sé glúpnanda, (<i>Fnm.</i> 31) ²⁹¹	It's better for the keen than the cowardly when they go in for battle-sport; it's better for the cheerful than the snivellers, whatever may be at hand. (Larrington) ²⁹³
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Here, the text explicitly glorifies courageous heroism in direct contrast to cowardice and, implicitly, rationality (i.e., fighting with a blunt sword).

Contrasting this form of heroic otherization with the transformed bodies of the Fáfñir and Andvari, it becomes clear that monstrosity is very clearly socially decided: Those opposing our hero and forcing him down his solitary path are inhuman, animalistic beings that violate the order of things; they become monstrous in action and being. The protagonist himself is unwittingly thrust into this plot, a once regular human who is forced to deal with the actions of the gods and dwarfs. Through his close connection to these monstrous beings, he is 'tainted' and becomes hero, who inherently is an 'other'. Since he is the righteous one, acting in opposition to rules only to protect himself or because he manipulated, the otherization does not make him a monster. Even Reginn, who had largely been exempt from physical otherization, gets likened to a *brímkald[r] iqtun[n]* ('frost-cold giant') in the final passage of the poem.²⁹⁴

Lastly, *Sigrdrífumál* uses monsters very sparingly. From a functionalistic perspective, the short and rather uncertain invocation of what perhaps could be read as monsters, mirrors that of the previous two texts:

Ðat ræð ek þér it fiórða, vammafull á vegi, ganga er betra þótt þik nótt um nemi.	ef býr fordœða en gista sé, (<i>Sdm.</i> 26) ²⁹⁵	That I advise you fourthly, if a witch, full of malice, lives on your route, better go on than be her guest, though night overtake you. (Larrington) ²⁹⁷
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²⁹¹ Ibid., 465.

²⁹³ Ibid., 159.

²⁹⁴ von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 475.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 601.

²⁹⁷ "The Poetic Edda," 166.

Forniósna augo	þurfo fira synir,	Eyes that can spy out ahead are what the sons of men need,
hvars skolo reiðir vega;		where angry men shall fight;
opt þǫlvísar konor	sítia brauto nær,	often malevolent women sit close to the roads,
þær er deyfa sverð ok sefa.		those who deaden swords and spirits.
	(<i>Sdm.</i> 27) ²⁹⁶	(Larrington) ²⁹⁸

Here, the titular valkyrie Sigrdrífa warns Sigurðr of *þǫlvísar konor* ('malignant women')²⁹⁹ and a *fordæð[a]* ('evil-doer(-ess), witch').³⁰⁰ The implication in these verses seems to be the danger presented by the malicious, perhaps supernatural influence by women along his path. While a *fordæða* could perhaps be described as a social monster (MCat 1a), *þǫlvísar konor* seems to mainly invoke mere deviance. This contrasts the bodily-deviant monster of *Rgm.* and *Fnm.* with socially assigned monstrosity. Nonetheless, they serve a similar function to the animalistic monsters: They provide an obstacle to the hero; a threat and temptation to overcome in his travels (MFCat 2). Similarly, *Sdm.* 33 and 34 can be read as a warning against the undead, which present a similar danger to the protagonist.³⁰¹

The poem in its current form is incomplete, as the final part of it is lost to the 'Great Lacuna' of *Codex Regius*.³⁰² As such, the poem ends abruptly, before any actual narrative can follow the series of bits of advice to Sigurðr by Sigrdrífa. This in turn means that none of the dangers elaborated on by her can play out in a narrative sense in *Sdm.* While the prose *Vǫlsunga saga* elaborates on the missing plot in the form of four stanzas of poetry, there remains no complete poetic source for the missing parts of the narrative as of today.

In summary, the core of the Sigurðr *fáfnisbani*'s story is a hero's tale and the usage of monsters in the story is thusly used to present an opposing force to the hero's valour and strength (MFCat 2). He must prevail against both the physically monstrous and those becoming monstrous through their actions (MCat 1, 4biv,v). The text additionally seems interested in connecting transformation into

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Cf. "böl-víss," in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*.

³⁰⁰ Cf. "for-dæða," *ibid.*

³⁰¹ Cf. von See, *Edda-Kommentar V*, 610-11. Note that these verses only appear in later paper manuscripts.

³⁰² Cf. *Ibid.*, 497.

physical monsters and monstrous behaviours. This mirrors conceptions of monstrosity found in several different traditions, with, for instance, the revenants of the *Íslendingasögur* operating on a similar principle.³⁰³ The narrative interest here seemingly lies less in navigating and exploring the borders of permissible behaviour and what it means to be human, and more providing sufficiently high stakes for a heroic narrative.

Looking back again at the initially posed research questions, we can see the three previously analysed poems as a reflection of the use of monsters as threats to the divine order and the gods themselves in *Þkv.*, *Vsp.*, *Vsk.*, and *Hym.*, but from a human perspective. As such, monstrosity is constructed along similar lines, but a different ensemble fills the roles occupied by the giants. This new ensemble of shape-shifting dwarfs also needs a different reason for evil actions, since Sigurðr does not represent human society in the way gods represent the divine order; hence the curse of Andvari. Both *Vsp.* and *Sdm.* feature similar descriptions of evil, magic-using women, who act in opposition to the protagonists.

³⁰³ As Ármann Jakobsson notes, transformation into a revenant in the afterlife is often preceded by monstrous or general anti-social behaviour in life. Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, "Vampires and Watchmen : Categorizing the Mediaeval Icelandic Undead," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 110, no. 3 (2011).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I argued that the monstrosity in the corpus of eddic poetry has distinct and complex constructions, which I demonstrated by systematising the ways in which the narratives in each individual text analysed herein constructs and uses monstrosity. Table 1 shows a summary of all my findings. Colours indicate subgenres (*mythological/heroic*).

Text	MCats	MFCats
Lokasenna	2a, 3	1, 2, 3
Þrymskviða	2a	2
Völuspá	1, 2, 2a, 4bv	2
Völuspá in skamma	1, 2, 4b	2
Hymiskviða	1, 2a, 4bii,iv	2
Skírnismál	4biv	1, 2
Helgakviða Hundingsbana I	2	1
Helgakviða Hiqrvarðssonar	1, 2, 4biv	1, 2
Reginismál	4biv,v	2
Fáfnismál	4biv	2
Sigrdrífumál	1a	2

Table 1: Summary of findings

Having reached the final section of this thesis, I want to turn our attention to the questions I asked in the beginning:

1. What is a monster?
2. How are they differentiated from the normative ‘human’(-like) characters?
3. What is the narrative function of the monsters within the text?
4. Do the analysed texts offer similar or equal understandings of monstrosity?
 - a. If so, are they used in similar narrative functions or do they differ?
5. Are similar characteristics used in the construction of monstrosity?

1 and 2 find their answers in chapter II, but to summarize again: A monster is a being that through some socially assigned or inherent properties becomes threatening to the stability of the persisting

social order. They can be human, animal, or supernatural being. They differ from the normative human or animals in the fact that they act or exist in ways that are incompatible with what is considered their nature or nature at large. Question 3 is similarly answered there, in summary: Monstrosity in these texts works very often in one of two ways, either as defamation or classification. Either a character is called monstrous – often socially monstrous – by another character to humiliate and defame them or they are constructed as monsters, so the recipient easily can differentiate between antagonists and protagonists. These uses can of course both occur at the same time and are best thought of as a spectrum rather than binary categories.

Question 4 requires a lengthier look back at the analysis. Looking at the summary of my findings in table 1, it becomes apparent that while many texts contain depictions of monstrosity that I categorized under shared categories, no singular category of monstrosity is present in all texts. Certain elements are recurring throughout the texts, though, with heroic poetry and mythological poetry each exhibiting slight preferences. The main shared monster is the giant, the *igtunn* or *þurs*. As previously outlined, such terms might, at times, describe diverging concepts – *igtunn* being a milder, but still otherized, archetype and *þurs* being clearly monstrous – they are often merged into a single concept of the giant, with sub-distinctions like age, beauty and their alignment towards the protagonists being deciding factors in their monstrosity. While not every giant is a monster, most giants in the *Eddukvæði* are constructed with monstrous characteristics, most often expressed through their active antagonism towards the gods and some association with supernatural powers. While it is certainly possible that all cultural conceptions of *igtunar* and *þursar* incorporated some form of bodily monstrosity, barely any text in the *Eddukvæði* actively spells this out. *Skm.*, *Hym.* and *Hks.* offer description of both *igtunar* and *þursar* that incorporate diverging bodies. *Skm.* and *Hym.* describe giants as being multi-headed, while *Hks.* describes the *igtunn* Hrímgæðr as having a tail.

Another recurring element is anti-social monstrosity, meaning monstrosity expressed through characterisations based on behaviour and characteristics that are considered extremely deviant by the text. This is often expressed through sexual deviance and gender non-conformity – for example in

Lks., *Hkb.*, *Hks.*, *Vsk.* and *Skm.* – or strongly antagonistic behaviour against the social order or the gods – like Surtr and his giants in *Vsp.* or Þrymr in *Ðkv.* Since we are dealing with socially assigned monstrosity in this case, often this is brought forth in the form of accusation or as the consequence of actions that are taken. As such, it is important who assigns this monstrosity and in what capacity – is the narrator assigning monstrosity, or is a character doing it? Is that character of good social standing, or are they themselves an outcast and thus cannot speak for normative society?

The texts constituting the first part of the *niflungar*-cycle offer a self-contained form of recurring monstrosity in their focus on monstrous transformations. All these types of monstrosities naturally can and do occur simultaneously in texts and must not be thought of absolute, with each monster existing somewhere on a spectrum between these extremes.

With respect to 4a, table 1 clearly reflects a trend in these texts to focus on using monstrosity as a shorthand to construct narratives of some heroic force clashing with some destructive, anti-social force. Monstrosity both offers opportunity for discourse regarding the limits of socially acceptable behaviour and what constitutes normative humanity (reflecting Cohen's definition of monstrosity), while also allowing for concise narrative construction. The latter is especially important to the genre, since the narrative capabilities of the often rather short poems are very limited compared to the lengthy forms of Old Norse prose that dominates the written record.

Competing and sometimes coinciding with this usage, monstrosity is sometimes invoked in the context of a verbal feud between two or more characters, like in *Lks.*, where such a conflict is centre-stage, and the paired episodes in *Hkb.* and *Hks.* Here, the monstrosity is invoked to degrade an opponent and win the argument and thus, often, is not intended to impugn a character beyond the scope of the conflict – though that also may happen, as is the case with Hrímgæðr in *Hks.* and Loki in *Lks.* Naturally, a focus on social monstrosity happens with this usage, since it is easier to accuse someone of deviant, but private behaviour rather than of being, for example, a giant.

With regard to our final question (are similar characteristics used in the construction of monstrosity?), I can again confirm the positive. While there are certain differences in the mental

conceptions that go into each of these texts, there are also common traits that appear throughout. Summarized here, in no particular order: Transformation into a different sex or gender, transformation into an animal, many-headed-ness, the capacity to use magic, belonging to a race of giants, opposing the gods, gender non-conformity and kin-slaying. The giant and the magic-capable, evil female being seem to be the most common monster, with Loki and his kin being the only recurring specific monsters – though Loki is certainly not monstrous in all text, cf. *Þkv.*

These results are certainly within expected parameters and confirm my initial assumption that, in comparison with the *Íslendingasögur*, these texts are more focused on inherent monstrosity than social monstrosity, as they are not bound by the constraints of a more naturalistic ensemble as many earlier *Íslendingasögur* are. While both genres share an interest in social monstrosity and deviance, they seem to have ‘preferred’ monsters: *Iqtnar* and *þursar* rarely ever present themselves in *Íslendingasögur* – while being abundant in the *Eddukvæði* –; berserkers and revenants on the other hand seem to be the favourite of the *Íslendingasögur*, as the abundant research on those groups can attest,³⁰⁴ with next to no presence in eddic poetry. We can only speculate about the reasons behind this split, which will inevitably circle back to the age-old question of the age of and sources for eddic poetry. Whatever the result of such discourse may be, the results of this thesis show that both genres have shared conceptions of deviance and monstrosity as a socially assigned attribute, all the while having clearly defined conceptions of monsters, which do not fully overlap. For example, the concepts of *níð* and *ergi*, and the social expectations connected with them are very prominent within the *Íslendingasögur*, whereas only *Lks.*, *Hkb.*, *Hks.* and *Þkv.* among the texts analysed in this thesis were concerned with the concept. Like in the *Íslendingasögur*,³⁰⁵ though, there is a very strong

³⁰⁴ Cf. Ibid.; Ármann Jakobsson, "The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch."; Ármann Jakobsson, *Nine Saga Studies : The Critical Interpretation of the Icelandic Sagas*; Gardela, "The Dangerous Dead? Rethinking Viking-Age Deviant Burials."; Matthias Teichert, "Nosferatus Nordische Verwandtschaft : Die Erzählungen von vampirartigen Untoten in den Isländersagas und ihr gesamtgermanisch-europäischer Kontext," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 141, no. 1 (2012); Keith Ruitter, "Berserks Behaving Badly : Manipulation Normative Expectations in Eyrbyggja saga," in *Narrating Law and Laws of Narration in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Roland Scheel, *Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* (Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

³⁰⁵ Cf. Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society : Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland*, 130-31. Ármann Jakobsson, "The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch."

association between a character being assigned monstrosity by others and having been shown to be *ergi*, while remaining independent concepts – as the lack of otherization against Loki in *Þkv.* demonstrates.

From here, comparative research into adjacent genres that build on similar heroic and mythological poetry all across the North Sea and Baltic sphere could perhaps reveal to which degree these monsters and the conceptions behind them are innovations of the 13th century Icelandic writers – and their oral sources – or are part of shared Northern and Central European cultural understanding of morality, deviance and humanity.

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