

3. Cancer in Finnish Folk Medicine

Pathography is an immensely rich reservoir of the metaphors and models that surround illness in contemporary culture. Accordingly, these written interpretations of illness experience must be understood as constructs, revisions, and in some cases, creative distortions that expose a variety of ideological and mythic attitudes about illness today (Hawkins 1999, 25). In this context I wish to point out the significance of understanding language as a tool that mediates culture-bound understandings, especially through changing times and situations. Language and traditions outline the cultural setting for human reasoning by offering schematic structures and linguistically mediated rules with which to understand and process the surrounding social and cultural setting. Accordingly, culturally agreed knowledge and understanding affects the way people form ideas, although their interpretations are based on individual reasoning and experiences (Hacking 2009, 77–79).

The American anthropologist Kathryn Woolard has closely examined theories on language ideologies in different cultural contexts. In her writing she has proposed that “cultural frames” have social histories (Woolard 1998, 10). This suggestion reminds us that in addition to culturally characteristic ideas, language, and accordingly also culture-bound traditions, capture the development of the social structures that form particular discourses affecting human minds. This means when coming to an understanding of the popular discourse on cancer, it is important to compare socio-historical processes and culturally accepted communication, and to detect the frameworks of culture-bound reasoning.

This chapter is an attempt to create historical context in order to better understand patients' argumentation analysed in this work. To recall and reconstruct tradition-bound images of cancer from the past, I shall use materials available at the Folklore Archive of the Finnish Literary Society, kept in various collections since the second half of the 19th century. It seems reasonable to use this rich source of material as it allows the introduction of unique, and so far unstudied, folk medical ideas relating to cancer, its occurrence and folk medical treatments. This analysis also demonstrates that cancer is by no means a new health concern in the Finnish context.

The archive materials reveal the period before the socially supported healthcare system gained its dominant place in Finnish society. In Finland new legislation on citizens' rights for health and public healthcare was proposed in the 1920s (Helén & Jauho 2003, 25). From this period onwards attempts were made to introduce a socially supported and controlled medical system to the Finnish people. This also meant suppressing the traditional folk medicine practised among Finns. Despite these efforts folk medical practices lasted until the 1960s for political and economic reasons (Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 187–189; Naakka-Korhonen 1997, 108–109; Piela 2006, 298–299). Since then suffering Finns have received help with their health concerns from socially supported healthcare centres and centralised hospitals, where the treatments given follow the newest discoveries of biomedicine. The final change in the healthcare system took place in the middle of the 20th century, removing mainstream Finns from their traditional healing methods, so that today many people in Finland only have faith in biomedical cures (see Chapter 8). However, according to previously culturally set frameworks, their health beliefs are still bound up with the folk medical past. In this chapter I shall describe various factors relating to cancer before the widespread acceptance of biomedical healthcare treatments in Finland. This is an attempt to demonstrate that several popular ideas relating to cancer still resemble these beliefs, and also to show the fears deriving from historic discourse.

Although ethnomedical records are indeed valuable when examining such argumentation, it must also be said that the available material is by no means an easy source when making a coherent study, at least when it comes to presenting certain numbers or statistics. Despite the inherent difficulties, if we agree that culturally accepted attitudes derive from the historical development of the human environment, then

the available ethnomedical records offer a good opportunity to recall tradition-bound ideas about cancer that, via language, influence human reasoning today and thus become embedded in cancer patients' writings. In my opinion, this kind of diachronic insight makes some current concerns in popular cancer discourse clearer and helps to explain some general ideas about the mythical nature of cancer in a more detailed manner.

The problem of recognising cancer among archive sources

The materials available in the Folklore Archive have little to do with the rational cancer explanations characteristic to modern medicine. Although the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century marks a period of great discovery and continuous change for medical discipline, in everyday life this change was less apparent as there were too few educated doctors to meet the needs of thousands of patients. In addition, within the medical discipline as a whole, this movement towards rational reasoning did not take place as quickly. Nevertheless, during the second half of 19th century the new generation of Finnish physicians slowly stopped believing that illnesses were independent beings (Pesonen 1990, 31), which made their attitudes somewhat different from those of ordinary people.

In today's medicine, the early detection of cancer is the dominant imperative for future treatments. A century ago the diagnosing procedure, both in scientific and folk medicine, was still mainly manual or visual, and explanations regarding illness origin, which influenced the selected treatments, mainly based on a combination of traditional belief and personal experience. Indeed, the possibilities for illness diagnosis became much better when the microscope was introduced and pathological study become routine. The diagnostic tools that made it possible to examine the body from inside were implemented for medical use at the end of the 19th century (Porter 1999, 575). Finnish physicians, however, were unable to serve their patients as expected. The lack of educated doctors was so great that, for example, in the 1860s a county doctor had 20 000 patients to take care of (the number had been twice as high 20 years earlier) (Naakka-Korhonen 1997, 108). Thus, there was also a continuous lack in terms of offering the best

possible cure for numerous sufferers. This means that people were used to taking care of themselves, with the doctor's help sought in only the most complicated cases.

The main problem was that although the number of doctors and other medical personnel was constantly rising and small hospitals and clinics were established, ordinary people did not trust the ideas and methods that trained doctors introduced and practised. The doctor had a different social status and his way of dealing with illnesses was treated with great suspicion (Naakka-Korhonen 1997, 107). Among ordinary people, first aid originated from the domestic sphere and often local healers, who represented the views and beliefs of local people, were consulted in cases where domestic healing practices were not successful.

The lack of competence when it came to telling the difference between illnesses was a common problem of the time. In his book about patient-doctor-patient relationships among the Finnish peasantry between 1889–1916, Finnish historian Anssi Halmesvirta has proposed that the peasantry did not recognise the symptoms of most common illnesses, which meant that when health problems occurred, people waited until the symptoms became “recognisable” (Halmesvirta 1998, 44). According to archive materials, in the case of cancer this meant that the disease was first recognised only when it was visible as an open wound, or manually detectable as some kind of external growth. For these reasons it is also difficult to decide which illness is described and handled in the Folklore Archive texts.

Among the studied ethnomedical records, I found only one text advising how to diagnose cancer in the domestic context. However, I believe the following method was more common than the available archive texts would suggest:

Jos epäilee että itsessä on syöpähaava, saa siitä seuraavalla tavalla tiedon: Otetaan onkimato ja pidetään sitä haavan päällä sormien välissä. Jos haavassa on syöpä, kuolee onkimato pian. Jos onkimato ei kuole ei ole myöskään syöpää.

If you think that you have an eater wound you will find it out in the following manner: You take an earthworm and keep it on the wound between your fingers. If the wound has eater in it the earthworm will die soon. If the earthworm does not die there is no eater.

SKS KRA Viljakkala, Mattila Martti E. 3809. 1936 < Jeremia Hieturi, 82 y.

Initially, in the folklore archive I examined the available ethnomedical texts dealing with phenomena called ‘the eater’ (*syöpä-kortisto*) and ‘growth’ (*kasvannainen-kortisto*). It soon became clear that using only the illness ethnonyms was ineffective in distinguishing between different cancer types, and between cancer and other health problems of the times. To gain a better picture I would have had to go through all the available materials on ethnomedicine (*kansanlääkintäkortisto*), which would have been very time consuming and also unproductive in relation to the main aims of this thesis. As an alternative, I chose to go through a few selected ethnomedical collections.

The first ethnomedical collection I selected for closer examination was the Finnish Physicians Association (*Suomalaisen lääkäriseuran*) *Duodecim* materials collected in 1907 by Ilmari Laitinen and Veikko Puntala. Studying these materials confirmed that the decision to concentrate on certain collections was beneficial as it gave a far better overview of the (folk) illnesses characteristic of the time (the late 19th and early 20th centuries). Based on this first collection, I gained the impression that various cancer(s) had had a rather unimportant role in Finnish folk medicine and were also rather badly identified. Based on 22 intuitively selected texts concerning cancer, it seemed that the disease could have been anything from *säärihaavat* (‘badly cured wounds on feet’) (SKS KRA E 190 5 *Duodecim* 328. 1950) to *watsanpoltteet* (‘stomach pains’) (SKS KRA E 190 5 *Duodecim* 367. 1950 < Simo Juho Sirkka < Kittilä).

In 1948 *Kalajokilaakso*, a local newspaper in the west of Finland, organised a competition to gather accounts relating to folk medicine. Among the materials contributed by Pentti Heilala I found four accounts that could (possibly) describe the treatment of carcinogenic illnesses in folk medicine. These were texts that describing healing *syöpä* (‘the eater’) (SKS KRA E 183, 13 (10) < Ylivieska, Lahdenperä 1948 – Heilala, Pentti < Ida Kangas), *koin tukko* (‘closed moth’) (SKS KRA E 183, 18 (15) < Oulainen, Piippsjärvi 1948 – Heilala, Pentti < Elvi Nasila), *munuais- ja rakkotauti* (kidney and bladder illnesses) (SKS KRA E 183, 22 (19) < Haapavesi, Vatjusjärvi 1948 – Heilala, Pentti < Emmi Pirttimaa) and *struuma* (goiter) (SKS KRA E 183, 55 (45) < Alavieska, Taluskylä 1948 – Heilala, Pentti < L. K. Vierimaa “Lieppastiina”). Again, the decision that these texts possibly deal with

different cancers was based on the researcher's intuition by combining illness descriptions and selected treatments, without confirmation.

Additionally, I examined the materials collected in 1964 from the folk medicine collection *Medica* to see the (possibly) changing importance of cancer, as well as the folk medicine collection organised in 1978. For example, among the answers received in 1978 I found twelve descriptions of how to heal cancer, or how to strengthen oneself when suffering from it. Materials representing the times after the advent of biomedical health care indicate an important change in societal life, including the use of folk medical practices. In most cases cancer, like other illnesses of the time, was no longer diagnosed and treated at home but in state supported hospitals. Thus, one may suggest that from approximately the 1960s onwards, treatments deriving from folk medicine are understood by most Finnish citizens as alternative or complementary cures, rather than as primary cures (Naakka-Korhonen 1997, 108–109; Piela 2006, 298–299).

Cancer's ethnonyms

Despite the fact that cancer, like many other diseases and illnesses, was not well recognised among ordinary people, it has received many vernacular names. People refer to cancer with words such as *vieras* ('stranger') (SKS KRA Sääksmäki. Tuomarila, Kalle. VK 102: 113. 1912), *ruumiin mato* ('body worm') (SKS KRA Viitasaari. Albert Rautainen 2768. 1953 < Emil Hämäläinen, b. 1896), *ruumin koi* ('body moth') (SKS KRA Sortavala, Otoisten kylä, Hyvärinen, Juho KRK 141: 482. 1936 < Maija Hyvärinen b. 1905). The most popular names, however, are *syöpä* ('the eater') or *syöpäpahka* ('the eater bump') (SKS KRA Sortavala, Laine Elli KRK 144: 336. 1935 < Sofia Savolainen, 78 y.), *kasvannainen* (SKS KRA Saarijärvi. Harju, Otto. 433. 1938 < Aukusti Kyyrä, b. 1867), *kasvain* or *kasvi* ('the growth') (SKS KRA Rääkkylä Hirvonen, Iida KRK 156: 35. 1936 < J. Harinen, 60 y.) and *rupi* ('the scab') (SKS KRA Viitasaari. Harju, Otto 2008. 1938 < Ville Kauppiainen, b. 1864). The word *rupi*, rather common in ethnomedicine, is only used once in the cancer narratives under study here: *Minulla oli käsivarressa sellainen musta rupi, en pitänyt sitä vaarallisena. Se sai olla siinä jotain 8 eli 9 kuukautta.* "I had such a black scab on my arm, I did not think it was dangerous" (144).

In the ethnomedical records, the noun ‘eater’ is used to refer to patients’ internal problems, the ‘growth’, to their external conditions. Sometimes instead of *syöpä* the words *refta* or *krefta* are used, which derive from the Swedish *kräfta*, also used by medical doctors at the time:

Rehta on se kun ruumiista kuluu pois liha ja nahka, eikä sitä voi millään parantaa. Sinikiviä ja pikiöljyä siihen koetetaan panna, mutta ei se auta.

Cancer is when the body loses flesh and skin and there is no way to heal it. They try to put the blue stone and tar oil [*Pyroleum picis*] on it, but it does not help.

SKS KRA Sodankylä, Samuli Paulaharju 20478. 1932 < Kurtin Eeva, 70 y. Mp. 1920.

Ethnonyms like *paisuma* (SKS KRA Korttesjärvi M. Nurmio 950. 1888 < M. Filipakka, 60 y.), *bajari* (SKS KRA KRK 145: 7 Salmi, Vihtilä. Mikkonen, Mikko. 1935 < Akuliina Laasarof, 49 y.), *rusto* (SKS KRA Lapua. Hautamäki, O. K. 300. 1935 < Anna Huhta, 66 y.), *pahkura* (SKS KRA Juva, Näärinki. Kolari, A. Elisabeth KRK 79: 4. 1936 < Sirkku Ylönen, ompelija 25 y.), *gruumi* (SKS KRA Sulkava, Rahkola. Karppinen, Juhani KRK 78: 158. 1935 < Alb. Karppien 82 y.) and numerous other local names are only sometimes used to describe cancers. Typically the same words are used to refer to several other problems, such as boils, abscesses, warts, infections, gangrene, allergic reactions or various skin problems caused by bad hygiene and *syöpäläiset* (parasites) (Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 189–191). For example, the notions *pääsyöpä* (‘head eater’) or *rupi päässä* (‘scab in head’) (SKS KRA Kärsämäki, Keränen Erkki 42+43. 1883) do not signify brain cancer but parasites in the scalp resulting in hair loss and skin problems.

According to the available materials, the concept *ihosyöpä* (‘skin eater’) was the most commonly recognised cancer type (SKS KRA Lappajärvi < Heikki Toivonen, E 193: p. 239. 1950; SKS KRA Ritola, Jaakko. VK 81: 10. 1909 < Antti Hintta), although, as already mentioned, it was also used to refer to other skin concerns that normally had nothing to do with skin cancer (Rytkönen 1937, 214–215). For example the ‘skin cancer’ affecting young children, also acknowledged in official death records (in Swedish *likmask*, *barnkräfta*), in fact referred to an infection called noma or *cancrem oris* (Vuorinen 2002, 219). As the options for making laboratory tests were limited, there was no way to find out that noma was caused by bacteria.

The word *nenäsyöpä* ('nose eater') also occurs in the studied materials (SKS KRA Laihia. Salokannel, Tyyne KRK 199: 1430 < Potinmomma). In current medical terms it may be explained as a problem connected with undiagnosed syphilis, a very common health problem that was misunderstood for a long time, and therefore because of the lack of necessary knowledge and facilities, one that remained untreated (Halmesvirta 1998, 209–218). On the other hand the expressions *rupi nenässä* ('scab on the nose') could be interpreted as some kind of external growth similar to warts (SKS KRA Inari. Samuli Paulaharju 8157. 1930 < Eeva Nuorgam, 32 y.).

Other cancer types typical in the Finnish context (Koskenvuo 1994, 43), such as gastric carcinomas or lung cancer, occurred under names like *vatsatauti* ('stomach illness') (SKS KRA E 190 5 Duodecim 458. 1950 < Aate Härkönen < Rovaniemi), *keuhkotauti* ('lung illness') (SKS KRA E 190 5 Duodecim 325. 1950); again these ethnonyms also refer to completely different medical problems in the digestive system, such as tapeworm (Naakka–Korhonen 1997, 141) or in the case of lung ailments, tuberculosis, another very serious health problem of the time (Kuusi 2003, 33) that caused *tuberkeli pahka* ('tuberculosis bump').

It is not unusual, when describing cancer, for people to use different onomatopoeic expressions, such as *kolotus* (SKS KRA Suomussalmi. A.R. Tuomas-Kettunen 236. 1938 < Kaija Seppänen, 55 y.) and *porotus* (SKS KRA Laihia. Brandt, Herman. 1156. 1891 < Fredrika Jäärnberg), referring to certain kinds of pain in different body parts.

Perhaps the best recognised and acknowledged cancer type of the time, in addition to skin cancer(s), both in folk medicine and scientific medicine, was breast cancer. Despite nonexistent methods of anaesthesia, breast cancer surgeries took place as far back as Antiquity. The most famous breast cancer surgeons during the Middle Ages were Paulus Aegineta (625 – 690) and Guy de Chauliac (1298 – 1368) from France (Forsius 2003). According to cancer patients' narratives, in the 1950s similar painful surgeries, causing inconceivable suffering to patients (246), still took place in Finnish healthcare centres at that time.

In the developing medical discourse, breast cancer was interpreted as a problem for elderly women that occurred during the menopause (Vuorinen 2002, 219). The medical discourse of the time encouraged woman to observe and examine their breasts from time to time; and in case of anything suspicious to go to a doctor promptly. The scientific descriptions of breast cancer caused insecurity and fear, mainly because

people did not know how cancer spread – was it an infection or an inherited illness? As is still true today, doctors could not answer this question, which certainly did not make patients' situations any easier (Halmesvirta 2002, 95). In the ethnomedical records, breast cancer is mainly referred to as *rintahaava* ('breast wound') or *syöpä rinnoossa* ('eater in the breast/chest') (SKS KRA Laihia. Brandt, Herman. 836. 1891 < Amalia Brandt, 32 y. < Sameli Silanpää, Jalasjärvi); however, again, the cancer cannot be divided from other concerns relating to this part of the body. For example *rintahaava* could also be caused by *ruusu* (erysipelas), described then as the swelling of the breasts (Rytönen 1937, 215).

The facts that allow the differentiation of illnesses in such challenging cases are the treatments and remedies used, although in cases where people were incapable of diagnosing the true causes of illness, they tried various different remedies and healing practices in the hope that something would help. Healing methods were intimately connected with illness origin, which in the case of cancer is again a complicated subject.

The problems associated with defining cancer aetiology

Typically, Finnish folk medicine consists of warning beliefs, sayings and legends advising people against transgressing cultural norms and stressing that they should avoid certain places, times and acts resulting in illness (Honko 1968, 20–23; Hästesko 1910, 324–325; Waronen 1989, 17–18). The Finnish doctor Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884), who was profoundly interested in the Finns and their traditional worldview, described in his medical dissertation how people living in rural society imagined that a person's life was endangered by invisible and visible malevolent forces, always and everywhere (Lönnrot 1984, 190; see also Manninen 1933, 228). According to ethnomedical thought some of these dangers derived from substances present in the human body, such as blood, sweat, excrements or body hair (Hämäläinen 1920, 133–141), whereas other illnesses were interpreted as acts of human enemies, such as witches and the dead, or attacks of various forms of illness demon (Honko 1968, 23–37). However, such cultural norms and warnings, containing rules of behaviour and preventative techniques

for cancer, are not reflected in the available ethnomedical records. In the material at hand I could find only two descriptions of magical practises used to prevent cancer:

Syöpä estethän tulemasta. Kun lapsia saarhan niin pitää sitte vasta katkaasta navan varrenkun on jo jälkimenotkin alkana, jot' ei sitä saa sisälleen katkaasta, niin sit' ei tuu syöpä lapshen.

To prevent getting the eater. When the child is born you should cut the root of the navel after the afterbirth is out as well. It should not be cut inside, then the child will not get the eater.

SKS KRA Laihia. Brandt, Herman 1153, 1891 < Amalia Brandt, 31 y. < Anna Pakkanen.

Sellainen henkilö joka söi käärmeen lihhaa viinapalona tai muuten. Se henkilö ei kuole ruumiinmaun syöntiin eli syöpään.

This kind of person who ate snakes' flesh as pieces with vodka or otherwise. This kind of person will not be eaten by body-worm or the eater.

SKS KRA Viitasaari. Albert Rautiainen 2768. 1953 < Emil Hämäläinen, b. 1896.

The lack of particular beliefs and norms, as well as preventative techniques, may be interpreted in multiple ways. It may indicate that cancer was seen as an unpreventable illness in the ethnomedical context, where health problems with unknown origins were mainly approached and interpreted as *Jumalan tauti*, referring to generally incurable concerns and suffering sent by God (Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 199–200; Halmesvirta 1998, 50). Although people tried various methods to soothe their suffering, recovery was in the hands of the almighty Father of Heaven. Similar argumentation is also common in cancer patients' pathographies, in which people connect their falling ill with some kind of higher punishment (350, 402, 409).

In contrast to this, ethnonyms such as *vieras*, *ruumiin mato*, *ruumiin koi* or *syöjä* allow the suggestion that cancer was imagined as an individual being, similar to other worm-like parasites such as tapeworm or "tooth-worm", destroying bodies and endangering lives (Honko 1968, 23–37; see also Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 201–202). In cases of tapeworm the worm also existed in reality, whereas, the "tooth-worm" was most likely the greyish-white nerve that was sometimes 'picked out' from a tooth destroyed by caries (Pekkola 2010). In instances of cancer it is not quite clear where the roots of this kind of worm image are, but it

is possible to imagine that in open wounds that were not kept clean, maggots would occur.

In addition to this universal disease-worm explanation, in which a putative worm-like disease in limbs or organs is interpreted as the cause of pain (Honko 1968, 23–37), in some cases falling ill with cancer has also been seen as the result of breaking societal or cultural norms, as defined by the relevant belief system and/or worldview. I wish to emphasise that because of cancer's secondary role in folk medicine, the illness origin was often defined based on single illness cases and thus was closely connected with a personal life story. In this vein, one should not forget all kinds of rational causes for the many diseases prevalent at the time, such as malnutrition, exhaustion, unbearable living and hygiene conditions, poor clothing and possibly also untreated injuries and infections (Ackerknecht 1971, 8–21). Similar explanations arising from lifestyle, nutrition or individual behaviour play an important role in current cancer aetiology (see Chapter 5).

The ethnomedical treatments described later in this chapter indicate that the popular aetiology of cancer connects cancer's origin foremost with earth, water and fire. This suggestion is based on the fact that, typically, the ethnomedical treatments are based on *similia similibus curantur* and *pars pro toto* principles (Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 205–207), meaning that the selected treatments are connected with the suggested illness origin. 'Like cures like' means that the selected treatments had to bear a resemblance to the origin of illness or the illness itself, while 'a part for the whole' meant that if part of an illness was taken elsewhere the entire body was healed. Earth, fire and water have mainly been used to heal all kinds of skin problems, and were seen as having the magical power of removing the illness and purifying the affected area. Although there is no apparent evidence for the following suggestion, I still wish to emphasise that in the folk medical context cancer could have been interpreted as a taboo topic because of its unknown origin, lack of effective treatments and of course its connection with images of painful death, and dying in general. The latter perspective becomes particularly important in terms of understanding the ways in which popular attitudes are expressed in written cancer narratives, i.e. the materials under study.

Some notions about the medical discourse of the time

Laura Stark has suggested that, historically, folk belief formed human understanding of the self and its dynamics and balance in a similar way to that in which, today, biomedicine and psychiatry do (Stark 2006, 30). In the case of folk medicine this suggestion could be mistaken for a proposal that folk medicine has inner dynamics based only on folk belief system, excluding other (medical) discourses of the time. It should be emphasised that the continuous lack of information regarding illnesses, and the poor potential to define the symptoms and offer efficient treatments, made the folk medical system open to all kinds of impacts deriving from other (not necessarily folk belief based) systems.

The ethnomedical records relating to cancer offer a good opportunity to demonstrate the relationship between folk medicine and the scientific medicine of the time, a relationship that has for too long been interpreted by scholars of (folk) medicine as being parallel yet without any real meeting points. Again it is worth emphasising that even though the folk medical explanations reflected in the ethnomedical records represent the tradition-based belief system and worldview characteristic of rural Finland, the medical opinions and suggestions of the time, mediated via various publications such as early medical self-help books, calendars and newspapers, were acknowledged, and were also quickly integrated into the existing folk medical tradition. This, in one way, shows the importance of health in general, and in another demonstrates the closeness between medical and folk medical approaches. To exemplify this I shall compare a few examples representing the medical discourse of the time, with descriptions found in the ethnomedical records.

In the medical self-help book *Suomalaisen talonpojan kotilääkäri* (The Finnish Peasant's Home Doctor) first published in 1838, Elias Lönnrot describes cancer and its treatments as follows:

Syöpäpahka, ruumiinmadon alku. Tutaan leikkelewästä, wiilaisevasta kiwusta, jossa myöhemmin alkaa nähdä suuria sinisiä, suonia ja haawailemia. Myhkyrän ympärille pitää aikaiseen panna 5 iilimatoa joka toinen wiikko. Wäli-ajoiaksi katetaan se ohuella nahalla, säämyskällä tahi muulla semmoisella.

Cancer bump (*syöpäpahka*), the beginning of body worm. One recognises it because of its cutting and hurting pain, later one sees big blue veins and wounds. Around the bump one must put 5 leeches every second week. In between, it will be covered with thin skin, turned skin or something similar. (Lönnrot 1981, 109)

A few pages earlier (p.107) there is a description of how to treat the *koi* (moth), *koiso* (mothy), *wieras* (stranger), *koi sormessa* (moth in finger), *jäsenkoi* (limb moth), *iso kumppali* (big friend):

Jos olisi alottanut jostaki wieraasta, esimerk. Kynnen alla pistävästä aineesta, niin pitää esinnä sama aine pois otettaman. Muuten imetetään paikka 5:llä eli 6:llä iilimadolla ja haudotaan perästä, koska veri on laannut juoksemasta, 2 eli 3 tiimaa kylmässä wedessä tahi kylmillä puuroilla jouhoista etikan kanssa. Jos tuska ei sillä heittäisi, niin ruwettakoon pitämään lämpimässä wedessä tahi käärittäköön ympäri lämpimiä haudepuuroja ja koska paikka pehmenee, pistettäköön ohut, kaita, teräwä weitsen kärki sywältä sisään ja pidettäköön reika auki, kunnes elo lähtee ulos ynnä märänneen luun kanssa, jos sitä olisi. Jälkeenpäin korjataan haawaa liewittäwällä woiteella ja sidelaastari-nauhoilla. Muutamat neuwowat sian sontaa lämpimältä koin ympäri käärittämään ja sanowat sillä paranewan.

If [the illness] has begun because of some alien [substance] e.g. something pinching under the finger, this [substance] must be removed. Otherwise one uses 5 or 6 leeches and later the spot must be covered, because the blood has stopped running, two or three hours with cold water or with cold porridge with vinegar. If the pain does not stop then keep it in warm water or wrap it with a warm porridge compress and if the place gets softer one should stab a thin slender knife deep inside and keep the wound open as long as the “life” together with wet bone comes out, if there is any. Later one fixes the wound with some lotion and bandages. Some also advise wrapping warm pig’s excrements around the moth; and they assert it cures just as well. (Lönnrot 1981, 107)

This part of Lönnrot’s suggestions apparently refers more to problems that are gangrene-like, but considering cancer’s ethnonyms the illness could also have been interpreted by readers as some kind of cancer, as is the case in the ethnomedical record regarding *mätänemis viat* (rotting problems) or *koi* (moth) collected from northern Finland in 1907:

Mätänemis-viat. Koin tuntee [--] hirmuisen kovasta särkemisestä, ihon punoituksesta ja ajettumisesta. Kun koi on ehtinyt pitemmälle, alkaa se syödä sekä luita että lihoja ja tekee ennen pitkää päälle näkyvän haa-

van joka laajenee ja laajenee ja samalla syvenee luihin saakka, kunnes vihdoin luukin alkaa syöpyä ja kulua kokonaan pois.

Problems with rotting. One recognises the moth [---] from very strong pain, red skin and its peeling off. If the moth has gone deeper it begins to eat bones and flesh and creates a visible wound that becomes brighter and deeper at the same time until it reaches the bones, so that the bone begins to vanish and finally becomes totally eaten.

SKS KRA E 190 5 Duodecim 479. 1950 < Juho Kantola < Rovaniemi (1907).

Despite difficulties recognising the difference between cancer and other illnesses with similar names, reading Lönnrot's healing suggestions is truly remarkable. Mainly because Lönnrot did not hesitate when suggesting domestic surgical treatments, although he must have been well aware that poor hygienic conditions among the Finnish peasantry was the cause of many endemic and other illnesses at the time. Notwithstanding this, stabbing the wound is also suggested as a way of finding out if the illness will disappear, and is described in the ethnomedical records examined:

Syöpää on parannettu siten että on kurinvarras kuumootettu tuli-punaiseksi ja sillä pistetty kipiä paikkaa. Jos on naskahtanut kun sillä vartahalla on pistetty niin sitte paranee. [---]

A cancer treatment was used in which one took a knitting needle and heated it red and stabbed the aching place. If it prickled it meant it will be healed. [---]

SKS KRA Kauhajoki. Könnö, Oiva. KT 243: 105. 1939

In his writing, cited above, Lönnrot also mentions the use of pig excrements in the treatment of open wounds, although he seems to have doubts about its usefulness. The internal and external use of all kinds of excrements was widespread in Finnish ethnomedicine. For example, burning someone's excrements gives this person *rupia* (scabs), which together with the magic power of fire can "cleanse" the sick person (Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 206; Hämäläinen 1920, 84–85).

The use of leeches to balance sufferers' conditions was also a common practice among the Finnish peasantry. The idea of cleaning wounds of bad blood derives from Hippocratic ideas on the humours and how they influence the nature and condition of the body (Porter 1999, 58). The idea of bloodletting as a central treatment for any health problems was recognised and adopted both by scientific and ethnomedicine alike

in order to expel toxins from the blood. In the case of wounds, leeches were apparently more useful than phlebotomy.

From other written sources we find that a century later, the use of leeches, as per Lönnrot's suggestion, was already seen as unnecessary. The health newspaper *Terveydenhoitolehti* (1912) proposed that instead of bloodletting with leeches, one should use only cold wrappings to control blood circulation (Halmesvirta 1998, 52). Nevertheless, progress towards modernisation and evidence-based treatments in scientific medicine did not greatly affect the situation of those with cancer, as the disease was for a long time still understood as a "body-bump surrounded by a wet wound" (Halmesvirta 1998, 67). This confirms that by the beginning of the 20th century, improvements in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer were still minimal. Thus, having cancer would mean suffering and passing away without much professional help. This, again, put the caretakers into a complicated situation.

Because of the economic and societal situation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, accessibility to new treatments was very limited. Only the poorest were supported by law in their efforts to gain access to state supported healthcare (Naakka-Korhonen 1997, 107–110). As any visit to a medical doctor took valuable work time and cost money, people chose instead from the available domestic treatments, or consulted with family members or local healers. As already mentioned, in rural areas, for mainly economic reasons but also due to a lack of faith, a doctor's help was sought only in the worst cases, and even then people often hesitated for the simple reason that buying medicine for someone who was going to die was seen as unnecessary. At the beginning of the 20th century, doctors were forced to admonish people, pointing out that helping sufferers should be seen an act of humanity and not be calculated in financial terms (Halmesvirta 1998, 44). Such attitudes demonstrate well the hopeless situation of cancer patients in this period; however, it did not mean that sufferers were left entirely without help.

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, general improvements in Finnish society meant that, to some extent, it was possible to alleviate poverty and care for those who were seriously ill. This affected behaviour towards people who were suffering from cancer. For pragmatic economic reasons, attempts were made to place the responsibility for care of the terminally ill with different social healthcare organisations. As there was a shortage of facilities, cancer

patients sometimes suffered poor conditions or nonexistent care in houses organised for those in greatest need. Accordingly, in public, because of the lack of money and doctors, people were admonished and encouraged to take care of the sick at home for as long as possible using domestic healing techniques (Halmesvirta 1998, 91–92). The domestic care of the terminally ill naturally reinforced the use of folk medical treatments, which perhaps contained more magic and belief in healing powers than true medical effects. Even today in such cases a patient's strong belief in a given treatments plays a significant role in their recovery (see Chapter 8).

The above treatments, suggested by medical practitioners, were used in folk medicine and accordingly are reflected in ethnomedical records, allowing us to see that vernacular perception and scientific medical practice were very close to each other. Such proximity and mutual influence lasted approximately until the advent of the microscope and cancer medicine became a bioscience at the cellular level (Porter 1999, 574–580). However, before this milestone, particularly when implementing new medical practices, people were eager to experiment with new cures. An individual's health was the most valuable asset for people whose ability to feed themselves on a daily basis was directly connected to their ability to do their daily work.

Treating 'the growth' and 'the eater'

Archive records indicate that when people recognised cancer, they tried numerous methods to cure the sufferer, and this again has affected the quality of available archive materials. Brief descriptions relate how people tried various curative practices using plants, mixtures, mammal products and magic performances; however, the outcome was always unsure. As with the archive records regarding other issues connected with folk healing, some informants were sure that the practises they used were truly helpful; whereas, others say that despite all efforts it was not possible to save those afflicted (see also Naakka-Korhonen 1997, 85–86). In this context, considering the situation and attitudes described above, it is actually incorrect to talk about healing cancer, but rather about various attempts to treat its consequences.

As cancer was only recognised as problematic once it formed a visible bump or a wet wound, the treatments were mainly divided into two

categories meant to cure either the closed or the open wound. These wounds were generally treated either by salving (*voitelu*) or pressing (*painelu*) the affected area. For salving, different substances were used, most of them available in the domestic sphere, such as vodka, dirty water, water, the sweat from glass (condensation), or water from a hole in a stone; although urine, spit, salt, turpentine (*Aetherolum terebinthinæ*), lamp oil or mercury were also used. Various plant-based liquids were prepared using herbs and other plants like *tulikukka* (Great mullein, *Verbascum thapsus*), *maitikka* (cow wheat, *Melampyrum*), *näsiä* (mezereon, *Daphne mezereum*), *tuomi* (bird-cherry, *Prunus padus*), *suokanerva* (wild rosemary, *Ledum palustre*), *tielehti* (plantain, *Plantago major*), *ryssänlehti* (*Mahorka*-tobacco, *Nicotiana rustica*), *inkivääri* (ginger, *Zingiber officinale*), and *pippuri* (pepper, *Capsicum*). Here, when considering various healing plants and herbs, one must be aware that the ethnobotanical plant names referred to in the ethnomedical records are not necessarily in direct correlation with plant taxonomy as we know it today (Kalle 2008, 53f.; see also Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 209).

Among the healing plants are juniper and the birch tree. The latter was used when boiling the *tuhkalipeä* (birch-tree ash), perhaps the most well known cancer medicine in the Finnish context, containing water and ashes from the birch tree. For example, among the answers received in the 1978 folk medicine collection, we find the following suggestion for the preparation of *tuhkalipeä*, which in diluted form was supposed to help maintain a patient's general health by increasing low pH levels:

Koivuntuhkalipeä (1 osa tuhkaa, 5 osaa vettä kiehautetaan; sakan annetaan painua, kirkas neste päältä pulloetaan; käytetään vajaa ½ dl 3-4 kertaa /p. kaljan, piimän tai limonadin kera).

Birch tree ashes (boil 1 part ash with 5 parts of water; let it settle, put the clear water into a bottle; one takes ½ dl, 3 to 4 times a day with beer, sour milk or lemonade.

Kansanlääkintäkysely 1978 – Liminka. Paavo Kytökorpi 18.

Together with blueberries (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), which contain useful antioxidants (Kansanlääkintäkysely 1978 – Suoniemi. Arto Järvensivu 206, see also Blueberries Health), the “fluid of birch tree ash” has survived as a well known cancer treatment to the present day, and is used by cancer patients as alternative or complementary medicine (Gernet 2009 & Keskustelut, Koivuntuhkalipeä ja syöpä 2005).

Mixing different plants and substances containing putative magic and healing powers is typical to folk medicine. By doing so people believed they could make medicines even more powerful. It is not extraordinary that such healing potions were used internally and externally at the same time in an attempt to push and pull the illness out of the body:

Paratahan syöpä rinnoosta: Kun pannahan puoli naulaa koiran rasvaa ja puoli naulaa ryssänlehtiä ja tuoppi vettä patahan. Se sitte kiehutetaan; niot' ei jää kun puoli tuoppia vettä patahan. Sitte kun soon jähtynyt niin siihen sitte pannahan puoli tuoppia viinaa. Sitte se pannahan tallellen pottohon. Sitte kun sitä ryyppäjää puoli kanta-kupillista joka huomen, niin paranoo syöpä rinnoosta, jos on syöpä johonkin rinnoos.

To cure cancer in the breast: you put half a pound of dog fat and half a pound of mahorka leaves and a pint of water into a cauldron. Then you boil it until there is only half a pint of water left in the cauldron. Then, as it is cools down, you add a half pint of vodka. Then you close it into the pot. And then you drink a little cup of it every morning and so the eater in the breast will be cured. If there is an eater in the breast.

SKS KRA Laihia. Brandt, Herman 1153. 1891 < Amalia Brandt, 31 y.
< Sameli Sillanpää, Jalasjärvi.

As dead people were believed to interfere with the lives of the living by sending them various suffering, the substances connected with the dead corps had a practical value in folk medicine (Rytkönen 1937, 213). Accordingly, the water that was used to wash a dead body was believed to have healing power, *väki* (Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 84–86) and was therefore also used in treating cancer wounds:

Kertojan vanhoilta kuulemma taika uskomus. Myöskin käytettiin ruumiin pesuvettä ja ruumiin saippuaa n.s. ruumiin koita (syöpää) parantaessa, pesemällä niillä syöpä kohtaa.

An old belief that the storyteller has heard from older people. The water that was used to wash the dead body, and also the soap, were used to treat the body moth by washing the cancer place.

SKS KRA Sortavala, Otoisten kylä, Hyvärinen, Juho KRK 141: 482.
1936 < Maija Hyvärinen b. 1905.

As with the treatment of many other skin problems, people also used earth from graveyards as it was believed to contain power emanating from the dead. Here, as in many other similar rituals, it was important that the intermediating earth was returned to the graveyard after use:

Syöpätauti jos vaivasi niin haettiin hautausmaalta multaa ja hierottiin sillä, jonka jälkeen se vietiin takaisin hautausmaalle samaan paikkaan niin syöpä parani.

If someone had the eater illness then one brought earth from a graveyard and rubbed the ill place. After use, the earth had to be taken back to the same place from where it was taken.

SKS KRA Pori. Porin tyttölyseo, 2934. 1936 < Simo Konttinen, b. 1901.

In a similar manner people also made use of stones, tree knots, ears of grain and wooden sticks to press the illness out of the body (see also Palmén 1937, 231–232). Stones, knots, sticks and other magical items were used as intermediating agents that were believed to take on the illness and therefore, like graveyard earth, were handled with care to avoid new infection. The number of intermediating agents was also significant. The typical magic numbers were 3 and 9 (3x3), so for an effective cure people took, for example, 3 stones (SKS KRA Ritola, Jaakko. VK 81: 10. 1909 < Antti Hintta) or 9 kinds of grain (SKS KRA Kalajoki. A. Lindqvist 237. 1887 < Miina Alstetti, 40 y.) or spit from 9 different people collected in the morning (SKS KRA Ii. T. Matikainen 317. 1906). The rituals involving intermediating agents were typically repeated three times to assure efficacy:

Painellaan kivellä kolme kertaa, se painuu. Ei tavallisella kivellä. Konovitsan kivet on hyviä, samoin esim. rillirauta. Kierretään sillä kaaressa.

One must press with stone three times, then it gets lost. Not with any stones. The stones from Konovitsa are good, but also for example iron. You make a circle with them.

SKS KRA Rautu. Haavio, Martti 80. 1931 < Annuska, Tatjana Haukan naapuri, 60 y. Mp. 1921.

Another method to improve the power of ethnomedical practices consisted of various rituals in which curative methods were combined with the use of animal blood, ashes, flesh, fat, and excrement. This examples suggests the following:

Parannus syöpää vastaa saadaan kun ottaa elävän kravun ja sitoo sen kynnet yhteen kiini niin että se ei saa nipistettyä sitte ottaa se ravun ja panee sen sen kipiän paikan päälle ja antaa sen olla siinä niin kauvan kuin se siinä itsestään kuolee vallankin jos ei syöpä vielä ole auki oleva niin on tämä paras keino ja muutenkin se auttaa se on tosi.

To cure eater you take a living crab, tie its claws together so it cannot pinch you, and put it on the aching spot. You let it stay there until it dies. This is a particularly good method if the cancer [wound] is not yet open, although it helps otherwise. It is true.

SKS KRA. Kiikala. Lindqvist, Aleksander 388. 1891 < Gusta Helgreeni, 60 y.

On syöpää vastaan se kun ottaa vasta tapetun kyyhkysen ja halkaisee sen ja sitoo ne puolikkaat kumpainkin jalkapohjan alle mutta samalla täytyy myös panna vasta tapettu rotta sen paikan päälle jossa syöpä on niin se kuljettaa säryyn jalka pohjain kautta pois.

Against eater one takes a freshly killed dove and cuts it into two halves and ties these halves under the soles of the feet, but at the same time one must also put a freshly killed rat on that place where the eater is, so it takes the pain out though the soles of the feet.

SKS KRA Loimaa. A. Lindqvist 498. 1892 < Liisa Härkönen, 71 y.

Because of the belief in the eater or the moth as a worm-like illness, one popular animal product to heal cancer was a mash of earthworms (SKS KRA Virrat. Eino Mäkinen 6, 1936 < Lydi Hietanen. 405; SKS KRA Viljakkala. Mattila Martti E. 3810. 1936 < Jeremia Hieturi, 82 y.). This product was prepared in different ways, but the main aim was to change it into a salve so that it became possible to smear it on the cancer wound:

Syöpä paranee kun ottaa tyhjän sarvej ja panee sen täyteen onkimatoja ja pään kii. Kun sitte sen sarven panee saunan kiukaaden niittä se saa sitä kiahun rasvaks ja siellä rasvalla usein voitelee nii kyllä syöpä paranee.

You can heal eater if you take an empty horn and fill it with earthworms and close it. Then you place this horn on the sauna stove so it boils and becomes a fat, and if you salve with this fat often enough then the eater heals.

SKS KRA Tattijärvi. Jukka Rehola 319. 1904 < Herman Piitamaa, 70 y.

Within Finnish folk medicine, selecting the right place and the appropriate time had great significance for the successful outcome of healing rituals. Generally speaking, this meant preferring a certain day of the week, such as Sunday, Tuesday or Thursday, and avoiding Wednesday and Friday (Palmén 1937, 231). Usually the selected time, early morning, midnight or late in the evening, was decided on so that there would be no occasional people passing by, as there was a fear that any stranger might cause additional harm or make treatment invalid.

The ethnomedical records on cancer allow the suggestion that the particular time, and also place, were more important when treating what were called *kasvaja* or *kasvi* (external growths). Here, again, it becomes difficult to separate the treatment of cancer growths from other skin problems, such as warts, allergies or boils, which, according to folk belief, originated from the earth. Normally, treating various external growths, whether cancer or not, meant taking account of the phases of the moon, thus creating a connection between the growing and diminishing moon and a growth which, although it that may have been getting larger, was expected ultimately to disappear.

Typically growths were pressed with earth, knots, or sticks from particular trees taken at the time of the new moon. This practical *ars magica* was supported by simple sayings, like: "*Painu, elä paisu, ja pane puuro päälle!*" "Get lost, don't grow, and put some porridge on." (SKS KRA Heinävesi, Varistaival. Pennanen Olavi KRK 84: 441. 1935 < Anna Maria Törrönen b. Koponen, 67 y.) Or with more powerful spells in the following manner:

Tautien painelus. Pahkat painan, kuvut kuristan, kuun kuulumatto-maks, päivän näkymättömäks, kun et kuulu kuuna päivänä, etkä nävy ilmaana ikänä, linnat liikkuu, järvet järskyy, mikset sinä liiku? Paha, pagene pois ennen päivän nousemista, auringon kasvazzumista.

Pressing diseases. Warts I press, bumps I strangle, away from the moon's hearing, away from the day's seeing, if you don't disappear in a month, and don't shrink in time, towns move, lakes shuffle, why don't you move? Bad one, get lost before the day rises and the sun grows.

SKS KRA Impilahti, Ruohojärvi. Saarela, Niina, 18 y. KRK 153: 114. 1935.

Thus it was assured that by selecting this particular time for healing, as the new moon stopped growing, so also the growth would vanish for good (Naakka-Korhonen 2007, 86–87). In this context trees also appear as a metaphor for a tumour, which was imagined as being hard like a tree knot and as having stumps or roots that had to be removed in order to cure the cancer. The tree metaphor is also used in healing charms that describe how the growth should disappear inside the tree rather than torturing humans (SKS KRA Suistamo. Hautala, Jouko. 1078. 1939 < Sandra Lösönen, 78 y.). Such metaphoric connections between cancer and the various images of trees is very strong in people's minds even today, and is also repeated in cancer patients' narratives (see Chapter 6).

The most common places for healing were the doorstep, crossroads, graveyards, as well as other places that were believed locally to have a certain closeness to the spirits. Additionally, such places as chimneys, thresholds, pigsties and the forest near the household were seen as suitable places for dealing with all kinds of magic, including curing various illnesses (Hämäläinen 1920, 102; Palmén 1937, 232; Paal 2004, 99–102). Perhaps the most important healing place in the Finnish context, particularly for healing growths and other skin problems, was the sauna (Naakka-Korhonen 2008, 210–213; Hakamies 1983, 277–279) as it offered direct, private, access to earth, water and fire, all recognised as the most important substances in the treatment and pressing of different kinds of growths and lumps:

Ihosityöpä. Tässä tapauksessa käytetään tulen voimaa. Se saadaan siten, että tietäjä menee saunassa kiukaan, muurin pesään pää edellä, jossa hän salaperäisesti hymisee: "Tulen voima, tule tänne." Sen tehtyä ottaa hän kiukaasta kolme kiveä, sylkäisee kolmasti joka kiveen, painaa kolmasti joka kivellä samaa kohtaa aina niin kauan kun auki olevat paikat ovat tarkkoihin joka paikasta painellut, jolloin hän viimeisellä kivellä painaessa koppaa sairasta kiinni ja karjaisee haltioissaan: "Pois paskat." Sitte hän asettaa itse kunkin kiven siihe paikkaan, josta ne otettu oli.

Skin cancer. In this case one uses the power of fire. This is made as follows: the healer enters the sauna oven humming secretly: "Fire-power come here." After doing this he takes three stones from the sauna oven, spits three times on every stone and presses the same place with every stone, as long as open wounds are carefully pressed from every side. Then after trampling with the last stone, he grabs the sufferer and screams in trance: "Off the crap!". Then he puts all the stones back in the places where they were taken from.

SKS KRA. Ritola, Jaakko. VK 81: 10. 1909 < Antti Hintta.

The tradition of using different remedies and rituals at the same time makes it difficult to give a proper classification of folk medical cancer treatments. As I already suggested, for domestic healers the most important act was finding the illness origin and then selecting suitable curative practices. Based on the ethnomedical records that describe different healing practices, it is only possible to suggest the supposed illness origin and the aim of selected treatments. The herbal remedies used suggest that the eater or the moth were seen as independent beings – disease worms. This is shown by the use of the same strong-smelling herbs that were used in the Christian tradition of exorcism

(Valk 1994, 149). This idea is supported by the use of all kinds of mixtures, lotions and mammal products, as well as herbs, described in the ethnomedical records. While salving and pressing may again be interpreted as parts of a healing ritual that raise magical power on the one hand, on the other they may also be seen as methods of balancing body dynamics and correcting the endangered physical order. Here particularly, earth, water and fire are used as intermediating objects that remove disease from sick bodies. The verbal healing used in the domestic sphere may be interpreted as playing an important role in all kinds of other curative practices (Palmén 1937, 227).

Gaining healing power

Although people knew shorter magical sayings and charms, more powerful healing was typically practised by the local specialist *tietäjä* ('the one who knows'). The central idea in any healing ritual was to send afflictions back to the place of their origin and balance social disorder (Honko 1993, 365). Accordingly, in the healing ritual the healer aimed to dispel illness from the patient's body by diagnosing the origin of the illness. With the help of magic rituals united with the power of words, the illness was forced to leave:

<i>Lihansyöjä, kuivakkah,</i>	Meat eater, dry one,
<i>luunpurija puurtukkah.</i>	bone biter, screwy one.
<i>Lihansyöjä, luunpurija,</i>	Meat eater, bone biter,
<i>jäsenien järkyttäjä,</i>	limb torturer.
<i>kuin lienet kotini koira.</i>	If you are a domestic dog
<i>Syö sie luita lautsan alta.</i>	eat bones under the table.
<i>Vain kuin lienet kyläni koira.</i>	If you are a village dog,
<i>Syö sie luita pellon peässä.</i>	eat bones at the edge of the fields.
<i>Mäne heitto helvettiin,</i>	Go fast to hell,
<i>häikie häpiemähä.</i>	get lost to shame.
<i>Syömästä kaluomasta!</i>	Away from eating, aching!

SKS KRA. Paulaharju, Samuli 4350. 1911. Vuoninen, Oulu.

When the local healer was asked to help the healing act in some way, this act immediately took on a different value, as in the following example:

Haapavedellä siellä 1929 koetettu syöpätauti parantaa "haltian voimalla". Syöpä tautisen luokse tullut Alatalon Niika – katsonut sairasta ja yhä enemmän haltius kohonnut. "Ei sinussa ole muu kun Martti-

vainaan pirut.” Sairas kieltänyt halteutumisen. Sairas kuoli parin viikon kuluttua.

In Haapavesi they tried to cure the eater disease with the ‘power of the spirits’ in 1929. Niikka from Alatalo came to the diseased one and he looked at the ill one and the spirits rose. “There is nothing in you other than the devils of Matti the dead one.” The ill one refused to be healed and died a few weeks afterwards.

SKS KRA Muhos. Marttinen, J. 1625. 1931 < H. Korpikallio, 58 y.

Joensuun Sohvi loitsi veljeni ranteesta kasvannaisen. Alakuun viimeisenä päivänä hän pani sen päälle tähkiä ym., paineli sitä molemmin peukaloin ja hoki: “Syö kuu kasvannaista, kasvannaisen kantaa.”

Sohvi from Joensuu charmed off the growth from my brother’s wrist. On the last day of the waning moon she put ears of grain and some other stuff, pressed it with both thumbs and said: “Moon eat the growth, [eat] the growth’s heel.”

SKS KRA Saarijärvi. Harju, Otto. 433. 1938 < Aukusti Kyyrä, b. 1867.

The different value here refers to the fact that accounts of healing in which recognised healers were involved, tend to concentrate on the healer’s personality and healing skills, and less on healing practices and final outcome. The local healer was a respected person who maintained the role of healing specialist. However, all healers were not equal in their status, skills and powers (Siikala 1992, 71–76; Kopponen 1976, 8–9). This meant that when there was a growth, or the eater, one had to visit the healer who had a special talent for removing specifically these ailments.

Among the studied materials I discovered two texts saying basically that anyone could gain the power to heal growths or the eater after performing certain rituals:

Litomadot ovat hyytelömäistä melkein kuin sammakon kutu. Kulkevat käärmeen muotoisessa parvissa. Tarkasti katsomalla erottaa pienoiset mustat päät ja ruumiin ääri viivat jotka ovat limalla toisiinsa yhdistetyt ja kulkevat jokainen ruumistaan liikutellen kulku on niin hitaasta ettei se näytä juuri ollenkaan estyvän. Näitä hämmennellen on moni saanu taika käteen jolla painellen kasvannaiset ihmisruumista painu. Nytki elää vielä sellaisia poppamiehiä. Näitä matoja ei ole nähty vuosikymmeniin.

Lamprey larvae are like jelly, like frog’s spawn. They go like snakes in a cloud. If you watch carefully you can separate little black heads from their body contours, which are connected with others by slime, and they

go slowly moving their bodies, although their movements are so slow that it looks as if they are not going at all. If one stirs them, this person gets in his hand the magic to press growths, which then disappear from the human body. Even nowadays you find such healers. Those worms one has not seen for ages.

SKS KRA Peilisjärvi. Hiljainen Hanna, KRK 156: 27. 1935.

Jos joku alastomalla kärellään käy kiinni Myyrään keskeltä ja pitää sitä niin kauvan siinä kuin se kuolee niin saa se käsi sen voiman että hän voi parantaa kaikkia syöpiä ennen kuin ne pahoiksi kerkiä tulemaan kuin hän vain tällä kärellä muutaman herran sivele kipeetä paikkaa.

If someone holds with a naked hand a mole from its middle and holds it there as long as it dies then this hand gets this kind of power that one can heal all eaters before they can turn bad, even if he only touches the aching place.

SKS KRA Kiikala. A. Lindqvist 389. 1891 < Gusta Helgreeni, 60 y.

In both examples, the magic power to cure illnesses like growths or the eater is gained via animals and positioned in the hands. Healing with hands has been one of the central acts in folk medical treatment and thus the powerful touch of the human hand also appears in charms (Piela 2005, 11f.; Honko 1994, 37). As the following example shows, it was also thought that if human hands could not cure a patient, God's hands could:

*Nouzen ja painelen,
kazvajat kavottelen,
kuun kuulumattomah,
päivän nägemättömäh,
kus et kuluu kuuna piän,
sinä ilmosna igänä.*

*Puun juuret punottumah,
koivun juuret korguomah,
hoavan juuret hajottumah
pajun juuret painumah,
vaan ei ihmisen iho.*

*Linnat liikkuu, järvet järskyy,
vuoret vaskizet vabisou,
linnan torit torkahteloo,
kun et kuulu kuuna piän,
nävy ilmosna igänä,
miun käzien käytyvö,
miun sormien sobivuo.*

I stand and press
the growth I reduce
away from the moon's hearing
away from the day's seeing
if you don't disappear soon
you appear again.

Tree roots intertwine
birch tree roots tower above
aspen roots dispel
willows roots descend
but not human skin.

Towns move, lakes shuffle,
copper mountains shake,
town markets sound
if you don't disappear soon
don't shrink in time,
I shall use my hands,
I shall try my fingers.

*Jos ei käyne miun käet,
sobine miun sormet,
sit käygäh Luojan käet,
sopikkah Jumalan sormet,
itse Luoja loitssemah,
pyhä isä pistämäh.*

If my hands can't do it,
my fingers can't handle it,
then the Lord's hands should do it,
God's fingers should handle it,
the Lord should charm,
the holy father stick in.

SKS KRA Suistamo. Hautala, Jouko. 1078. 1939 < Sandra Lösönen, 78 y.

Removing illness from a sick body and transmitting it to these agents caused the agents to become new carriers of the disease, and thus they were seen as highly infectious. The idea that illnesses could have been transmitted via different substances shows how, in folk medicine, these illnesses were interpreted as infectious. Therefore, bodily contact with sufferers must be seen as a complicated issue. Placing the hands over the possibly infectious site required certain protective power that was not given to everyone. It is also notable that healing with the hands is still practised among modern cancer patients. According to the cancer narratives, this may be a simple self-suggestive act practised at home alone (031), or offered by a particular specialist *henkiparantaja* (spiritual healer) often representing a religious movement (186). These examples show how both in the past and today, those other than designated healers refrain from touching cancer sufferers when attempting to help them, meaning that non-specialists have historically, and continue to be, afraid to touch cancer patients. I shall return to this subject, which is linked to the contagious image of cancer, in various contexts in later chapters.

Conclusions

Based on the ethnomedical texts included in this study, I suggest that people in rural Finland did not have fixed ideas about cancer and its symptoms. Such uncertainty makes it a challenge to decide which problems were handled as cancer, and which ethnonyms refer to cancer. My attempts to understand this situation made it clear to me that while impressions can be drawn from the information, intuition plays its part in the process. Notwithstanding, this chapter attempts an overview of popular ideas regarding cancer and its healing in Finnish folk medicine in order to create historical frames of reference within which to understand current popular images of, and beliefs about, cancer.

It is worth emphasising that cancer did not belong among the primary concerns of the Finns until the era of modernisation within medicine, which began in approximately the 1960s. This impression is supported by cancer patients' narratives, which include individual reminiscences of cancer during the first half of the 20th century:

Ensimmäinen tieto tästä sairaudesta minulle tuli, minun ajatusmaailmani, kun keväällä v. 1931. N. N. Kemin Vainikkalan kylästä kuoli syöpään. Hän oli naapurin mies, sellainen rakennustyöläinen. Minä näin hänet sairaana, hän oli luonnottoman kalpea, ja laiha, kotona hän sairasteli. En muista varmasti, mutta vatsassa se kasvi taisi olla. Se oli hyvin kauheaa, ei oltu kuultu sellaisesta taudista, en ainakaan minä. Ei siitä osattu ainakaan parantaa. Seuraava oli oman kylän vanha-isäntä Taavetti Vainikka, samanlainen sairaus hänessä ja kuolema keväällä 1938. Eihän ne kylän isäntien kuolemat nyt muuten minulle paljon merkinneet, mutta kun Vainikan tytär Vieno oli ikätoverini, niin taisinpa hänen kanssaan vähän itkeäkin, osaa ottaen. Sitten niitä alkoi kuulua yhdeltä ja toiseltakin puolelta, sama sairaus monella tutulla. Ja sattui kohdallekin.

My first reminiscences of that illness came into my worldview in the spring of 1931. N.N. from Vainikkala village in Kemi died of cancer. He was our neighbour, a construction worker. I saw him when he was ill. He was unnaturally pale and thin. He was at home. I do not remember correctly but I suppose the cancer was in his stomach. It was terrible, no one had heard before about this kind of illness. At least I had not. No one could heal it. The next one was T.V. from our own village. He had a similar illness and he died in 1938. These deaths did not have any particular meaning to me. As T.V.'s daughter was my age, I believe I cried in sympathy with her. Since then I have heard from here and there about cancer and many acquaintances fell ill with it, and then it happened to me. (047)

The available statistics, compiled by medical practitioners, shows that cancer did not belong among the most significant illnesses of the time. Above all, trained doctors recognised breast cancer and skin cancer, although of course this does not mean that other cancer types were nonexistent. Folk medical definitions, such as 'stomach illness' or 'lung illness', or other vaguely defined health problems, could all be caused by cancer; the problem was that, like village people, trained doctors also failed to diagnose cancer because of a lack of the correct resources. Therefore, it seems appropriate to propose that cancer's current place among other modern illnesses has been constructed in parallel with the development of modern medicine.

This parallel development has, at least so far, not changed the culture-bound images associated with cancer. As I shall demonstrate in the following chapters, people still picture cancer as a living being endangering human life. Because of its often inexplicable origin people share various theories about its aetiology. This also means that often enough cancer is interpreted as a consequence of sometimes widely differing causes, such as individual lifestyle, personal qualities, or the various environmental effects of the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986 and even unhealthy underwear. Based on the ethnomedical records it is possible to suggest that cancer has been seen as an infectious disease and thus people without particular skill tried to avoid bodily contact with those affected. This, in my opinion, explains the fear some people still sense when in contact with cancer patients. The only thing that modern medical practice has changed entirely are the healing practices. This makes it even more interesting to examine how traditional ideas are interpreted, accepted and put together in cancer patients' writings about their lives after diagnosis with the disease.

WRITTEN CANCER NARRATIVES

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