A Storm in the Head: Animals, Dreams and Desire

LOUISE S. MILNE

ABSTRACT. This article analyses the long history of the “storm in the head” as a recognisable image-constellation in art, mythology, dreams, and folk-culture. Some very old components – hybrid animal imagery, a set of mediations on the mystic identity between man and beast, and a rhetoric of commotion associated with ecstatic ritual – were drawn together around the evolving identity of the heroic warrior at some point in the Bronze Age. They can subsequently be seen in dream representation and North European folk-culture, briefly moving to centre stage in Renaissance Neo-Platonic art and thought.

The constellation expresses itself in many ways: in myths of the warrior’s animal alter ego (shape-shifting), in the emotional “climax” of war and its symbolism, in the configuration of hostile dreams, in conventions for describing dreams, in the phenomena of panic. While it exhibits marked elasticity, tenacity and longevity as a cultural package, over many generations, the meaning of the constellation was effectively altered by rearranging its component elements, so the “storm” came to be understood in psychological rather than supernatural terms.

KEYWORDS: battle-fury, shape-shifting, hybridity, dream-culture, warrior-culture, Bosch, Leonardo, Neo-Platonism, berserker, fetch, animal-self

THE WARRIOR’S HEAD

A trope which fascinated Leonardo (1452-1519) and others is the image of the antique head, helmeted with animals and monsters (fig. 1). Down-market imitations – such as this anonymous Florentine drawing (fig. 2) – lose control of the different degrees of illusionism in the design. What was intended to depict sculpted decoration on metal ends up looking instead as if creatures are sprouting out of the man’s head. Though accidental, the resulting imagery is uneasy.
Literally, the man’s head is occupied by animals. The animals may then represent his thoughts, his feelings, or the forms of spirits possessing him. Like a second skin or rind, the contour of the helmet suggests a magical hinge. The imagery thus becomes a metaphor for a state of mind appropriate for display on the head, on the warrior’s professional hat. The lesser artist unwittingly reverts the subject to its roots in an ancient and complex *topos*, wherein wild beasts and uncanny shapeshifts were used to signify and give shape to ferocity and the eclipse of reason.


Fig. 2. Anonymous Florentine, *Man in a Fantastic Helmet*, c. 1470-80. Engraving, 12.8 x 7.5 cm, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.9069 (Hind A.1.56). Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington.
A Storm in the Head: Animals, Dreams and Desire

In a section of a *Last Judgement* design (fig. 3), Jerome Bosch (c. 1450-1516) revisited this old complex of ideas – about anger, madness and the Otherworld – explicitly in terms of dreaming. A large head, backwards and upside down, protrudes from the frame into the picture space. Fire spouts from its mouth, an arrow is stuck amongst its hair, the corner of its shoulder is armoured. Below the armoured shoulder is a hole; inside this, the shadowed head of a small demonic figure floats on his side. The linchpin of his leg and torso is the head of another, fully human, sleeping figure. This imagery depicts things happening inside the head – the head of Everyman, the head of an Angry Man. The half-asleep and sleeping men, rippling out in three dimensions, half-inside and half-outside the huge head, associate this complex with the inner world of the mind. The fire-filled head could be the dream of the small sleeper, umbilically linked to his vision by the intermediate state. This “storm in the head” thus becomes a discernable complex in the history of hybrid. Or all three may be read as versions of the same man: part of him (his conscience? his ego?) asleep, part inflamed by passion, part daimonic, transfigured by his animal self or spirit.

Bosch developed his hell-scenes in the direction of the oneiric, synthesising Classical and folkloric materials according to Neo-Platonic principles (Milne 2007: ch.1). In this essay, I unpack this imagery of the angry head, with its spouts of fire and shapeshifting creatures, and follow its genealogy back in time, through a skein of traditions which represent ferocity as a metamorphic state – a “storm in the head”, the history of dreams and nightmares.

**ANIMALS AND ANTHROPOMORPHS**

Anthropomorphic behaviour is built into us. We could not abandon it even if we wished to. Besides, we do not wish to. (Kennedy 1992: 8)

The relationship between animal imagery and human psychology starts at the level of representation. Animals are seen as human, or as part-human, and *vice versa*. There are three main positions. In traditional societies, for instance, among hunter-gatherers, animals are
seen as equal spirits in animal form. In stratified societies, and in Christendom, animals are classed among the lower orders (cf e.g. Gilhus 2006: ch. 8). Lacking souls, anything that looks like intentional behaviour in animals can be ascribed to the agency of demons. In the discourses stemming from Descartes and the Enlightenment, animals are fully bestial and absolutely distinct from humans. Animal characteristics and epithets become derogatory synonyms for the monstrous and the alien, and often code for the under-class (e.g. Thomas 1983: 38-9; Midgley 1994: 35-46).

3b. Bosch *Last Judgement*, inside right panel. Detail, fire-breathing green giant in armour.
Though I have for convenience described these as a historical progression, in fact, all three modes are present to varying degrees in every society and era. So, an early 21st-century person may see her pet cat as fully human, food animals or exotic creatures in a zoo as partly kin, and other beasts (and other groups of humans) as aliens, vermin or predators.

There is a sense, then, in which all representations of animals are coded representations of humans. More exactly, the three apparently distinct positions can be understood as “really” different ways of construing animals as hybrids. To bring animals into representation – into culture, into consciousness – means to translate them into human terms. If animals are not literally anthropomorphised (as humans in animal skins), then they are classed as inhuman; and this too is a coded category which identifies them as either alien or occult (not, of course, mutually exclusive designations).

Mediating these various potentials, we find the convention of the visual human-animal hybrid, an ancient figura, familiarly used to represent a supernatural creature, such as the horned man, or the mermaid.

As discussed in an earlier essay for Cosmos, in visual culture, the hybrid figure is a master-convention for representing a creature with a dual or multiple nature (Milne 2006). Thus the mermaid form – half-woman, half-fish – represents an entity which may take the form of either woman or fish.1 In stories or real life, people can apprehend the doubleness of a supernatural animal experientially; so one may be informed that a whale is a shapeshifting witch causing a storm, or directly perceive that a certain leopard is in fact one’s grandfather. But to represent these entities in art, it is necessary to construct a visual hybrid; the witch is shown as half-whale, and grandfather leopard given a man’s legs. Like the monsters on the warrior’s head, these composite forms are adynata, or impossibilities (Milne 2007).

All of this has a bearing on the different traditions wherein animal-human metaphors and imagery were used to represent the mind overwhelmed by passion, in the case of the warrior, by rage or battle-fury. How did adynata become linked to extreme emotions, and how were such traditions folded into the wider culture of dreams and visions?
ANIMALS AND PREHISTORIC DREAM-CULTURE

Humans do a great variety of things to and with animals – put them in cages, squeeze milk from them, ride on their backs, harness them to ploughs, castrate them, gather their droppings... arrange affairs and unions for them, and of course, kill and eat them. Humans also observe animals moving, eating, reproducing, interacting, vocalizing, and dying. [Our] forebearers’ knowledge of animals [and their] metaphorical use of that knowledge [were both] extensive and diverse... (Howe 1981: 280)

Metamorphosis as a function of art was evident right from its beginning. If the Magdalenians had had bicycles in advance of Picasso, they would have taken them to pieces and changed them into cattle. (Lorblanchet 1989: 113)

Animals were the fundamental resource for human cultures, materially and mentally, for tens of millennia before the invention of writing, and well into the modern era (cf Löfgren 1985: 184-213). Animal imagery is the oldest type of figuration on record, making up a huge proportion of extant Upper Palaeolithic art. Visual concepts of “animals in the head” emerge from this period in several ways. First among these are actual hybrid or composite creatures.

There are not many representations of these in Palaeolithic art, but a handful of very striking ones attest to the great antiquity of the concept (Bahn and Vertut 1997; Leroi-Gourhan 1983; Lorblanchet 1989). Among the clearest examples are: the bison-man embedded in a schematic “Venus” at Chauvet (c. 30000 BP; fig. 4a), the theriomorph at Gabillou (fig. 4b), the antlered humans at Les Trois Frères (c. 15-10000 BP, e.g. fig. 4c), and various lion-human statuettes carved from mammoth ivory (Germany, c. 32000 BP; e.g. fig. 5; Conard 2003: 830-2). Towards the end of the Magdalenian (c. 15-12000 BP), we find bona fide monsters in Franco-Cantabrian cave art. One chamber at Pergouset contains engravings of fantastic creatures, with distorted heads, elongated necks, misplaced features (fig. 6a-b), a panel of such heads interlaced, and a headless human with missing extremities (Leroi-Gourhan 1983; Lorblanchet and Sieveking 1997: 113).
It is pieces of animal forms, rather than wholes, which emerge as the basic representational material of this art, endlessly combined, recombined, and decomposed (Lorblanchet 1989: 139-40): “The fragmentary parts of animals join together as fantastic intermediate animals with the attributes of different species [and] come together with parts of humans [to] give birth to men-animals”.

Very many of the animal panels in caves were engraved or painted on top of older works (cf. Les Trois Frères, fig. 4c). This layeredness produces a distinctive visual effect of dimensional complexity or simultaneity, a semiotic thickening, increasing in weight over time. Both the composites on their own and the layering in different ways prefigure the two processes Freud identified as characterising dream imagery: condensation and displacement (Freud 1978: 381-419; Milne 2006: 81-2; Milne 2007: 32-7; cf. Noll 1985: 443).7

Finally, as experienced hunters, butchers, anatomists, tanners and bone-artificers, Palaeolithic people would have been aware of the striking visual kinship between animals and humans at the level of the skeleton. Hidden in life, manifested after death, that most basic metamorphosis reveals that we are all indeed brothers under the skin. Apart from 2D and 3D figuration, Upper Palaeolithic artefacts, habitats and graves involved much manipulation of skeletons and their extremities (claws, teeth, horns). Skeletal parts are pre-fragmented pieces; they invite visual identification of humans with animals, and the reshuffling or substitution of parts.8 Thus in the Palaeo-Eskimo cultures of Point Barrow and Dorset, arguably closer to archaic Circumpolar societies than their descendants in historical times (cf. Kehoe 1996), the “flying bear” associated with shamanic practice is actually a skeletal bear (cf. fig. 7, c. 1-500 CE).9

Opposite page: Fig. 4a. Bison-man, c. 30000 BCE (with later “Venus” addition). Salle du Fond, Chauvet-Pont-d’Arc Cave, Vallon-Pont-d’Arc, Ardèche France. Photo: Courtesy of Jean Clottes.
4c. Human figure with bison head and tail, c. 15000 BCE. Engraving, Gabillou cave, Lot, France. Photo: University of California, San Diego/ARTstor.
Fig. 5. Lion-human statuette, Aurignacian, c. 32000 BCE. Mammoth-tusk, H 296mm. Hohlenstein-Stadel-cave, Baden-Württemberg, Germany. Inv. Ulmer Museum Prä Slg. Wetzel Ho-St. 39/88.1. Photo: Thomas Stephan © Ulmer Museum.
Fig. 6a-b. Imaginary creature and bird (?), cervid, “monstrous head” and long-necked animal, Magdalenian, c. 15-12000 BCE. Room IV, Panel V and VI, Pergouset cave, near St Gery, Lot, France. After Lorblanchet and Sieveking 1997.

Fig. 7. Flying or floating bear with skeletal markings, Middle Dorset culture, c. 1-500 CE. Igloolik area. Photo: Canadian Museum of Civilisation NhHd-1_2655.
ANIMALS AND METEMPSYCHOSIS

The greatest peril of life lies in the fact that human food consists entirely of souls. All the creatures we have to kill and eat, all those we have to strike down and destroy to make clothes for ourselves, have souls, as we have. (Ivaluardjuk, an Iglulik Eskimo shaman, c.1921)\textsuperscript{10}

The lion-headed figures could represent a god or a human with lion-like qualities, or a human reincarnated as, or possessed by, a lion (or \textit{vice versa}). For our purposes it is the polysemous potential supplied by the composite structure that is important. The idea that animals were people in the distant past is common in world mythology (cf. Bahn 2010: 53-4). In myth and legend, they talk, think and breed with humans; they are frequently claimed as ancestors or kin. In early philosophical texts, hybrid creatures appear in the context of this issue of kinship with animals at the beginning of the world. Piero di Cosimo illustrated Lucretius’s version of this myth with human-headed animals (fig. 8a-b). Thus the Pythagorean Empedocles (c. 490-430 BCE) wrote in his zoogony (Campbell 2000: 150),

\begin{quote}
Here many heads sprang up without necks, bare arms were wandering without shoulders, and eyes needing foreheads strayed singly. (fragment 57)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Many creatures with a face and breasts on both sides were produced, man-faced bulls arose and again bull-headed men, [others] with male and female nature combined, and the bodies they had were dark. (fragment 61)
\end{quote}

\textit{Contra} the Pythagoreans, at the end of his \textit{Timaeus} (90e-92c), Plato has animals descending from humans: “men of the first generation who lived cowardly or immoral lives were... reborn in a second generation as women” (90e-91a). Human metamorphosis in the first days of the earth is an evolutionary mechanism. Without an intervening death, people atrophy into lower animals through mental deficiency: “These are the principles on which living creatures change
and have always changed into each other, the transformation depending on the loss or gain of understanding or folly” (92b-92c).

Fig. 8a (left). Piero di Cosimo, *Landscape with Forest Fire*, c. 1505. Oil on panel, 71.2 x 202 cm. © Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. WA 1933.2\A420

Fig. 8b (above). Piero di Cosimo, detail: prehistoric hybrid creature.
Plato tries to link outward transformation to inward defect; souls described as “hopelessly steeped in error” (92b) become fish and descend into the oceans; “Birds were produced... growing feathers instead of hair, from harmless, empty-headed men” (91d). In the case of men who would not exercise reason: “because they had ceased to use the circles in the head...their forelimbs and heads were drawn by natural affinity to the earth, and their forelimbs supported on it, while their skulls were elongated into various shapes as a result of the crushing of their circles through lack of use” (91e).

The collapse of the “divine circle” inside the mind is made visible in the flattened skulls of animals. The passions thus distort outward shape when they are released from the control of reason. Inner change is a visible change.

In Book 9 of Plato’s Republic (9.588a), Socrates describes Man as internally metamorphic, a composite in one skin of lion (temper), man (reason), and monster (passions):

Mold me then the shape of a multiform, many-headed monster with heads of tame and wild animals around him in a ring, all of which he has the power to change about or to make them all grow out of himself.

Notice that the human himself can rearrange the many heads of his inner monster, the unbridled passions, and even make them all grow out of himself. Socrates concludes, “We ought to do and say what will make our inside man completely master of the whole man, and give him charge over the many-headed monster” (9.589b).

However the next book of The Republic (10.613-621) relates the Myth of Er, which famously ends with a scene in the afterlife where souls choose animal bodies in which to be reborn:

[Er] saw the soul which had once been Orpheus choosing the life of a swan... hating to be born of a woman because they had been his murderers; he beheld also the soul of Thamyras choosing the life of a nightingale; on the other hand, the swan and other singing birds wanting to be men (10.620a)
The Homeric warriors elect to become fierce beasts; Ajax,

chose the life of a lion... [he] would not be a man, remembering
the injustice which was done to him... Agamemnon took the life
of an eagle, because, like Ajax, he hated human nature by
reason of his sufferings (10.620b)

**NEO-PLATONIC AND CHRISTIAN ANIMALS OF THE MIND**

Understand that you have within yourself herds of cattle..
flocks of sheep and flocks of goats.. and that the birds of the air
are also within you... understand that you are another little
world...(Origen, *Homily on Leviticus* 5.2.3)

As one might expect, Christianity notably complicates this line of
thought, and it is worth pursuing the ideas of Plato and Socrates
further into the first few centuries after Christ, leaving aside for the
moment the materialisation of the complex in warrior imagery. Neo-
Platonic scholars in particular, committed to a mystical interpretation
of the Platonic corpus, actively psychologised the topos of internal
animal and monster imagery, often (though not exclusively) in their
efforts to integrate the new faith onto the foundations of classical
philosophy.

Origen of Alexandria followed Plato in teaching the pre-existence
of souls, effectively metempsychosis (*Origen on First Principles*,
2.10.8). St. Jerome complained that, at the end of Book 1 of his *De
Principiis*, Origen argues,

that an angel, a human soul, or a demon – he affirms that they
share the same nature but are diverse in will – can become a
beast [through] great negligence [or] folly, and that, rather than
suffer the torments of punishments and the intense heat of fire,
it may prefer to be an animal which lives in the sea or some
other species of beast: thus we have to fear receiving not only
the body of a quadruped but of a fish as well!13
But Origen also interpreted God’s instruction to Adam to have dominion over all beasts to mean internal beasts; thus, in the soul of the higher man: “the wolf, the lamb, the leopard and the kid...will be together in pasture” (Origène, *Homélies sur la Genèse* II.3-5). As Cox explains: “Origen imagine[s] that metempsychosis might be an imaginal journey... a seeing with the eyes of the beast, and not a brutish fall” (1982: 115-6).

In lines that evoke parallels with Sufism (cf. Douglas-Klotz 2011), Origen argued that, “we are all born men, but we are not all ‘men-men’”, for some the inner man is really a *serpent-man* or a *horse-man* (Origen, *Homilies 1-14 on Ezekiel* 3.8). The man who is truly man – *homo homo* – is the one whose inner man matches the image of the Creator. The animals of Genesis “indicate either that which proceeds from the dispositions of the soul and the thought of the heart, or that which issues from bodily desires and from the movements of the flesh” (Origène, *Homélies sur la Genèse* I.16; Cox 1982: 124).

Meditation on this inner landscape and its animal-selves enables the educated man to grasp the spirit of nature. Then the way is open for a mystical epiphany, a “stretching of words occurs, and the heart of a man is enlarged [with] figures... parables, dark speech and riddles” (*Origen: The Song of Songs*, Prologue 3).

The suggestion of surrealism here was taken further and explicitly linked both to dreaming and to composite imagery by the Neoplatonic bishop, Synesius of Cyrene (c. 373-414) in his essay *De insomniis* (*Essays and Hymns*, 355):

Anyone can see how great the work is, on attempting to fit language into visions, visions [where] things which are united in nature are separated, and things separated in nature are united... [things] of a strange nature stir in one’s own soul, [and by] this phantasy things which are expelled from the order of being, and things which never in any possible way existed, are brought... into being – nay, even things which have not a nature capable of existence. (cf. Milne 2007: 112ff)

With Synesius, we enter the early middle ages and the Christian era, where any kind of literal transformation will be a matter of witchcraft or demonic agency. The apotheosis of Origen and Synesius’ idea
comes centuries later, when Renaissance illusionist artists created the genre of the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, as a man beset by serpent-man, horse-man et al. (see fig. 14 below).

**HALLUCINATORY WAR**

If you ask an older Ilongot man of northern Luzon, Philippines, why he cuts off human heads, his answer is brief: ... rage, born of grief, impels him to kill... He claims that he needs a place “to carry his anger”. The act of severing and tossing away the victim’s head enables him, he says, to vent and ... throw away the anger of his bereavement.... more questions fail to reveal any further explanation. To him, grief, rage, and headhunting go together in a self-evident manner. Either you understand it or you don’t. (Rosaldo 1989: 1)

So far we have seen two aspects of Leonardo’s warrior head – hybrid creatures and animals of the mind – knitted together in various mystic or mythological contexts. The third ingredient is somewhat different; not an image in itself but a rhetorical marker. This is the sense of commotion, of metamorphic chaos; the blurring of the boundaries of the world. The sign of commotion binds the imagery of hybrids and animal avatars into a complex composite, variations on which appear in the warrior’s helmet and in Bosch’s fire-spouting head. This sign is present in the vision of Er. Recall that Er himself is a warrior. His spirit enters the Otherworld as he lies on the battlefield, and departs with the other souls when they all drink to forget their former selves:

> towards evening they encamped by the river of Unmindfulness, whose water no vessel can hold; of this they were all obliged to drink... and each one as he drank forgot all things. Now after they had gone to rest, about the middle of the night there was a thunderstorm and earthquake, and then in an instant they were driven upwards in all manner of ways to their birth, like stars shooting. [Er does not drink]... by what means he returned to the body he could not say; only, in the morning, awaking
suddenly, he found himself lying on the pyre. (Plato, *Republic* 10.620)

So: the final metamorphosis occurs at night, involves sleep, forgetfulness, thunderstorm, earthquake and a cataclysmic exit, and all this happens in the frame of a dream which starts with death in battle.

The motif of turbulence is linked with shapeshifting and warfare in a number of prehistoric, ancient and medieval contexts. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Upper Palaeolithic was relatively peaceful. The formative period for organised warfare — and hence for the emergence of a warrior class — was the Mesolithic (Vencl 1999: 58-9).\(^{14}\) The earliest extant formal battlefield is at Megiddo, Syria, 1469 BCE (Carman 1999: 40); though there is earlier evidence for raiding parties (which were, of course, the cradle for warrior class norms), and late predynastic Egyptian art depicts captives and fallen warriors (such as those on the Battlefield Palette, fig. 9a, c. 3100 BCE),\(^{15}\) showing that war was an organised affair well before this. The warrior-aristocracies of the Bronze-Age represented a Europe-wide distinctive “cultural package”, whose chiefly elite were “both ritual leaders and leaders of war”, engaged in a set of novel ceremonies and customs, such as, “ritualised drinking, the employment of trumpets or lurs in warfare and ritual, special dress, special stools, and sometimes chariots” (Kristiansen 1999: 180-1; Enright 1995). Men with ceremonial helmets and weapons (e.g. fig 9b-c), along with ritual animal guising (e.g. fig. 9d), appear in petroglyphs (cf. Gunnell 1995: 37-46) and elite decorative art from the Scandinavian Bronze Age.\(^{16}\) The lurs (curved trumpets) are also depicted. These bird-headed and horned men seem to illustrate myths or their enactments (cf Gelling and Ellis Davidson 1972: 68-78; on ritual animal-dress see pp. 96, 112-6).
9b-c. Two figurines with horned helmets and battle-axes, Nordic Bronze Age first half 1st millennium BCE. Bronze. From group of seven found at Grevensvaenge, Zealand, Denmark; one survives. 9b. Original configuration of duo, after drawing by Schnabel 1780. 9c. Extant figurine of the duo, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen. Drawing by author.
In 1228 BCE, the Assyrian King Tukulti-Ninurta (1243-1207 BCE) attacked the Babylonians and captured their king (Mayer 1995: 213-5; 220). The epic poem he commissioned about this campaign describes the fighting style of the royal troops (Speidel 2002: 254-5) in cosmic terms. The gods themselves take the field and the warriors shapeshift in the manner of Anzu, the Assyrian eagle-dragon (*Tukulti-Ninurta Epic* 3a-4c):

Display your weapons / find fulfillment in the battle for which your passion burns (3a, 27-28)
The mighty warriors.../ were not clad in armour, like a lion they kill...[they struck] like a fierce serpent (3a, 39-42)

There was a great tumult, the soldiers trembled.../ Assur... kindled a devastating fire upon the enemies / Enlil whirls in the midst... he makes smoke rise from the flame... /...Sin fixed upon them the paralysis of war / Adad the hero poured out a wind and flood on their fighting / ...Shamash... blinded the armies / Ishtar whipped with her jump rope, causing their warriors to go mad (4b, 32-40)

The warriors of Assur shouted Forward to the battle!... / They are enraged and furious. They become strange in form like Anzu / They are aggressive, (they go) fiercely into the chaos of battle without armour / They had removed breastplates, cast off garments / They gathered up (their) hair, they polished (their) lances with bran (?) / Wild heroic warriors played with sharpened weapons / (and) mighty winds rushed together like quarrelling lions / (and) the confusion of the whirlwind swirls in the battle / (and) death was, in the eyes of the warriors / like finding refreshment on a day of thirst (4c, 44-53)

These angry metamorphic warriors become superhuman, second in rank only to the gods themselves. The point of their rage, in a way, is to release their daimonic spirit, and the point of composing the epic is to advertise this status.

How far did this reflect actual mores? The image-package I have been calling “the storm in the head” is still so far an aestheticisation;
the evidence for it comes from art and literature, it is part of a mythic discourse, not a piece of reportage. Yet war and magico-religious beliefs and practices are closely intertwined (cf. compilation in Turney-High 1971: 213-20). Ferguson comments (1990: 46),

it is hard to find cases where the connection is not evident... Ritual commonly precedes, accompanies and follows an engagement. Military success and safe return are divined. The enemy is attacked and confused by supernatural means. Oaths and curses maintain discipline in combat. Supernatural rewards are added to other potential gains for warriors.

In general terms, Kehoe (1976: 46-7) argued,

Kinetic rituals are analogous to phylogenetically ancient animal ritualizations and, for this reason alone, may be more suitable for the evocation of reflex-type reactions... ritual[s] are likely to produce and manage measurable biochemical changes in the persons taking part... Rituals do more than communicate: they MOVE.

In other words, ritualisation is akin to bio-psychological routinisation. The latter produces a physiological reward – minimally, relief from the effort of thinking (cf. Sperber and Wilson 2002) – maximally, an adrenalised or hormonal excitation. In humans, this evolutionary given can be culturally augmented – instrumentally dramatised – to produce profound effects of emotional cathexis. Ethnographic evidence supports the idea that “impulsive aggression is weak unless actively cultivated” (Ferguson 1990: 19). Among the Amazonian Yanomami, famously characterised as “the fierce people” by Chagnon (1968; but see contra, Ferguson 2001), young men practice putting on displays of rage, “as a tactic”, while warriors use drugs, “to put themselves in a fighting mood” (Ferguson 1990: 19). In Melanesia, among the Avatip,

to kill, men must be in a bewitched state of mind in which they misperceive all other human beings, even their own families, as enemies... they say that when they are bespelled with war
magic in ritual or warfare, their faces become strange and different [and] turn fearsome or bad (Harrison 1993: 96)

When the Avatip go on a head-hunting raid, each warrior holds a stylised face in his teeth, covering his face except for his eyes. The effect is to give him two sets of eyes, a long theriomorphic nose, and a ring of claws or teeth hanging from his chin (fig. 10a) This mask embodies his spirit, which thus “went before the man...into battle in front of him, so the enemy saw only it and was terrified” (Harrison 1993: 121). The mask normally hangs round the neck as a chest-piece; its usage recalls the Gorgoneion (stylised Medusa head), on the aegis of Athena in her warrior guise, and on Alexander’s breastplate (Ridgeway 2001: 182). Some helmets from the Vendel era graves (c. 550–793) bear a small head between the eyes (e.g. fig. 10b), in addition to the animal and hybrid imagery on the helmet foils (e.g. fig. 10c; cf figs. 13b and c below).

The Caribs, to whom we owe the phrase, to run amok, prepared for war with mock battles. They drank beer containing the brain and organs of a tiger, and performed a dance to invite their ancestor, Tiger-Spirit, to possess them. In 1907, a warrior explained the dance:

I growl. I hiss. I swing the club just like he does when he crushes his prey with one blow of his terrible claws. And when I have killed my enemy I must also drink his blood and taste his flesh [so that] the spirit that impels me [will] be assuaged... When the Tiger is in the man, the man becomes like the Tiger. (Penard and Penard 1907/I: 66-7; Whitehead 1990: 152)

Battle madness was fostered in antiquity by similar cultural practices. Proto-Indo-European languages contained,

A wide range of meanings... associated with *dhlVeslni, e.g. “rage” (e.g. OIr dtisachl, “rage fury”, Latfuro “rage”), “ghost” (e.g. MHG lusler “ghost, spectre”, Lith dvasia “ghost, spirit”), “gasp”, “expire” (e.g. Lith dvesiu) [with] the suggestion of some form of animated breathing, a suffusion of wild spirits; derivatives give us general names for “wild animals”, including NE deer, Lat belua “wild animal” (Mallory and Adams 2006: 190-1).
10a. Avatip head-hunter wearing a kwa’alesapi, October 1978. Courtesy of Harrison, used by permission.
10d. Trajan’s Column, 112 CE. Roman aquilifers in wolf-skins, river crossing, Dacian campaign. Photo: Chicorius 1896.
As an imagistic complex, this can be found expressed on a number of levels: in the metaphors and rituals of military training; in the adrenaline release of battle as a peak experience involving ecstatic self-loss; in the visual and material culture of armour design; in art and literature relating the warrior package to mythology and cultic practice; and finally in accounts written by bystanders unfortunate enough to encounter these people in the grip of their frenzy.

Consider the terms used by the Greeks and Romans to describe the ferocity of the Celtic horde. In the period of their first invasions (5-4 c. BCE), Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics 3.7) writes that the Celts fear nothing, neither earthquake nor wave of the sea; he calls them mainomenos (mad) and analgētos (bereft of sensibility). Polybius (late 1st c. BCE) says that the Celts, “made use of trumpets and horns and the human voice... the whole landscape [was] alive with noise” (Histories 2.28-30). He mentions the brightly-coloured war-dress of the Insubres tribe, and the naked frontline warriors of the Gaesati. Poseidonius (c. 135-51 BCE) calls their appearance “terrifying” (katapléktikoi), their manner, “full of eloquent exaggeration... menacing, stressed and highly dramatic” (in Diodorus, Library of History 5.30; Rankin 1996: 68). Livy (c. 27 BCE) describes them as “a race naturally prone to tumult, indulging in wild war-cries and battle-songs that filled the air with a horrendous noise” (History of Rome 5.37). The Germanic Chatti, according to Tacitus (Germania 31; c. 98 CE), are fearsome of aspect, “even during peace they abate nothing in the grimness and horror of their countenance”.

The Celts, says Rankin (1996: 115), “were locked into a ritual concept of war which taught that a fighting death transported the liberated soul immediately to the immortal sphere.” For the Celts, comments Lucan (c. 61 CE), “death is the middle of a long life” (Pharsalia 1.458).

Poseidonius (and other Classical observers) connected emotions and representations of this kind of wildness with the archaic mores that drove their own Homeric Age. Barbarian courage was ascribed to thymos, or daring spirit, carrying the implication of lost or absent self-control (Rankin 1996: 55-6).

A passionate attitude to warfare was hardly restricted to the so-called Celtic cultures, though in sober discussion, the Romans, like the Greeks before them, tended to project it onto the enemy. Recall
Fig. 11a. Daikrates’ Dream, 3rd c. BCE, stele, Mesaria, Kos. Photo: courtesy F. van Straten.
Fig 11b. The Lykaon Painter, Athenian krater, c. 440 BCE. Detail, Lyssa with dogshead cap. Photo: Museum of Fine Art, Boston, 00.346.
the Myrmidons, who – according to Ovid (Metamorphoses 7: 634-60)– actually originate in a dream; Achilles’ shock-troops: “hungry as wolves that rend and bolt raw flesh / hearts filled with battle-frenzy that never dies... the fury builds inside their chests” (Homer, Iliad 16: 118-94). Trajan’s column (112 CE) shows a rare glimpse of the legions in wolf-helms and pelts, easily as theriomorphic as their foes (cf the aquilifer in wolfskin, fig. 10d).

PANIC: A CONVERSE CASE

As a cultural package, the “storm in the head” has a converse, less heroic side. The elements of this are all in place in the activities of Tukulti-Ninurta’s gods, who produce tumult, fire, smoke, and the paralysis of war, blinding the enemy and sending them mad. This is also what happens in Classical legends of battle madness when the god Pan intervenes. Pan’s contribution to battle, is, of course, panic, the quintessence of commotion.

It is important to note that Pan is involved in dream-culture; his help may be sought through incubation at one of the sanctuaries he shares with the nymphs. In stelae erected by grateful customers such as Daikrates of Kos (Van Straten 1976: fig. 11a), two distinct states of being – the sleeper and the dream – are represented in one image. And Pan himself is a hybrid; in vase-painting (e.g. in scenes of the death of Actaeon), he is often accompanied by Lyssa (fig. 11b; daughter of Heaven and Night), the nightmare fiend of Madness, havoc-breathing (Quintus Smyrnaeus 5.519).

By the time the cult of Pan was installed at Athens (to celebrate his help at Marathon, 490 BCE), Pan had absorbed powers of fear and battle from the older god Phobos. Ascribed to Pan, the situation of men in battle took on a complex psychological resonance. Panic was first described as a collective mental experience occurring, often during darkness, among armies on the brink of conflict. Thus, it was said, the Gaulish army, in its unsuccessful raid on Delphi in 279 BCE, succumbed to deranging visions and cut itself to pieces in the night. To the pirates described by Longus (Daphnis and Chloe 2.25.3-4): 
On a sudden all the land seemed to be on fire; then anon their ears were struck with an impetuous clattering of oars as if a great navy were coming... Some called this and others that; here some thought they must be wounded, there others lay like dead men. A man would have thought he had seen a kind of nocturnal battle, when yet there was no enemy there.

The next day they hear the god’s pipes, pleasing and terrible at once, and this also drives them mad. In Borgeaud’s view (1989: 99), Pan, never takes part in combat... [He] acts at a distance... He intervenes to replace combat by a bloody parodic mockery of itself. He comes before, or after Phobos: when he interferes, the warrior is cut off from war and in fact knocked loose from all contact with reality.

As a god of dreams, Pan produces a disordering of the senses, similar in effect to the chaotic metamorphic blood-lust, ramped up by ritual, into which the ecstatic warriors catapult themselves. The difference is that here the source of the discombobulation is located as an external attack on the self, wrapped around or thrown over them externally, and so perceived as profoundly alien. It is an inside-out version of the madness of battle, as opposed to a wished-for consummation.

MONSTER IMAGERY

The same ingredients are found constellated and condensed in two related ways in the ancient motif of the hero in combat with a monster, and its post-Classical transformations.

By the end of the Neolithic, the motif is widespread (e.g. fig. 12a; c. 2025-1763 BCE). This early story-type is “about” bringing order out of chaos; the monsters killed by heroes as diverse as Jason and Beowulf represent a primordial chthonic order, superseded by the “normative” human rule of patriarchal law (cf. Forsyth 1987: 21-3; Beal 2002: 13-22). Structurally, we can view the composition of these creatures as a second-order level of condensation, fusing hybridity
with ferocity (and indeed often fertility in a civil sense; see e.g. Lyle 2011).

The exact format of the creature is important and naturally varies with time and place (cf. Forsyth, 1987). Consider the make-up of *Direach Ghlinn Eitidh*, the desert creature of Glen Eiti:

Ugly was the make of the Fachin; there was one hand out of the ridge of his chest and one tuft out of the top of his head; it was easier to take a mountain from the root than to bend that tuft (Campbell 1860-1/2: 300-1, 304-5)

An Irish description (Hyde 1890: xxi) makes it clear that the *fachan* is a kind of walking nightmare:

he held a thick flail club in his skinny hand, and twenty chains out of it, and fifty apples on each chain, and a venomous spell on each great apple, and a girdle of deer and roebuck skins around the thing that was his body, and one eye into the forehead of his black-faced countenance, and one bare hard very hairy hand coming out of his chest, and one veiny, thick-soled leg supporting him, and a close firm mantle of twisted hard thick feathers protecting his body...

Notice how this oneiric creature and his club defy visualisation – leading the mind into an infinite spiralling path that marks the Otherworld (cf. Mencej 2008). Some light is shed on the function of the creature in the otherwise much briefer Scottish account: a magic sword is tempered by thrusting it through his body. This *unhandsome man with a shaggy eye in front of his face* appears in the story solely to be killed and pass his supernatural qualities into the sword.

Elaborate malevolent monsters represent a compression and rearrangement of “storm in the head” imagery, so that all the metamorphic elements are concentrated in the semiotically dense body of the creature. The visual medium tends to fuse the bodies of human and monster into a single emblematic grouping, within which interfaces can be various handled. A tenth-century carving from the Isle of Man, *Odin fighting the Fenris Wolf* (i.e. at Ragnarok) shows Odin’s body like a wheel at the centre of an abstract design; the form
of his shoulder is cut into by his raven, just as his leg is by the wolf (fig. 12b). The two are rendered formally equivalent, though, as all would know, the raven is Odin’s companion, or symbol, and the wolf his foe.

12a. Male god or hero killing a fiery Cyclops, c. 2025-1763 BCE. Iraq, Temple of the god Sin. Courtesy of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago.
12b. Thorwald’s cross, 10th c., Andreas Kirk, Isle of Man. Detail, lower right corner, Odin with raven, fighting the Fenris wolf. Photo © Werner Forman Archive/Heritage-Images/Imagestate.
On the other hand, the hero’s body may itself be monstrous. Celtic heroes grow huge in size (Birkhan 1997: 975; Speidel 2002: 260, no. 30), like the fiery Kai in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (229; ca 11 c.):

Kai had this peculiarity, that his breath lasted nine nights and nine days under water, and he could exist nine nights and nine days without sleep... When it pleased him he could render himself as tall as the highest tree in the forest... so great was the heat of his nature, that, when it rained hardest, whatever he carried remained dry for a handbreadth above and a handbreadth below his hand; and when his companions were coldest, it was to them as fuel with which to light their fire.

An extreme example comes from the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* (ca 8 c.; Kinsella 1970: 150-3; cf. O’Rahilly 1967: Introduction) as Cúchulainn prepares for battle:

The first warp-spasm seized [him] and made him into a monstrous thing, hideous and shapeless, unheard of... His body made a furious twist inside his skin... on his head the temple-sinews stretched to the nape of his neck, each mighty... knob as big as the head of a month-old child... His face and features became a red bowl...

Malignant mists and bursts of fire... flickered red in the clouds that rose boiling above his head ... The hero-halo rose out of his brow... long as a snout... Then, tall and thick, steady and strong, high as the mast of a noble ship, rose up from the dead centre of his skull a straight spout of black blood, darkly and magically smoking.

Unsurprisingly, one of Cúchulainn’s titles is “the Distorted One” (Ellis Davidson 1988: 84). Passion turns him almost inside out. The image recalls the swollen head and face of Penfield and Rasmussen’s somatosensory Homunculus: a neurological figure showing body parts scaled according to the number of nerve-endings (fig. 12c).

Cúchulainn is, of course, about to dispatch another record number of opponents over the border between life and death, and so he is represented as an Otherworldly terror. His fury is encoded through
*adynata* and human-animal imagery, as before, but the rhetoric of commotion is considerably expanded, and his metamorphosis involves more extreme axes of condensation and displacement.

**BERSERKERS AND SHAPESHIFTERS IN DREAMS**

I will fasten a wolf skin about my back, and o’er my head put the brute’s gaping jaws; then fitting its fore-feet to my hands and its hind-feet to my legs I will go on all-fours in imitation of its gait to puzzle the enemy... (Euripides, *Rhesus* 210-3).

In the Viking era – more precisely, at the interface between Northern paganism, Christianity and folk culture, where pagan oral traditions were actively mediated into literature by Christian writers – the hallucinatory aspects of battle fury, hybridity as double-nature, shape-changing and dream-states underwent a further integration.

Figures dancing, bearing weapons, wearing animal masks, metamorphic beasts and clearly hybrid men (such as a three-headed man) enact what are evidently mythic scenes on the Golden Horns of Gallehus (5th c.; fig. 13a). These instruments may have been high-status drinking horns, or intended for use in battle or ritual. Whatever the context, the import of the imagery has a clear relation to ecstatic cultic warrior traditions, such as initiation rituals, as indeed does the martial imagery on the earlier (1st c. BCE) Gundestrup cauldron (e.g. Plate E, Nationalmuseet, Denmark; Taylor 1992: 84-9). Given the theriomorphic look of the helmets and helmet foil imagery found at Torslunda and Valsgärde (cf. figs 10b-c, 13b-c; also Vendel graves 1 and 14), Ellis Davidson (1993: 106) suggests some of these kings may have put on boar-mask helmets, “in order to be possessed by the god” Freyr, whose animal was the boar (cf. Gunnell 1995: 49-53).

The Norsemen thus inherited a range of beliefs about animal personae, only the most famous of which are to do with *berserkers* (compare the Gutenstein and Torslunda animal-headed warriors; figs 13b and c). In the sagas, literal shapeshifting is a form of sorcery. One might be born with a capacity for this. In *Völsunga saga* 34, Ottarr transforms without spells, for he *hafde adra idn ok naturu* (had a second occupation and nature) – that is, as an otter. We find this idea
also in ballads, where ordinary humans can take animal form at will, if driven by great desire (cf. Milne 2006).

More often, even for the gods, animal transformation requires a magic skin. Sigmundr and Sinfjötli don wolf-skins they find hanging over two sleeping men in the forest, and become trapped in wolf-shape. Compelled to wolf-nature, they attack bands of travellers and fatally injure Sigmundr’s son (Völsunga saga 15-17).²⁷

At the same time, all humans have an animal spirit self (Irish, *fetch*; Norse, *fylgja*) which can leave the body during sleep or trance (Kelchner 1935; Bremmer 1987: 130-7); some people however are *hamrammr* (shape- or skin-strong) and have magical control over their animal alter egos; the concepts of *fylgjur* and *hamr* overlap (Grundy 1998).²⁸ The *fylgja* can be seen in dreams, or by one gifted with supernatural sight. A farmer sees a bear and boar fighting in a field, these turn out to be two *hamrammr* men, both seen later to be injured (Landnámabók, Ch. S 350/H 309).

As Saxo Grammaticus comments (ca 1200; History of the Danes, I.14), “Bold warriors have frequently concealed / themselves beneath the pelts of beasts”, but the configuration of pelt and man lent itself to endless variation. For the Icelanders under Christianity, the *berserker* phenomenon becomes progressively understood as psychological rather than magical.

*Berserkers* then, can be straightforwardly mad warriors. Snorri Sturluson in his Ynglingasaga (early 13 c.; Heimskringla 6) gives the classic description:

> [Odin’s] men fought without armour, and were rabid as hounds or wolves. They bit into their shields, and were strong as bears or bulls. They slew the men, but neither fire nor iron could restrain them at all. That is called berserkgangr [going berserk]²⁹

Or they can incarnate the metamorphic and hybrid elements of the “storm in the head” constellation. Under a curse, Björn shapeshifts every morning, using a skin: he, *steypiz síðan bjarnarhamrinn yfir hann, ok gengr björninn svá ut* (afterwards pulled the bear-hide over
him, and the bear thus went out) (*Hrólfs saga kraka* 52). Two of his sons are hybrids: Elgfróði is elk from the navel down, Þórir has the feet of a dog (*Hrólfs saga kraka* 54; cf. Grundy 1998: 107). The third, Böðvarr--Bjarki, takes the shape of a vast bear to fight in the battle where his king dies (*Hrólfs saga kraka* 100):

>a great bear went before the men of King Hrólfr, nearest to where the king was; he slew more men with his paws than five other warriors... weapons bounced off him... he broke under him both men and horses... all which neared him he crushed with his teeth, so that ill murmuring came into the host of King Hjörvarðr.

But this is his *hamr*; meanwhile he sits asleep or entranced (Ellis Davidson 1988: 80); at the moment he is woken (*Hrólfs saga kraka* 102), *er þá björninn horfinn burt úr liðinu, ok tekr ná bardaginn at þyngjaz fyrir* (then the bear vanished away from the host, and the battle grew very heavy).

Etymologically, *fylgja* is usually derived from *fylgja* (to accompany) or *fylgja*, afterbirth or caul (cf. Turville-Petre 1975: 228; Mundal 1974: 44-5).30 The word *hamr* means covering or skin, but de Vries (1962: 208) finds a kinship with Middle Low German words for afterbirth, rind, snake-skin.31 Like the caul, the animal-form is the skin you were born with; magical because it emanates, like the soul, from the otherworld; its natural habitat is the dream.

Fetches, like some kinds of physical transformations, were generated by crises of emotion: murderous intent expressed as the rage of an animal self. These sendings appear in dreams, and here is where the constellation of the “storm in the head” undergoes a further set of dimensional transformations, folding its hallmark elements into the history of the nightmare.

Before his last battle, Gísli Súrsson dreamed that the man who led his assailants had a wolf’s head and howled like a wolf (*Gísla Saga Súrssonar* 17; cf. Turville-Petre 1966: 348); the helmet-plate from Torslunda, Sweden parallels this imagery (Matrix, ca 600 CE, fig. 13c).
Fig. 13a. The Gallehus horns, gold, Germanic, early 5th c. BCE (later destroyed). Engraving from drawing of 1734, after Stephens 1884.
Fig. 13c. Odin and bear-headed warrior dancing, c. 600 CE, helmet foil matrix, Torslunda. Historikamuseet, Stockholm. Drawing after Montelius 1905.
In the early 10th c. *Second Lay of Guthrun* (in *The Poetic Edda*), Atli dreams first of fire; then he sees his sons – on whom he is doomed to feast – as saplings, hawks and dogs (*Guðrúnarkviða II* 40-2):

Hawks flew from my hands in my dream/ Without prey to an ill-abode Their hearts with honey I had to chew/ Swollen with blood in sorry mood

Hounds were loosed from my hands in my dream/ Both howling, hungry for joys I saw their flesh turned fowl and rotten/ And unwilling I had to chew them

The convention in literary prophetic dreams, especially those involving *fylgjur*, is that the dreamer is represented as baffled by the dream, and seeks an explanation from another character, which may or may not be accurate. Most interesting are the cases where such (mis)interpretations in fact effect further oneiric transformation of the imagery. In *Atlamal in Groenlenzko*, on the night before Atli attacks, the lady Kostbera has four warning dreams, each of which her husband explains away:

K: I thought a bear had come in here, broke up the barding, brandished his claws, so that we were terrified, held many of us in his mouth, so than we could do nothing – his heavy tread – made no little noise.  
H: By this a gale will spring up, it will soon be dawn. Your mind saw a white bear, that means snow from the east.  
K: I thought an eagle flew in here, through the length of the hall...it splashed us all with blood. From its threats I thought it was the hamr of Atli.  
H: Soon we slaughter [our beast] so we [will?] see blood (*Slatrom sysliga, siam Pa rooro*). Often it stands for oxen when one dreams of eagles, Atli’s heart is loyal [full] whatever you may dream.
In the final dream, Kostbera actually identifies the attacking animal as the *hamr* of Atli. Auden’s translation catches the right inflection of this: “I imagined that his fierceness was Atli’s rage”. The dreamed polar bear appears gigantic (holding many people in its mouth). This abnormal scale is typical of a hero’s animal-self. In medieval dream-culture, it is also one of the characteristics of the nightmare (*phantasma*), according to the well-known categories of Macrobius (*Comm. Somn. Scipio.*, I, 3; Milne 2007: 121-32):

[The dreamer sees] forms, distorted in appearance and out of all natural proportions in size, or he may experience the rushing in of tumultuously whirling kaleidoscopically changing things, either delightful or disturbing.

Each dream-image is followed by Hogni’s response. To deny that the bear is Atli, he moves the image along a different metaphorical axis: the bear must signify something equally white and filled with (natural) rage: wind and snow. The image of the white bear, for the audience, morphs into a white storm. This transforms the enormous bear radiating death into a moment of obliteration of both image and self (pure whiteness; a snowstorm). In a similar “sideways” move, Hogni explains the eagle as a “dream of blood”. These dimensional and metamorphic shifts amount to a kind of deconstruction: as the central element is repressed, other elements of the “storm in the head” complex swim into view.

In the compressed phrase, *Soon we slaughter, so we see blood*, Hogni expresses the idea that the intention of slaughter is hanging in the air of the season, part of occult forces which bind the world together. This diverts the intent to kill from Atli to himself, and its target from himself to his animals. Even as Hogni seeks to evade the meaning of the dreams, the smell of blood intrudes, like the indelible stain in a fairy tale, tacitly acknowledging the violent intent of the fylgja.

Shifts in vocabulary give some sense of how the experience of emotion-filled dreams (Milne 2009) altered over centuries of Christian assimilation. The idea of a transforming power from within is expressed in a constellation of concepts to do with drunkenness, inspiration, fury and dreams. Odin’s name derives from *ôðr*, which
Adam of Bremen translated as *furor* in the eleventh century. The German and Gothic equivalents were respectively, *Wut* (rage, fury) and *wōds* (possessed) (De Vries 1931: 45).

According to Dumézil (1959; 1973: 36-7):

As a noun it denotes drunkenness, excitation, poetic genius (cf OE *wōd*, chant), as well as the terrifying movement of the sea, of fire, and of the storm. As an adjective, it means sometimes “violent, furious”, sometimes “rapid”. Outside of Germanic, related Indo-European words refer to violent poetic and prophetic inspiration: Latin *vates*, Old Irish *faith*.

Societies from late antiquity to the tenth century thus conceived of ecstatic self-loss as a state wherein humans asserted their daimonic nature, against the ideals of self-control and moderation promoted (on different grounds) by Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian teaching. Long after the age of the warband, violence and “commotion in the head” remained tangled together in European terms for dreaming, but the tension between the two paradigms in the long run acted as a torque, pulling its terms of reference away from the occult.

Consider the complicated evolution of terms for dreaming in the several mother languages of modern English. The texts evoke a world rich in references to dreams; 553 in Middle English, 530 in the smaller body of Old Norse. In Old English and Old Saxon, the oldest extant sense of the word *dream* (still in use, for example, in Layamon, writing as late as c. 1205) was *joy, noise, disturbance* – and so by extension, *mirth, music*; as a verb it meant *revel, rejoice*. The modern word, *fey*, conveys this sense of dreamy wildness.

Quite quickly, between 1350 and 1400, the older synonyms *meten* and *sweven* were replaced by *dremen* as the ordinary verb for "dream". Analysing this change, Ehrensperger (1931: 88) pointed to the phrase *swefnes woma*, used several times to mean the noise or sound of a dream:

*swefen* came to be regarded as a disturbance, noise, or sound in sleep, and that it gradually became confused with the word *dream* used in the sense of frenzy or ecstasy, so that the two
words were used synonymously, and finally the one which last came into use survived... (ibid)

This history points to a time when dream in the Germanic languages was regarded as distinguishable category of experience (swefen), which could take place apart from sleep. A kind of semiotic disintegration or refinement seems to have occurred, wherein dream eventually became the container and swefen the contents. At this point we see starting to evolve something close to our way of conceiving a nightmare: a disturbing, emotion-charged dream, confined to sleep (Milne 2008). Following the fission of dream and swefen, as one turned into a container for the other, there was also a new merging of the two concepts, in the sense that the cup and its contents could be regarded as one thing.

Thus, for example, the verb dreccean (Middle English, dretchen), meaning torment, vex, afflict could still be used to describe the action of the dream on the sleeper, as in Alisander (line 819), “He was draight with dreme through deuiles engines”. This conveys the idea of an attack from without, like the fylgia, or the Greek leaping nightmare, ephialtes; a connotation confirmed by the poet’s gloss on the dreme’s agency: “devil’s engines” drive it. Alisander still has the sense of something being slung at the sleeper from the outside, a massy lump of dreme. By the time of Chaucer, dream was more clearly a mental state; it is within it, rather than by it, that one is tormented: “As man that in his dreem is drecched sore” [Chaucer, Nonne Preeste’s Tale, 67; Ehrensperger 1931: 89).

By the time of Malory, we have a line dismissing dream as unreal: “It is but dretchyng of sweuens” (Arthur xxi.12). And so it comes full circle, the swefn was originally itself a kind of dretchyng – an affliction or disturbance – which occurred in sleep. Both swefn and dream have moved so far together, one inside the other, in the direction of modern dream and away from disturbance, that a separate adjective is required to represent the swefn as disturbed.
THE RENAISSANCE

For as of old the great seer Proteus, while disguised and transformed into fire, water, a tiger, a dragon, and other strange shapes, could not foretell events to come, and therefore, in order to foretell them had to be restored to his own native shape, so man cannot receive the divine art of prophecy except when that part of him which is most divine - to wit his Nous or Mens – is quiet, tranquil, peaceable, and neither occupied nor distracted by extraneous passions. (Rabelais 1955 [1546], 3.13)

Man [is] not without reason, described sometimes by the name of “all flesh”, sometimes by that of “every-creature”, inasmuch as he himself molds, fashions, and changes himself into the form of all flesh and into the character of every creature. The Persian... writes that man has no semblance that is inborn and his very own... Why do we emphasize this?... to the end that, after we have been born to this condition, we can become what we will... (Pico della Mirandola 1948 [1486], 226-7)

Consider then some of the channels which carried the idea of a “storm in the head” into concepts of the nightmare and the nightmarish during the Renaissance. As the Humanists knew, Panic, Phobos and Mars inhabit the mind of the antique warrior, and this view is expressed in Leonardo’s rendition of wild hybrids – their violence is displaced into style rather than action – captured in a magical armour and harnessed for government by a wise impassive face.

Leonardo’s contemporary, the Neo-Platonic philosopher Pico della Mirandola (1463-94) was instrumental in the revival of Origen (Milne 2007: 105-7; Wind 1983: 42-55). He therefore read the newly-translated Timaeus in that light: as psychological allegory. Renaissance thinkers (and artists) at this date assumed that coded truths (i.e. Christian moral meanings) were the real point of mythic matter in Plato (and in later works by Iamblichus, Plotinus et al.). The transformations in Timaeus were thus fables, to be understood as extending rather than contradicting orthodox theology, wherein any spirit not angelic or human must be demonic. Where Socrates saw the multi-headed inner man as a problem, Pico saw it as a virtue, part of
God’s machinery for enabling humans to choose to be good. Defined
as internal and metaphoric, the capacity for inner metamorphosis was
worthy of praise in itself. Who, he asks, would not admire this, our
chameleon? (Pico della Mirandola 1948 [1486]: 225-6). This is why
Proteus, the “changeable god”, became a figura of ideal Man. If
everyone can metamorphose into higher and lower forms, then hybrid
imagery becomes newly useful as a way of visualising the monstrous
aspects of the self.

Like Pico, Renaissance artists and art theorists were creative
mythographers. They devoted much time and thought to cataloguing
existing mythological hybrids from ancient sources, and devising new
ones. They responded to the “chameleon” configuration of the inner
man as a mandate to analyse, fragment, augment, proliferate – and so
reconstruct – existing formal traditions which dealt with similar
subjects. In so doing, they achieved a genuine retrieval/retranslation
of the “storm in the head” mythos, the meta-composite linking
passion, dreams and animals of the mind. Pulled into centre stage, the
structure underwent a further folding and twisting, as it was projected
into Christian frame-stories. This is how an invention like Bosch’s
Angry Man, a deconstructed type of homo chameleon, finds its place
in the corner of a hell scene (fig. 3).

All these ingredients came together in the subject which probably
did more than any other to establish the new disposition of the “storm
within the head” as nightmare: the Temptation of St. Anthony. His
legend was widely known, through Athanasius’s Life of Saint Anthony
(c. 356-62) and Jacob of Voragine’s Legenda Aurea (c. 1275). Here is
the key passage in Caxton’s version of The Golden Legend:

suddenly S. Anthony revived [and] began to summon the devils
again, which had beaten him, to battles. And anon they came in
form of divers beasts wild and savage, of whom that one
howled, another siffled, and another cried, and another brayed
and assailed S. Anthony, that one with the horns, the others
with their teeth, and the others with their paws and ongles, and
disturned, and all to-rent his body that he supposed well to die.
Then came a clear brightness, and all the beasts fled away, and
S. Anthony understood that in this great light our Lord came...
(Jacob of Voragine [1483] 1900: 2.100)
And in Athanasius (c. 9; Kelly 1968: 101):

That night... they made such a din that the whole place seemed to be shaken by an earthquake. It was as though demons burst through the four walls of the little chamber... in the forms of beasts... the place was filled with the phantoms of lions, bears, leopards, bulls, serpents [and] wolves; each moved according to its assumed shape... The lion roared ready to spring upon him, the bull appeared about to gore him, the serpent writhed without quite reaching him, the wolf was rushing straight at him... the apparitions emitted frightful noises.. the fury shown was fierce.

Anthony [was] pummelled and goaded by them [yet] his mind was master of the situation... as if to mock them, he said: “the Lord has taken your strength away [so] you are trying to scare me out of my wits by your numbers. It is a sign of your helplessness, that you ape the forms of brutes”.

A dretching of sweven indeed: noise and commotion are stressed; the spirits are threatening animal phantoms, like the fylgja, yet they cannot touch him, his reason is not eclipsed. This “storm in the head” is illusion.

Anthony is invoked against fire and fiery diseases (especially ignis sacer), against madness and demons; he is a desert saint, protector of travellers, also capable of punishing with fire. But it is as a visual subject, through the genre of his Temptation, that he becomes the de facto patron of nightmares. The classic Renaissance depictions – Martin Schongauer’s engraving (c. 1480-90; fig. 14a), Bosch’s Lisbon triptych; Grunewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece, Bruegel’s print (fig. 14b; Milne 2007: 136-44) – are essentially dramatic rearrangements of materials we have met in many other contexts. These designs triggered a flood of imitations. Bruegel’s basic idea of a huge hollow head, emanating fire and hybrid creatures was especially popular (e.g. fig. 14c). As a specialist variant of the “storm in the head,” Temptation compositions multiply some parts of the package (the hybrid creatures, the commotion) and shrink others (Anthony
himself). This achieves a further surrealistion of the material, so that it is more definitively seen as psychological and imaginary.

On a technical level, these artists generated their novel hybrid imagery out of the older materials through the rhetorical strategies of explicatio and complicatio. These amounted also to psychological transformations, as Wind (1968: 204-5) explained:

[images of] the hybrid gods [it was believed] consistently follow a logic of their own, which is the logic of concealment. And by that logic, their meaning can be “unfolded” [explicatio], provided the rule of “infolding” has been mastered first... [The latter was] distinguished from explicatio by the quaint but fitting name of complicatio... Theoretically, the process of explication could be continued indefinitely; and the further it proceeds, the plainer are the elements obtained. But so long as the elements remain interdependent, they all partake of each other’s nature, and pure externality is never reached... even the most “explicit” members of this expanding series retain an inherent “complication”.

The hybrid image thus has an implicit dynamic, both internally and as part of a projectable series. The methodology of unfolding an image presumed to have been infolded to begin with would result in infinitely expandable potential sequences of images. Equally, each hybrid image can be thought of as possessing its own, inner capacity for change: it is by definition an infolded thing, which can never be completely unfolded. The 15th-century Classicists took this to stand for mystic truths about impossible unions; we can apply it to the phenomena of hybrid-making traditions

Dual levels of action and tension are implicit in the hybrid sign. As a magical performative transformation (a human turning into a lion; a human possessing the soul or heart of a lion, a lion-god), the hybrid conveys a sense of excess vitality: the power of two or more bodies in one. As a reified form, the hybrid implies the possibility of (further) potential transformations to come.

This notion of an infolded-yet-unfoldable image can also be understood in terms of Freud’s great categories (Freud 1978: VI, 381-419): any human-animal composite can be regarded as condensed (a
human-lion fusion) or displaced (part of the human replaced by part of the lion, and vice-versa).

Fig. 14b. Pieter van der Heyden, after Pieter Bruegel, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1556. Engraving, 24.5 x 32cm. Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels. SI 7602

Fig. 14c. Joos van Craesbeeck, *Temptation of St Anthony*, c. 1650. Oil on canvas, 78 x 116cm. Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Inv. 2764. Photo: Bucerius Kunst Forum.
CONCLUSION

Two kinds of conclusion emerge from this data. In the history of representations, and the history of myth, the “storm in the head” emerges as a recognisable image-constellation, wherein hybrid creature types probably constructed for quite different reasons (such as the Aurignacian human-lion), a set of mediations on the mystic identity between man and beast, and a rhetoric of commotion associated with ecstatic ritual, were drawn together around the evolving identity of the heroic warrior at some point in the Bronze Age. Early manifestations of this include the motif of the hero killing a composite monster, wherein the prowess of the hero is in some sense symbolised in the complexity of his foe’s body.

The elements of the constellation were subsequently configured in a great variety of ways: concentrated in the body of the warrior (shapeshifting), or located in the emotional “climax” of war itself, or in the symbolism of the ritual leading up to it, or in the dreams of enemies, or (in the case of panic) maximally dispersed.

Near our end of this process, we have the Renaissance works with which we started: an anonymous and unintentional deconstructive imitation of Leonardo; and an intentional piece of explicatio et complicatio on the same theme by Bosch, who shared Ortelius’s interest in stretching the soul. But both kinds of deconstruction reveal the underlying structure of Pico’s chameleon.

In terms of its capacity to retain coherence as a cultural “package”, the elements of the “storm in the head” show astonishing elasticity, tenacity and longevity; it demonstrably survives a great number of transformations, reinventions and reinterpretations, and is consistently selected for retention over many generations.

However, some of its variations are not, as it were, reversible. At the level of art, for instance, it is possible to decompose the lion-human into a lion and a human; it is not possible to decompose the fachan. I have outlined here a particular trajectory of the package, focusing on branches where progressive psychologisation produces visible change. Due to the efforts of Plato and his interpreters, and even more clearly of the Church, key aspects of the constellation – hybridity, animals of the mind, commotion – underwent complicatio and explicatio, the results of which generally tended to wind the
material ever more securely into traditions of dream representation. One might say that history itself performed these transformations of condensation and displacement, effecting a slow sea-change on the mythos, like the palimpsest that we see in the layering of animal imagery in the caves of the Palaeolithic.

Louise Milne is a Lecturer in Visual Culture at Edinburgh Napier University and the University of Edinburgh. She is the author of Carnivals and Dreams: Pieter Bruegel and the History of the Imagination, and she writes on the visual history of dreams and nightmares; louise.milne@ed.ac.uk

Notes

1 The Greenlandish monster *Tupilak* may appear as a seal above the water, but it has other limbs or wings hidden below the waterline.

2 Animal imagery was used constantly as analogy well into the industrial era; thus when pre-industrial people say, *he hatched a plot*, or *her thoughts flew*, there is no necessarily supernatural or even oneiric connotation intended. Only in the centuries after industrialisation do we see these usages superseded by mechanical metaphors e.g. *He built up a head of steam, you could see the cogs turning*, etc.

3 For a survey of the literature on Upper Palaeolithic art see e.g. Conkey and Soffer 1997: 1-15.

4 That is, using realist conventions devised for the representation of people and animals; on the difficulties of these conventions see Davis 1987: 111-47, and comments by Davis et al. (1996b: 227-75) to McDermott.

5 There are also images whose hybrid status is ambiguous or contested, such as the theriomorph from Namibia (Apollo 11 cave, ca 40 000 BP), and animal-animal hybrids such as bison-deer (Bahn and Vertut 1997: 165-6).

6 In Leroi-Gourhan’s analysis (1993: 395-6), the “Sorcerer” of Les Trois Frères has: “a fairly human trunk and legs ... arms and genitals reminiscent of a cat’s, a horse’s tail, and the ears, beard, and antlers of a reindeer; his eyes and beak are probably an owl’s”, however Lorblanchet remarks on the shifting sands of composite identifications (1989: 109-
Louise S. Milne

43); cf. Davis’s warnings (1989: 179-89) about assuming marks are representational. I intend to address these issues in a forthcoming work on the semiotics of dreams in prehistory. In the present context, the hybrid images illustrated here are widely identified as both figurative and composite.

7 On the issue of prehistoric mental imagery, I give Noll (1985) as a representative citation rather than the better-known publications of David Lewis-Williams and his colleagues (for this background see Bahn 2010: ch. 3 and 4); an adequate account of the cave-art/shamanism debate would require a separate paper. I take here Lorblanchet’s position: “The precise knowledge of meanings is outside the competence of the archaeology of prehistoric art, which must modestly content itself with grasping the structures rather than the meaning as such of the figurations it studies.”(1988: 282)

8 Jordan (2001: 102) explains, “The routine and ritual treatment of specific animal body parts ... reproduces broader cosmological concepts linked to wider processes of [environmental] enculturation, [to form] the embodied community habitus.”

9 Similar in kind to the unconscious consequences of the semiotic thickening caused by layering, composite representations, like the Aurignacian lion human or the Point Barrow bear, are made out of bone. To carve the residue of a dead animal into the form of a living one in itself implies a further dimension of condensation and displacement.

10 Reported by Rasmussen (1929/7.1: 56).

11 The belief that the mental ability to perceive universals is a physical attribute of the head runs from Aristotle to Leonardo (who thought he could identify anatomically an “organ of common sense”) and eventually into 19th c. physiognomy. On this tradition, see Summers (1987: 71-109; esp. 71-5), on Leonardo’s senso comune, studies of skulls, and writings.

12 Origen is discussing Leviticus 5-6, on sacrificial animals.

13 De Principiis is known through St Jerome’s summary (Ep. ad Avitum, 4; trans. by Cox 1982: 115) and through a problematic Latin version by Rufinus. On 15th- c. revivals of Origen and metempsychosis, see Wind (1983: 42-55), and Walker (1964: 11-15 and passim).

14 “The earliest accepted evidence for warfare, Site 117 near Jebel Sahaba, Nubia, is a [late Palaeolithic] cemetery dated to 12000 to 10000 BC ... in
which 24 of 59 well-preserved skeletons are associated with stone artifacts interpreted as projectile microliths [but] around the world the multiple archaeological indicators of war are absent until the development of a more sedentary existence and/or increasing sociopolitical complexity, usually in combination with some form of ecological crisis and/or steep ecological gradients.” (Ferguson 2000: 159-60, citing Wendorf 1968: 90-3; Wendorf and Schild 1986: 818-24).

15 Cf. the more famous Narmer Palette, ca 3000 BCE (Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE32169; CG14716); on the palettes in general and their interpretation, Davis 1996a: 199-231; for illustrations and bibliography, http://xoomer.virgilio.it/francescoraf/hesyra/palettes/narmerp.htm

16 Cf. the Viksø helmets, demonstrably ceremonial, early 1st millennium, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen; http://oldtiden.natmus.dk/udstillingen/bronzealderen/viksoe_hjelmene

17 Trans. Chavalas 2006: 150-2. This differs slightly from the translation by Morgan (2005), Tukulti-Ninurta Epic 5A, 45’-50’: “They are furious, raging, taking forms strange as Anzu / They charge forward furiously to the fray without any armor / They had stripped off their breastplates, discarded their clothing / They tied up their hair and polished (?) their ... weapons / The fierce heroic men danced with sharpened weapons / They roared at one another like struggling lions, with eyes aflash (?) / While the fray, particles drawn in a whirlwind, swirled around in combat” (cf. Speidel 2002: 255; for Akkadian text, Machinist 1978: 121).

18 The Gorgoneion itself is an interesting motif, clearly related to our topic in a variety of ways; though space does not permit a full exploration here, I hope to discuss this imagery further in a future study.

19 The central Gorgoneion appears on breastplates from Hellenistic and Roman times onward (Ridgeway 2001: 182).

20 Thus Poseidonius compares the Celtic champion’s share to Hector’s “best” portion in Iliad 7.21; on later Classical accounts of the Celts and comparisons with the heroic age see Rankin (1996: 72-7).

21 Speidel (2004: 14-15), thinks that Scene 36 on the Column shows foreign auxiliaries, whose presence in the Roman army is of course well-attested. However Roman troops wore wolfskins in the wars against Hannibal up to the time of Marius – for the same reasons as the other warrior groups we have been considering, and because the wolf is of course the totem of Rome – and the standard-bearing aquilifer rank
continued to do so, while the *antesignani* (elite infantry) sometimes wore bearskins.

22 At the site called Mesaria.

23 A relief from the same site shows them as a trio (van Straten 1976: 1). Such nymph-cults were both geographically widespread and long-lived, persisting into the middle ages and in some cases (e.g. the *vily-rusalki*) into the early 20th c.; cf. Milne 2006.

24 The Lyssa drives maddened Heracles to kill his children; for her character see e.g. Euripides, Heracles 844-74; for the vase paintings see Borgeaud (1989: 110f).

25 In the Kos reliefs, Pan, an entity representing the unknown forces of the mind, is shown in the same plane, as it were, as the dreamer. In the shrine relief from Mesaria dedicated to the Charites (Van Straten, fig. 1) Pan is depicted by a small head thrusting through the blank plane on which the nymphs are arranged in profile. This implies that Pan intrudes from a different dimension to that of the other deities; his observing head – eyes and mind – perhaps represents the cause and nature of the vision.

26 Cf. Borgeaud (1989: 101): “Panic overtakes a special artificial human community: the army in the field... [when] the soldier cease[s] to recognise his fellows... [this] suggests the standing possibility of regression [to chaos]... Panic dissolves the bonds of a little society [such as a band of warriors] characterized by a high degree of reinforcement and involution, placed... outside the territory proper to the city [i.e. on foreign soil]... [It] thus typically attacks a model of order and disrupts it.”

27 Ellis Davidson (1978: 136) points out that, “the word *vargr*, wolf, was used as a legal term for an outlaw,” but also we catch hints of an age-set tradition wherein young “heroes” would support themselves by “living like wolves in the woods”, preying on travellers (cf. Mc Cone 1987, 1986). She adds that, speaking in 1910, the Lapp Turi said that in the old days the shamans turned themselves into wolves, and it was easier to do this when they had slain innocent people.

28 The *fylgja* and the *hamr* “overlap in both form and function, as expressions of the extra-physical force of the person to whom they are attached” (Grundy 1998).
29 Cf. Tacitus, *Germania*, 31; on tonal range in references to berserkers see the comments by Eddison on Egil’s Saga (1930: 244-5); Ellis Davidson 1988: 79-80.

30 *Fylgja* is “likely to be related to Icelandic *fulga* (thin covering of hay) and Norwegian dialect *folga* (skin, covering) and with the verb *fela* (to hide)” (Turville-Petre 1966 and 1975: 228). Magnússon (1989: 218-9) connects the verb *fela* to *fylgja* (spirit); cf. de Vries (1962: 147-8).


32 Cynwulf, *Elene* (line 71); two other instances of this phrase occur in *Daniel* (lines 110, 118).

33 In part, this can be explained in terms of the limits imposed, as well as the new techniques opened up, by Renaissance workshop practices. Quattrocento artists – in Italy, Germany, France and the Netherlands – were trained to excel in the reproduction of detail, and to arrange this detail in terms of compositional templates held in common as the intellectual property of the shop. Novelty could be inserted into this working practice, either by copying new kinds of detail, or by copying new compositional templates. None of this activity was likely to lead to a marked simplification of form. In the lineage of Giotto, Massacio, Leonardo – and possibly Piero della Francesca – a re-classicised simplification of form did occur, but these were exceptions to the general trend.

34 Literally “sacred fire”, a disease now thought to be ergotism from cereal poisoning, which caused the limbs to rot and drop off, and was usually fatal. The epidemic of 1089 in the south of France is associated with the founding of the Order of the Antonites, who cared for victims of *ignis sacer*, and, by the 16th century, also syphilis and plague patients. Grünewald made his *Isenheim Altarpiece*, featuring a *Temptation of Anthony*, for a hospital branch of this Order.

References


----. *Heracles*. Transl. by E. P. Coleridge (1938).


Gelling, Peter, and Hilda Ellis Davidson (1972). *Chariot of the Sun and Other Rites and Symbols of the Northern Bronze Age*. London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.


*Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Transl. by G. W. Dasent (1866). 


http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/goldenlegend (last accessed 3 December 2011).


*Landnámabók*. Transl. by T. Ellwood (1898).


Vries, Jan de (1931). Contributions to the Study of Othin, Especially in his Relation to Agricultural Practices in Modern Popular Lore. *Folklore*


