

## On the Interpretation of *ialuns* in the Norwegian Runic Text B257<sup>1</sup>

### 1. A Definition of the Problem

In 1964, Aslak Liestøl published a runic text inscribed on a stick<sup>2</sup> discovered during the excavation of Bryggen in Bergen. Liestøl knew that the stick had been found immediately over the layer of the great fire of 1332, so that it may have been carved in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century (unless one assumes a longer time between the inscription and the deposition of the object). The stick has been inscribed on all four sides, and is broken at one end, so that there are four corresponding lacunae in it. The text appears to be a sort of charm, where protective and hostile magic mix, and it reads as follows:

<side A> R1'1IP: B41: RNT1R: R1'1: IPB14B\*: RNT1R: 1111: P1T1NIP: 1T1N1Y:  
 1N1N1T1N1P: 1R111Y: 1R1N1T1: N1P:1N [...] <side B> N1P1T1Y1P1P1Y1P1P1:  
 N1T1Y1RR1N: 'N1T1:11: 111Y1P1P1: 1P1: 111N1N1: 1T1N1': P1T1: 1N1: 1P1N P [...] <side  
 C> 1P1T11R: 1R: 1P1Y1P1R: 1R1P1R: . 1R1: 1P1P1P1: 1P1R: R1N: N1P1N: 1N1Y: 11T1N1':  
 Y1P: '111N: 1T1R1: '1B1N: 1T1R1 [...] <side D> 1T1: Y1R: 'Y: '11T1B1R1: 1R:  
 B1R1'1: RNB1: R1B1: 1P: 1R1T11B1: 1N1: 1B1: R1Y: P1N1 [...] ]

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to James E. Knirk for granting me access to the Runic Archives in Oslo and for his expert advice; to the directors of Bryggen Museum for allowing me to examine the runic sticks B257 and N631; to John McKinnell for his help in solving linguistic and other problems, and to Anatoly Liberman for his many careful corrections of the present text (though the responsibility for any mistakes which remain in the text is entirely my own). This article could not have been completed without the grant received from the Norwegian Government which enabled me to research both in Bergen and Oslo. My special thanks go finally to my teacher and friend, Maria Elena Rugggerini.

<sup>2</sup> The inscription will be referred to by the number assigned by the Runic Archives in Oslo. The stick itself has been numbered 000/28770 by the Bryggen Museum in Bergen. The reading is based on Liestøl 1965 and its interpretation on Liestøl 1966.

ristek: bot: runar: rist: ekbiabh: runar: eaein: faluip: aluom: tuiualtuip:  
 trolom: preualt: uip:þu [...] uipenniskæpo:skah:ualkyrriu: sual:at:  
 eaeimehi: þo: atæuili: læuis: kona: liui: þinu g [...] eksendær: þer:  
 ekseaper: ylhiar: . erhi: okopola: aper: rini: upole: auk: ialuns: mop:  
 sittu: aldri: soppu: aldri [...] ant: mer: sem: sialpre: þer: beirist: rubus:  
 rabus: ep: arantabus: laus: abus: rosa: gauq [...]

*Rist ek bótrúnar, / rist ek bjargrúnar, / einfalt við álfum, / tvífalt við trolum, / þrífalt við þu<rsu> [...] / við inni skæðu / skag-valkyrju / svát ei megi / þótt æ vili / lævis kona / lífi þinu g<randa> [...] / ek sendi þér, / ek sé á þér / ylgjar ergi ok úpola. / Á þér rini úþóli / ok iatuns<sup>3</sup> móð. / Sittu aldri, sof þu aldri [...] / ant mér sem sjalfri þér, / Beirist rubus rabus ep arantabus laus abus rosa gaua [...].*

'I cut runes of help; I cut runes of protection; once against elves, twice against trolls, thrice against <giants> [...] against the harmful 'skag'-valkyrie, so that she never can, though she may always want to — evil woman! — <injure> your life [...] I send you, I cast on you with the evil eye (lit. "I look at you") wolfish evil and distress. May distress and a giant's wrath come upon you. Never sit, never sleep, [...] (that you may) love me as yourself, beirist rubus rabus ep arantabus laus abus rosa gau<a>[...].'

In 1965 Liestøl wrote an article which was translated into Icelandic and published in "Skirnir"<sup>4</sup>; in it he corrected many of his previous interpretations. He admitted readings like *rini* or *sé á þér* (which he had formerly read as *renni* and *síða þér*<sup>5</sup>); the form *rini* is particularly important, for it is the Norwegian form of a verb which would have been spelt *hrini* in Old Icelandic (from *hrina* which means 'to cleave' and metaphorically 'to take effect [of a curse]').

In his second article he held fast to two conjectures which could be neither demonstrated nor refuted: a) that the runic **skah** (on side B) was a mistake for *skass*, thus identifying the *valkyrja* with a witch, and b) that **ioluns** (his reading of **ialuns**<sup>6</sup>, on side C) was a *hapax legomenon* in Old Norse literature, which could be understood from comparison with

<sup>3</sup> The correction of **ialuns** in **iatuns** is the only point of divergence with the published text, which otherwise follows Spurkland 1991: 293.

<sup>4</sup> Liestøl 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Liestøl 1964: 41–42.

<sup>6</sup> The reading **ialuns** has first been proposed in Spurkland 1991: 293.

similar words in modern Scandinavian dialects. He regarded the eddic word *iþll* as a fitting starting point. This noun is also a *hapax legomenon* found in *Lokasenna*<sup>7</sup>; without considering the mutated vowel, Liestøl stated: "Det er her tale om vonde ynskje, og det ligg mein i omgrepet 'ioll', og det same ventar vi ligg attom iolun òg"<sup>8</sup>.

Liestøl was followed by Barbro Söderberg<sup>9</sup>, who adduced more evidence and referred to a much longer work, in which she had offered some new data on the supposed word root<sup>10</sup>. However, alternative readings have been proposed which seem to invalidate Söderberg's theory. For example, the word in question could be understood as *oll*, assuming the initial /i/ to be part of the hastily erased preceding word; this word would also be a *hapax legomenon*, but clearly related to OE *oll* 'contempt; scorn', and might be a loanword. Even more attractive is the reading *i þllok* 'at the end of the banquet (ale)'<sup>11</sup>.

Söderberg chose not to analyse the origin and current use of the Germanic ending \*-*un-az* in Old Norse. This suffix of *nomina agentis* is rather scantily attested in Old Norse and may have been unknown to the other Germanic languages, if one disregards the single occurrence of *eoten* in Old English: Walde and Pokorny give the traditional explanation of *þotunn* and *eoten* as derived from \**etan*, with a question mark, adding "für germ[anisches] -*una-* aus \**-ŋo-* fehlen wenigstens sonst Parallelen"<sup>12</sup>. In Pokorny's edition this remark was absent (probably because in the meantime the author had considered words such as *þormun-*, *þlunn*, *þjónn* and *hjónn*, *mþskun*<sup>13</sup>), and yet the question mark was retained<sup>14</sup>; moreover, Pokorny gives no explanation of OE *ent*, which in the former edition was derived from a nominal root meaning 'stone'<sup>15</sup>. It will be seen that no definitive explanation has been found of the etymology and semantics of *e(o)te(o)n* and *ent* and their relation to *gigant*, not to speak of *þotunn*.

<sup>7</sup> *Lokasenna*, str. 3, vv. 4–6: *iþll oc áfo / færi ec ása sonom / oc blend ec þeim svá meini miþ* 'Strife and hate / I bring to the sons of the Æsir / and I (will) blend for them offence with the mead' (ed. Neckel–Kuhn; on the meaning of this particular word see Ruggerini 1979: 50).

<sup>8</sup> Liestøl 1964: 50.

<sup>9</sup> Söderberg 1988: 365–366.

<sup>10</sup> Söderberg 1984: 46–58.

<sup>11</sup> The first reading is found in Dronke 1997: 356–357. Dronke quotes also the alternative reading *i þllok*, which had been first proposed in Stefán Karlsson 1993: 263.

<sup>12</sup> Walde–Pokorny 1930: 120. Cf. Falk–Torp 1910–11 s.v. *jætte*.

<sup>13</sup> Together with a few other words (*þormuni*, *arfuni* with the \*-*uni* suffix, and the female gender *þjörgyn*, *Hlödýn*, *foldýn*; see De Vries 1961 s.vv.), these have been used by Torp (1974: 19) to reconstruct a rather problematic and rarely attested suffix.

<sup>14</sup> Pokorny 1959 s. v. *ed-*.

<sup>15</sup> Walde–Pokorny 1930 s.v. (from which derives Holthausen s.v. *ent*).

Only one thing is known for sure: \*-un(-az) was not a productive suffix<sup>16</sup>. Wessén, in his history of the Swedish language, notes how *jptunn*, though similar in structure to denominative nouns formed with the derivative suffix \*-an-az, cannot be grouped together with them because it is a deverbative<sup>17</sup> (assuming the etymology of Pokorny to be correct).

Therefore, the whole question needs serious examination<sup>18</sup>. Early Middle English forms such as *eont* and *e(o)tend* testify to ancient, seemingly non-etymological, adjustments<sup>19</sup>, and this might indicate that the word structure was not clear to the speakers themselves, while in Norwegian dialects a different suffix occurs in forms such as *jotul*, *jøtul*<sup>20</sup>. In any case, postulating a broader diffusion for \*-un(-az) in Old Norse has no solid foundation in fact.

It is true that the existence of the adjective *jålun* in a modern Swedish dialect could be regarded as evidence for the existence of a noun such as \**jolun*/\**jålun*<sup>21</sup>; the reconstructed Scandinavian root from which this and other words could have been derived is \**jol(l)*-, but since the best reading on side C of this runic stick is probably *ialuns*<sup>22</sup>, the text would have to be corrected if it were to fit Söderberg's (and Liestøl's) theory.

I hope to demonstrate that the emendation of *ialuns* to *iatuns*, though representing a sort of *lectio faciliior*, will give a much better reading, in that it offers the most economical solution and is supported by strong evidence from the texts<sup>23</sup>.

## 2. On the Runological Evidence for “reversed /t/”

There is at least one other instance in the text of a mistake brought about by confusion between 1 and ʀ. On side B, *suāl* seems to be a mistake: the scribe probably intended to write *suat*, but realized too late that it could

<sup>16</sup> De Vries 1961 *s.v.* *jptunn*.

<sup>17</sup> Wessén 1965: 48.

<sup>18</sup> In commenting the entry by Ásgeirr Blöndal Magnússon, Liberman quotes two more etymological hypotheses of *jptunn*, which could be related with a root \**od-* ‘grow’, or share the same root of the latin *odium* ‘hate’ (Liberman 1994: 298–299).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kunath–Kuhn 1952 *s.vv.* *eont* and *ēten*. An alternative form *eotan* for *etan* is possible in some Old English dialects (cf. Campbell 1959: 88–90).

<sup>20</sup> De Vries 1961 *s.v.* *jptunn*.

<sup>21</sup> Söderberg 1988: 365.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. note 5.

<sup>23</sup> I have chosen not to examine stick B145 (BRM 000/18910), which has the reading *ioluns*, since I believe it to be a correction of *pluns* due to a completely different context, as supported by Liestøl–Krause–Jón Helgason 1962: 98–106 (cf. also Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989 *s.v.* *ölun*).





are also some instances of the reversed *l-t* system coming from peripheral areas of the Norse-speaking world, such as Viking Ireland, where the inscription on the Killaloe cross<sup>37</sup> has been dated to not later than the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The text is too short for us to decide whether the system was fully reversed. Finally, one inscription dating from 1200–1250 (DR 162, the Ørum-font, where the short inscription **mefeciþ | nikolaus** shows reversed *l*)<sup>38</sup> is known from Denmark.

According to Svante Lagman, in the corpus of inscriptions known to him, nine instances of reversed *t-l* occur<sup>39</sup>. This means that the phenomenon must be practically non-existent in Sweden, apparently because of the different conditions of writing (in the “long-branch” futhark commonly used in Sweden *↑* and *↓* cannot be confused), but it was not at all infrequent in the West Scandinavian area.

### 3. Philological Context and Literary Tradition

The closest parallel to the text of B257 is to be found in the Eddic poem *Skirnismál*, and in particular in stanza 36:

*Purs rist ec þér / oc þríá stafi, / ergi ok æði ok óþola; / svá ec þat af rist, / sem ec þat á reist, / ef goraz þarfar þess.*

“Giant” I carve for thee / and three staves / evil and rage and distress; / I will cancel them / just as I have carved them / if there is need for it.

This poem is considered to be one of the youngest in the *Poetic Edda*<sup>40</sup>, which means it could have been composed not much long before or even approximately in the same period as B257.

Söderberg interpreted the inscription on side C of the stick as a kind of rewording of this verse, where *æði* would correspond to what she reads as *ialuns móðr*<sup>41</sup>, but *jatuns móðr* makes a better reading. My emendation

<sup>37</sup> For which cf. Marstrander 1930.

<sup>38</sup> DR 162 (Nørrejylland. Hjørring Amt): 198.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Lagman 1989: 32–33.

<sup>40</sup> In Von See 1997: 64 the composition date of this poem is set “in nachheidnischer Zeit, vielleicht erst im 12. / 13. Jh. Nahe” and Liberman states: “*Skirnismál* is an unnatural (and rather inept) blend of both plots: winning a heroic maiden and taming the shrew, a blend that could appeal only to people with ‘decadent’ tastes” (Liberman 1996: 117); other scholars had already agreed on a late composition date (Bibire 1986: 21; Klingenberg 1996: 42), though this is not unanimous (see Dronke 1997: 400–402).

<sup>41</sup> Söderberg 1988: 365.

is supported not only by palaeographical considerations: in mythological lore, giants often try to gain control over the gods' women, especially Freyja (cf. *Þrymskviða*, the tale of the giant builder<sup>42</sup> and the account of Hrungnir's visit to Ásgarðr<sup>43</sup> in the *Snorra Edda*). But a union between a goddess and a giant is not admissible, because an ethnic group cannot marry its female members to opponents without losing part of its power<sup>44</sup>. The opposite solution (a god, or even a man, marrying a giantess) is indeed much more frequent, and it even became a characteristic feature in the traditions concerning the origins of the most distinguished families in Norse society<sup>45</sup>. In fact, if we are to judge by the texts, a kind of sexual apartheid similar to this existed in Norse society, where chieftains (or even kings, such as Haraldr Fairhair) usually have sexual intercourse with Sami women, while the opposite never seems to occur<sup>46</sup>. Haraldr Fairhair's experience may serve as a grim instance of the failure of the coexistence of the two ethnic groups: his bride Snæfríðr died very young, but this was not sufficient to satisfy her enemies: even after her death she underwent a *damnatio memoriae* as witch<sup>47</sup>. Of the four children she bore to king Haraldr, Røgnvaldr Réttilbeini, lord of Haðaland, was accused of being a *seiðmaðr* and burnt alive together with his retainers by his half-brother Eiríkr Bloodaxe. This infamous act was met with the general approval of the Norse society<sup>48</sup>.

In *Þrymskviða* we find a model of the revulsion which women were supposed to feel towards giants: Þórr orders Freyja to dress up in order to go and marry in Jötunheimr. The marriage seems at the time to be the only means of recovering Mjöllnir, the gods' most important weapon against their enemies. Yet Freyja refuses, and the violent effects of her anger are vividly described in str. 13:

*Reið varð þá Freyja, / oc fnásaði, / allr ása salr / undir bifðiz, / stöcc þat iþ  
micla / men Brisinga: / "Míc veiztu verða / vergiarnasta, / ef ec ec með þér  
/ i iotunheima".*

<sup>42</sup> *Gylfaginning* 42 (ed. Faulkes 1982: 34)

<sup>43</sup> *Skáldskaparmál* 17 (ed. Faulkes 1998: 20–21).

<sup>44</sup> Clunies Ross 1994: 95; Clunies Ross 1998: 69, 105.

<sup>45</sup> Motz 1996 b: 76–77.

<sup>46</sup> Queen Gunnhildr had sexual intercourse with two Lappish sorcerers in *Haraldz saga ins hárfagra* 32 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979: 134–136); since Gunnhildr is portrayed in this source as an example of *ergi*, of evil and obscene behaviour, this episode is probably meant to show that she is no honourable woman, but a *trollkona*, a 'witch'.

<sup>47</sup> *Heimskringla, Haraldz saga ins hárfagra* 25 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979: 125–127). *Ágrip af Noregs konunga sögum* 3–4 (ed. Driscoll 1995: 4–6).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem* 34 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979: 138–139). The *Ágrip* reports Røgnvaldr's activity as a magician (*ibidem* 2, ed. Driscoll 1995: 4), but nothing about his execution.



Wrathful became then Freyja, / and snorted in rage, / the entire hall of the Æsir / quaked under her, / shattered the great / jewel of the Brisingar: / "You know that I will / prove a most licentious woman / if I go with you / to Giantland".

Freyja is the embodiment of feminine sexuality, and as such of gods' and men's generative ability, and this must be the reason why giants are particularly attracted to her. Refusing sexual intercourse with giants, Freyja provides both mortal women and goddesses with a model of behaviour that cannot be disregarded. Even giantesses seem to attach little value to giants as sexual partners; in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 25, Helgi refuses the offer to spend a night with the giantess Hríngerðr in compensation for the killing of her father Hati (called *þotunn* in 17, 3). He says:

*Loðinn heitir, er þic scal eiga, / leið ertu mannkynni; / sá býr í Þolleyo þurs,  
/ hundvíss iðtunn, / hraunbúa verstr; / sá er þér macligr maðr.*

Loðinn (hairy) is named he who shall have you, / loathsome you are to mankind; / he dwells in Þolley, the giant, / much wise giant, / the worst of the dwellers of wilderness; / that is a fitting husband for you.

This context could be compared to *Skírnismál* 35<sup>49</sup>, where Skírnir threatens Gerðr with a giant husband. Hríngerðr is a typically grotesque giantess; Atli addresses her as *fála* 'female troll; ox' (16, 3) and *hála* 'giantess' (16,2; 18,1) and refers to her indirectly as belonging to the number of *gífr* 'female monsters; giantesses' (15, 3) and *kveldriður* 'a kind of witches or monsters'<sup>50</sup> and as a *skass* 'monster; ogress; giantess' (23, 6); moreover, she explicitly affirms that she has *krummur* 'paws' (22, 6).

Also Skaði demanded a husband among the Æsir as compensation for the killing of her father, hoping to marry Baldr, the most beautiful of the gods. Skaði (called *scir* 'clear, bright; pure' in the poetic *Edda*<sup>51</sup>) and Týr's mother (described as *algullin* 'all golden' and *brúnhvit* 'with a fair brow / appearance'<sup>52</sup>), bear no resemblance to Hríngerðr and the horrible giantesses of later prose sources; Gerðr is described as *allra qvinna*

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Martínez-Pizarro: 344–347.

<sup>50</sup> For a deeper insight in this particular kind of folk-lore monsters see "KLNm" s.v. *kveldrida*.

<sup>51</sup> *Grimismál* 11, 5 (ed. Neckel-Kuhn 1962).

<sup>52</sup> *Hymiskviða* 8, 5–8 *enn önnor gecc, / algullin, fram / brúnhvit, bera / biórveig syni* 'but another one stepped forward, / adorned with gold, / with bright eyebrows to carry / an ale-beverage to her son'.

*fægrest* 'the most beautiful among women' in *Gylfaginning* 37, and her beauty is also mentioned in the prose *Prologue* to *Skírnismál*.

Gerðr is never called a giantess in the poem and strangely enough, she is referred to as *mær* 'maiden', and also as *man* '(chamber)maid' (probably employed as a denigratory term) and *maðr* 'human being' (when Skírnir in v. 27, 6 threatens her that her food will taste awful to her "more than to any human being"). Her preferred sexual partners are depicted as men, with no implication that they should be of giant race (34, 6–7 "[...] I forbid to the maid the joy of men [...]"). In *Snorra Edda* she is even included in a list of *ásynjur*<sup>53</sup>, since Snorri believes Gerðr to be Freyr's wife<sup>54</sup>, and he considers Freyr, Freyja and Njörðr to be *æsir*<sup>55</sup>. Her descent is stated clearly: her father Gymir is called *íptunn* in the poem (*Skírnismál* 25, 5), and Snorri reports that her mother was of a giant race, the *Bergrisar*, while saying nothing about her father, whom he just calls "man" (*Gymir hét maðr, en kona hans Aurboda; hon var Bergrisa ættar* 'a man was called Gymir, and his wife Aurboda; she was of the race of Hill-giants' *Gylfaginning* 37). And yet, she is threatened with being forced to stay in the *íptna garðr* (30, 3) and given a giant as her only partner (35, 1–6). The meaning of the threat is obscure, since *íptna garðr* should be her natural habitat. It is specified that the giant in question will be a three-headed *hrimþurs* and that he will treat her in the most humiliating way; however, there is no evidence that this may be the only negative part of the curse (we do not even know if having more than one head is supposed to be a monstrous feature for the giants themselves). It has been assumed, largely because of *Skírnismál*, that at some stage of heathendom the word *þurs* had a threatening character in the sources, while *íptunn* had a more generic meaning<sup>56</sup>, but *íptnar*, *risar* and *þursar* are hard to distinguish in Norse tradition<sup>57</sup>, despite the evidence from modern Scandinavian folklore<sup>58</sup>. It appears that Skírnir's curse could fit

<sup>53</sup> In *Skáldskaparmál* G55 (ed. Faulkes 1998: 1) Freyr and Njörðr are listed among the *æsir*, Gerðr together with the *ásynjur*.

<sup>54</sup> [...] *skyldi hon þar koma [...] ok ganga þá að brullaupinu með Frey* 'she would go there and then she would marry Freyr' (*Gylfaginning* 37, ed. Faulkes 1982: 31).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Gylfaginning* 23–24 (*ibidem*: 23–24). In *Gylfaginning* 24 Snorri even remarks: *Freyr er hinn ágætasti af ásum [...] en Freyja er ágætust af ásynjum*. We also have an Eddic reference about Freyr's excellency in *Lokasenna* 35, 6. There Njörðr states that he believes his son to be *ása jadarr* 'the best of Æsir', a kenning suitable only to Óðinn alone, who is called *goðjadarr* 'the best of gods' in Egill's *Sonatorrek* 23, 3 (ed. Finnur Jónsson 1973: 37).

<sup>56</sup> Simek 1993: 107 (s.v. *Giants*).

<sup>57</sup> In Motz 1987: 216 it is stated that the "generic names" (*þurs*, *íptunn*, *risi*, *troll*) are interchangeable. The author (*ibidem*: 217) tentatively proposes some distinctions between *hrimþursar* and *bergrisar*, and between *íptnar* and *þursar*.

<sup>58</sup> Motz 1987: 217, 234.

either a goddess or a beautiful woman of giant origins. Such was also Reichardt's opinion: he assumed the curse had been used in real life before being included in the poem<sup>59</sup>. Two more scholars shared Reichardt's views<sup>60</sup>. This means that one or more versions of this text could actually have been in use for practising magic in everyday life (even though we do not know whether an elaboration ever took place, and in which direction).

The role of giants in magic directed against women is also to be inferred from the use of the rune Þ in rites of hostile magic. Evidence for the negative influence of the rune Þ in women's lives is provided both by the Norse and the Icelandic *Runic Poem* (v. 3, 1: *Purs vældr kvinna kvillu* 'the giant causes sickness to women' and *Purs er kvenna kvöl* 'the giant causes torment to women')<sup>61</sup>. No matter whether *purs* is a noun or the rune name, this sentence refers to the effects of *pursar* on women. The use of the rune Þ in black magic against women is testified to in Iceland in a manuscript from the end of the Middle Ages, where a love charm reads thus:

*Ef þu wilt willa konu suo hun rati huergi nema til þin gior grauf i golfinu þar  
hun geingr yfer og lat i totun geira blod og rijst hring vtañ vñ og nafn hennar  
og stafi þessa Mollþuss og Mann þrišteipta blad naud Komlu og gapalldr  
og þessa særing les þu. Eglit a þig en þu legg a mig ast og elsku af aullum hug  
sit þu: huergi þol þu hvergi nema þu vner mijer þad bid eg Odin og alla þa  
sem kvenn runir kunnu ad rada [...]*<sup>62</sup>.

If you want to charm a woman so that she goes nowhere but to you, dig a hole in the floor where she will tread and pour into it some blood from giant spears and mark a circle around it and her name and these staves: *Moldþurs* and *Maðr* three times inverted (?), *Blad*, *Nauðr*, *Komla* and *Gapaldr* and read this enchantment: I look at you and you lay on me love and affection from the whole heart<sup>63</sup>; never sit anywhere, never be comfortable anywhere unless you love me. This I ask from Óðinn and all those who can read "woman-runes" [...].

<sup>59</sup> Reichardt 1939: 484–5, 494.

<sup>60</sup> Dronke 1997: 392: "[in this text] there is no attempt, or wish, to distinguish her as a giant maiden from a human maiden[...];" Motz 1996 a: 106, directly reports Reichardt's words on the matter.

<sup>61</sup> Respectively Dickins 1915: 24 and 28. Recently a new annotated edition of the Icelandic *Rune Poem* has appeared (Page 1998); the readings proposed in that edition, though, do not seem to vary substantially from Dickin's in the sections relevant to this article.

<sup>62</sup> Ed. Lindqvist 1921: 56–58.

<sup>63</sup> It is not clear whose heart is in question here, despite Lindqvist's assumption that it must be hers (*ibidem*: 59).

This charm shares many features with B257, such as the phrase *ek lit á þik*, which recalls *ek sé á þér*, and *sit þú hvergi þol þú hvergi*, which is similar to *sittu aldri soptu aldri*. Even more important is the reference to giants, in *þotungeira blóð* ('giant-spear blood?') and then in *Moldþurs* ('Earth-giant'), probably some *þurs*, with the first element serving the purpose of alliteration *Mold-Mann*; *Mann* equals *Maðr*, as we can see from the drawings which follow the text. Even though the names *Blað*, *Komla* and *Gapaldr* were probably invented, *Þurs*, *Maðr* and *Nauð(r)* are known to have been in use alone and often in the formation of complex runes.

Thus, *Maðr* is the basis for the runic *Ægishjálmr*, a complex sign with the magical ability of focusing the victims' love on the magician<sup>64</sup>. The use of such runes (called *gamanrúnar* 'runes of pleasure') to win the friendship of the best members of society has been attested in *Hávamál*<sup>65</sup>, and the *English Runic Poem* seems to agree with its Icelandic equivalent which quoted an old proverb<sup>66</sup>, *Maðr er mannz gaman* 'mankind's delight is in each other' also known from Eddic poetry<sup>67</sup>. Here the Scandinavian version could acquire a different meaning, referring to the power of the rune *Y* to secure sexual satisfaction (which is perhaps the commonest meaning of *gaman*) to its user. *Nauð(r)* 'constriction' points in another direction: it is employed against women as an important tool in love magic (evidence for it is provided in *Sigrdrífumál*<sup>68</sup>), and it is mentioned together with *Þurs* in *Kvennagaldur*, a modern Icelandic love-charm<sup>69</sup>. This word was used in magic with various meanings: in *Sigtuna-galder*, three *þrár* ('woes') and nine *nøðir* are invoked on the 'wolf', apparently a sickness demon<sup>70</sup>; in the somewhat later *Ribe Charm*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*: 46 n. 4 (cf. also De Vries 1957: 216).

<sup>65</sup> *Hávamál* 120, 5–6 *góðan mann / teygðo þér at gamanrúnom* 'draw to yourself a valiant man / through runes of pleasure'.

<sup>66</sup> *Icelandic Runic Poem* 14, 1 (ed. Dickins 1915: 32; line 14, 2 adds *ok moldar auki*, following the Norwegian poem's wording of 14, 1 *Maðr er moldar auki* 'Man is augmentation of dust', *ibidem*: 26); *English Runic Poem* 59, 1–2 *Man byþ on myrgþe / his magan leof* 'A man is in joy / dear to his relatives' (ed. Dickins 1915: 18).

<sup>67</sup> *Hávamál* 47, 6.

<sup>68</sup> *Sigrdrífumál* 7 (*Qlrunar scaltu kunna, / ef þú vill, annars qvæn / vélit þic í trygð, ef þú trúir; / á horni scal þær rista / oc á handar baki / oc merkeia á nagli Nauð* 'You must know the ale-runes, / if you do not want another man's woman / to cheat you, while you trust her; / on the drinking horn you must carve them / and on the back of the hand / and sign *Nauð* on the (your?) nail'. Both the Icelandic and the Norwegian poems (8, 1) quote the same line about this rune: *Nauð er þýjar þrá* 'Constriction is the woe of the female thrall' (ed. Dickins 1915: 30 and 26 respectively). It could be thought to have been in use to enthrall a woman so that she will be forced to love the person for whose benefit the charm has been uttered.

<sup>69</sup> Jón Árnason 1862: 449.

<sup>70</sup> Lindquist 1932: 28–36.

(dating from about 1300<sup>71</sup>), nine *nouþær* are conjured up to help healing the patient, as if they were spirits of some sort<sup>72</sup>. Therefore, *Purs* is to be considered a powerful rune in magic against women with a clear sexual meaning: the alternative to the magician is a hideous giant.

The curse in *Skirmismál* appears to be a crescendo whose culmination is the carving of four (three?) signs<sup>73</sup>: first *Purs*, and then *ergi*, *æði*, *úþoli*. It is at this point that Gerðr surrenders and consents to marry or have sexual intercourse with Freyr. Söderberg argues that while *ergi* and *úþoli* are mentioned in our text, the reference to *æði* ‘rage, fury, madness, frenzy’ must be seen in the phrase *ioluns móðr*, which would mean something like ‘foolish mood’, since the root she has reconstructed seems usually to refer to empty talking, more than to rage<sup>74</sup>.

It is clear from the word’s root (the same as in the adjective *óðr* and the verb *æða*<sup>75</sup>) that *æði* is connected with both rage and madness; in the *Homiliubók*, *æði* is explicitly said to be the consequence of *reiði*<sup>76</sup>. This is the precise meaning of *jatuns móðr*, as we can infer from the occurrence of the compound *ǰotunmóðr* in both *Vóluspá* and *Gróttasöngur*. In the former, it is used to describe the threatening world snake, *Miðgarðsormr* (which is not a giant itself, but was generated by Loki with the giantess *Angrboða* according to Snorri<sup>77</sup>), in the latter about *Fenja* and *Menja*, two giant maids who are about to destroy their master’s prosperity and kill him. In both cases, therefore, we know the state of mind designated by *ǰotunmóðr* to be blind fury that will lead to disaster<sup>78</sup>.

The same compound occurs in similar contexts in *Snorra Edda*. Here we have a clear example in the giant builder’s fit of temper after he realizes that he will not succeed: his rage is so fierce that the gods call for

<sup>71</sup> Moltke 1985: 494.

<sup>72</sup> Moltke 1960: 122–123.

<sup>73</sup> It is uncertain whether *Purs* is to be considered as a rune repeated three times (one for *ergi*, the second for *æði*, the third for *úþoli*) or as a rune itself followed by three other distinct runes (see von See: 135–136).

<sup>74</sup> Söderberg 1988: 365–366.

<sup>75</sup> De Vries 1961: s.vv.

<sup>76</sup> [ . . . ] *En ef hon [scil. ræiðin] væðr ærði stilt með scyn [æmi þa sny [c hon i øde* ‘but if it [wrath] is not soothed with reason it then turns into rage’ (*Homiliubók*, ed. Indrebø 1931: 27).

<sup>77</sup> *Angrboða hét gygr i ǰotunheimum. Við henni gat Loki þrjú börn. Eitt var Fenrisúlfr, annat ǰormungandr* [ . . . ] ‘Angrboða was the name of a giantess in Giantland. With her Loki had three children. One was Fenrir the wolf, the second the world snake [ . . . ]’ *Gylfaginning* 34 (ed. Faulkes 1982: 27).

<sup>78</sup> *Vóluspá* 50, 3–4 (*snýz ǰormungandr / i ǰotunmóði* ‘the *Miðgarðsormr* writhes / in giant fury’); *Gróttasöngur* 23, 1–4 (*Mólo meyar / megins kostodo, / óro ungar / i ǰotunmóði* ‘The maids ground / they tried [their own] might / the young women were / in giant fury’).

Pórr who instantly kills him<sup>79</sup>, while in *Skáldskaparmál* Hrungnir's wrath makes him follow Óðinn into his enemy's kingdom, Ásgarðr. This situation will lead to his defying Pórr and his death in a duel<sup>80</sup>. In the same chapter, Pórr is described as being *í ásmóði* (enraged, as is fitting for an *áss*) while approaching the place where he will slay Hrungnir and receive permanent injury from a fragment of the giant's whetstone<sup>81</sup>. This is the only place in which Snorri refers to the physical damage suffered by Pórr, so that *móðr* always seems to foreshadow an event which will have negative consequences. In the saga literature, this word occurs in *Porsteins þátrr Bøejarmagns*, where it is used to describe the mood of the giant jarl Agði when he learns that his king Geirrþór has been slain by a Christian<sup>82</sup>; after an unsuccessful attempt to take revenge upon Porsteinn (who in the meantime has also convinced Agði's daughter to desert her father), he lets his followers bury him alive in a mound "with many riches", as is proper for a pagan funeral rite<sup>83</sup>. These examples suggest that *jatuns móðr* must be a state most closely tied with *æði* and distinct from *jaluns móðr*, which would at best mean something like 'an idiot's temper'.

## Conclusions

There are four reasons why an emendation is, in my opinion, desirable: a) confusion between /t/ and /l/ is easy to explain, and it is not uncommon in medieval Western Scandinavia; b) the present runemaster seems particularly prone to it, considering the slip in side B; c) in the light of the parallel between *Skirnismál* and B257, *jatuns móðr* offers the most satisfying parallel to *æði* in *Skirnismál*, and d) reference to giants in a curse against a woman, especially of a sexual kind (as stated in side D's *antu mér sem sjalfri þér*), is very common in Old Norse literature and is therefore to be expected, even if *Skirnismál* were not the model for B257.

The reading proposed is of importance in classifying the text and in placing it in the context of the popular culture of medieval Bergen, which, although it was no longer the capital of the whole Western Scan-

<sup>79</sup> *Gylfaginning* 42 (ed. Faulkes 1982: 35).

<sup>80</sup> *Skáldskaparmál* 25 (ed. Faulkes 1998: 20–22).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*: 21–22.

<sup>82</sup> *Porsteins þátrr Bøejarmagns* 11 (ed. Guðni Jónsson – Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: 413).

<sup>83</sup> *Porsteins þátrr Bøejarmagns* 12, (*ibidem*: 416).

dinavian world, was still one of the largest cities of the time, where innovative linguistic and palaeographic features had made their way into Old Norse tradition.

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