

## One, Two, Many: Dream-Culture, Charms and Nightmares<sup>1</sup>

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Something seemed to tear me, and I awoke struggling. Such was my dream – more horrible than it seems, for the terror of dreams bears no relation to the hideousness of their incidents, but to some hidden emotion.

John Addington Symonds, 3 July 1861

The charm comes out of a mythological universe of mysterious names and beings... a separate world... reached through imagination or belief or acceptance of traditional authority...

Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi* (1976)<sup>2</sup>

Researchers may focus on charms as evidence about belief-systems in particular regions, periods or demographics; for insights into wider theoretical issues in the anthropology of religion, magic and ritual; or for their intrinsic qualities as a poetic and/or performative genre. This paper contributes primarily to the second and third of these foci. I am interested in charms as a cultural intersection for beliefs to do with dreams and nightmares. I draw on materials from a wide range of times and places to explore certain tenacious semiotic structures in the interlinked media of charms, curses and evil dreams; made visible in the ways that people conceive of, mount, and guard against external occult threats. Resonances between the characteristic rhetorics of bad dreams and charms shed light on the “cultural scripts”<sup>3</sup> which shape them both.

### The Nightmare and “Ego-shattering” Dreams

First, some definitions. The nightmare is a subset of what might be described as “self-shattering” dreams and visions: dreams characterised by a strong emotional charge, laden with *affect* (desire), and experienced in terms of extreme ego-alienation or alterity. Considered as a group, ego-shattering dream-types must be extremely ancient, as the capacity to experience them arises from the conditions of consciousness itself (waking and sleeping), howsoever these may be codified culturally.<sup>4</sup> I have argued elsewhere that affect-laden dreams share a certain rhetoric (cf. Milne 2006, 2010, 2011, 2013). They have marked liminal characteristics, such as commotion and chaotic semiotics (nonsense, reversals or inversions of natural order), expressed through typical visual structures (dream-demons are envisaged as hybrid creatures or shapeshifters, predatory in form, with teeth, claws, or fangs).

In the traditional, or archaic, nightmare (Milne 2006), the subject perceives him/herself threatened by an alien entity, identified as supernatural in origin. The dreamer is convinced this is a real encounter with an invasive creature. In psychoanalytic terms, the dream-creature is hallucinatory; it is an alienated (i.e. disguised, unrecognisable) avatar of the self. Such an avatar possesses fearsome power because it is animated by the dreamer's own repressed desire. No one is capable of recognising the agency embodied in a terrifying dream-avatar as emanating from one's own self – its radical alterity is the whole point – yet, the desire propelling the scenario must be the dreamer's own (whose else could it be?). This animating desire can be fairly described as repressed, since the dreamer cannot recognise its source in the self. So: alienated, inadmissible desire, projected into a dream-avatar, produces the impression of profound alterity in the archaic nightmare.<sup>5</sup>

But the psychology of the individual is not all there is to ego-threatening dreams. In cultural terms, while the raw agency of the dream-entity is (covertly) supplied by the dreamer, visual aspects of the creature, its ascribed motivation, its typical scenarios and habitats, come from the cultural store. As culture changes, so do belief-narratives, and so do dream-types, including affect-laden ones. Nowadays, nightmares are by far the most common manifestation of this kind of dream. The other cognate types are erotic, ecstatic, prophetic (mantic) or initiatory dreams – important in ancient, pre-modern and tribal cultures (and in traditional belief-communities) – and these overlap and exist in combination with the nightmare. What such dream-types have in common is their ego-shattering – or, in some cases, ego-remaking – potential.

It may seem obvious that culture supplies scenario, costume and *mise-en-scène* for such dreams and their interpretation. I would further argue, though, that culture does more than furnish supernatural shapes for affect-laden avatars: it configures the affect itself, and thus general import of the dream, as positive or negative. The dreamer's culture informs his/her mind-set and setting,<sup>6</sup> determining whether the experience of an affect-laden dream manifests as a nightmare or something better; whether the emotion involved is construed as terror, awe, or ecstasy.

The rhetoric of traditional nightmare imagery involves certain peculiar semiotic twists, which serve both to express the emotional commotion at the heart of the experience, and to occlude the avatar's point of origin in the self. Part of my point here is to provide further evidence (cf. Milne 2017) that, on some level, the characteristics of nightmare rhetoric and associated apotropeic media show knowledge of the existence and

action of repression. The present essay explores this hypothesis further by focussing on a general issue in dream and charm rhetoric: patterns of numerosity (apprehension of number).<sup>7</sup> As we will see, it is through this dimension of numerosity that cultural scripts can intervene most effectively to dispel threat in a range of dream scenarios.

### Dream-cultures and Cultural Scripts

The immediate context for dreams is the collective cosmological worldview of a group of dreamers: their “dream-culture.” “The dreams of an individual” – as Schmitt wrote twenty years ago – “from the moment they are accounted, put in writing, disseminated to everyone, take on a collective value and a social significance” (Schmitt 1999: 274-5). To understand how dream-culture works as a complex interface between individual and belief-system, we must first think about dream-experience as a matter of representation. Even before they are retold, dreams are constructed out of memories (representations). A dream is thus a kind of text, which effectively does not exist unless it is remembered (i.e. constructed/construed). Each time a dream is remembered, talked about, drawn or written down, the text is assimilated into the collective world of representations: that is, it is redacted at increasing levels of sophistication into dominant cultural scripts and belief-structures. All representations of dreams, fictional or historical, in whatever media – from epics and sagas to prayers and runic amulets – necessarily draw on their current dream-cultural matrix (in practice, consisting of several interwoven, even contradictory traditions).

Ego-shattering dreams, in particular, like charms, are rooted in the mythic domain (Frye 2006: 130-7, 147; cf. Mitchell 2000: 72). The dream-demon takes shape, and the desire attributed to it is apprehended as threatening or beneficial, because the nature of the encounter is instantly identifiable through the dreamer’s internalised cultural repertoire. Dream-culture generates all kinds of details about the dream-creature, both in the first phase of the dream’s internal construction, and later, in terms of redactions and interpretation.

This is where numerosity – the human capacity for apprehending number (Coolidge and Overmann 2012; 2013) – comes into play. The simplest kind of nightmare involves an attack by a solo dream-demon. In such examples, there is one ego (the dreamer), and one creature (the demon); the latter is a disguised avatar of the self, wearing a culturally specific shape. In the case of a malevolent dream-visitor, desire in the scenario is split and polarised: part is attached to the invasive avatar (menace, threat), and part to the

dreamer's ego (terror, fear). Cultural scripts can be brought into play in and around that primary tension, to further "split" the incoming avatar in a variety of ways. A protective script from the dreamer's birth culture may be triggered during the primary redaction; that is, the protection may be woven directly into the dream-text itself as it is remembered/constructed. Or, such a script may be invoked later, by the dreamer, a family member or ritual specialist (secondary redaction). These protective scripts typically introduce a benevolent entity into the dream scenario – a guardian figure – a god, saint or angel – to stand between the dreamer and the demonic attacker. This is, of course, a standard dramatic move in the genre of charms.

Alternatively, on waking, the dream-encounter may be swiftly interpreted as a manifestation of malign desire on the part of some third, hidden agency (such as a witch); beliefs about the Spanish *bruja* (Campagne 2008: 384-9) or Scandinavia *mara* fall into this category (cf. Pócs 1999: 31-4).<sup>8</sup> Though paranoid, this cultural strategy may also be therapeutic in effect: in blaming the threat on someone else, its source is, at least, firmly located beyond the dreaming self.<sup>9</sup> For millennia, charms of various kinds have been mobilised to enable and instigate these splitting effects, to ward off the nightmare-creature and neutralise the desire it embodies, often by rebounding that desire back to an assumed point of origin outside the dreamer.

#### The One-Two Dream-Demon Encounter

Pre-industrial peoples had a rich range of possible templates for dream-demons: actual gods or spirits, personified diseases, or the supernatural alter-egos of enemies or neighbours. The earliest evidence comes from the first literate cultures. Akkadian texts contain a huge number of references to demons oppressing or interrupting sleep, demons or ghosts appearing in dreams, and sleeplessness caused by illness or worry. The context is typically magico-medical: dream-interpretation books are lists of omens or symptoms, with their relevant ritual counter-actions or remedies (cf. Butler 1998: 43-72). Thus a tablet compiling common diagnoses mentions two kinds of nightmares caused by *lamassu* and *šēdu* demons:

If a man, while he lies asleep, (dreams that) a town repeatedly falls upon him, and he sighs, but nobody hears him – a *lamassu* and a *šēdu* are fastened to his body.

If a man, while he lies asleep, (dreams that) a town repeatedly falls upon him, and he sighs, and someone hears him – a very evil *šēdu* is fastened to his body.

(VAT 7525, col. III, lines 28-35, Staatliche Museen, Berlin; Butler 1998: 51-2)<sup>10</sup>

A medical text describes signs of sorcerous attack in the patient:

If a man's head constantly afflicts him; (in his) sleep [ ... ]; his dreams are frightening [OR] [he has po[llutions repeatedly] in his sleep]; he spoke in his sleep [ ... ]; his knees are paralyzed; his chest has paralysis; (and) his skin (lit., flesh) is constantly covered with moisture - 7 That man is bewitched. (Thompson 1923: 86/1, col. 11, lines 3-7; Butler 1998: 54)

The earliest fictional nightmares are depicted also in *Gilgamesh*.<sup>11</sup> Enkidu, doomed to die, has a series of ominous dreams, in each of which he encounters a terrifying demon:

“There was something, my friend, in my dream of last night / the heavens thundered, the earth gave echo / and there was I, standing between them. / A man there was, grim his expression / just like a roaring Thunderbird were his features. / [His] hands were a lion's paws / [his] claws an eagle's talons. / He seized me by the hair, he overpowered me...”  
(Ur tablet, vv. 62-9. c. 12C BCE; trans. George 1999: 131)

In this classic example of a “One-Two” dream-demon scenario, the hybrid antagonist has a predator’s extremities (beak, claws, talons), exemplifying the threat of penetration; a tenacious element in the imagery of affect-filled dreams (cf. Milne 2008; 2011; 2017). The archaic nightmare demon typically has teeth or beak and claws. But a sexual attack also threatens through penetration, and the two may be combined. In this striking late Graeco-Roman representation, known in two forms (fig. 1a and b), a clawed siren descends on a sleeping man, with the (implied) objective of wounding, raping or seducing him; this represents an erotic dream or nightmare (or both).<sup>12</sup>

*Gilgamesh* also gives us an example of the most basic template for reframing a nightmare scenario: the One-Two-Three dream, wherein the attack is interrupted by an equally powerful helper. Such patterns are strongly reinforced when mythical beliefs are instituted in organised religion; and further reinforced in this case, as *Gilgamesh* is a mythico-literary work, wherein we can expect ideal cultural guidelines about dream-experience to be followed. In the hero’s series of incubation dreams, here is his fourth dream, related to Enkidu:

“My friend, I have had the fourth [dream] / it surpasses my other three dreams! / I saw a Thunderbird in the sky / up it rose like a cloud, soaring above us. / 'It was a [ ]... its visage distorted / its mouth was fire, its breath was death. / [There was also a] man, he was strange of form / he ... and stood there in my dream. / [He bound] its wings and took hold of my arm / ... he cast it down [before] me... / ...upon it.”  
(Old Babylonian Nippur tablet, vv. 9-19. Early 2<sup>nd</sup> mill.; trans. George 1999: 117)

The scenario parallels the negative encounters dreamed by Enkidu, except that a new entity, “strange of form,” appears to save the hero from the predatory thunderbird. Gilgamesh himself is – according to the Sumerian King List – the son of a type of incubus (a *lilû*-demon; cf. Butler 62); his protector appears with no prompting.

## Dreams and Illness

Disturbed sleep is symptomatic of many kinds of illness. Rather than looking at the evidence about this and trying to diagnose “what was really wrong with them,” we can take seriously what people thought was going on, in their own mythological terms; more exactly, how people mobilised their belief-systems to conceptualise the related experiences of bodily pain and bad dreams.<sup>13</sup> In a world filled with demons, to be ill was to fall under the shadow of death – to have one foot in the underworld – and so become vulnerable to evil otherworldly agencies. Underlying all healing hymns, prayers and charms is the common perception of the sick person as inhabiting a liminal state or place – as in sleep and dreams – where two worlds meet. Hence the central position of dreams in magical texts. As the late Classical “Apollonian Invocation” puts it, once the initiate has succeeded in summoning a divinity:

when he enters, ask him what you want to find out about: divination, oracles in verse, sending dreams, revelation by dreams, interpretation of dreams, causing illness, in fact about everything included in the arts of magic (Betz 1992: PGM I.327-3; Gordon 1997: 70)

When disease is commonly viewed as an indicator of supernatural malevolence, illness becomes an oneiric place where responsible agencies could be perceived, identified and opposed.

Classical incubation cults (Wacht, 1998: 179–265; Renberg 2017: I. 3-33), for example, positively interpret typical nightmare scenarios for therapeutic effect. Here is a depiction of a healing dream on a *stela* at a temple to Amphiaros (fig. 2). In the foreground, the god heals the supplicant, binding his upper arm. The background shows the dream as it appeared to the patient: sleeping in the temple, he is bitten on the shoulder by a snake (note the teeth). Since the snake is the god’s chthonic avatar, the biting scene represents in coded form the same event as the foreground scene. This is an instance of the One-Two-Three structure wherein a therapeutic context re-stages a threatening dream scenario, fusing into one frame both the imagery of the dream-attack and its neutralising interpretation. The cultural script identifies the snake as a guise for the god, and renders the attack as divine medical intervention.

In the Amphiaros relief, the supernatural agent thus has two forms of affect – malevolent (biting snake) and benevolent (healing god) – together in one representation. In the great Akkadian poem, *Ludlul bêl nêmeqi* (or *The Righteous Sufferer*, Babylonian, c. 1500-1000 BCE), the protagonist’s dream-visitor switches character, from malevolent to benevolent, over a series of dreams. The protagonist complains:

The *alû*(-demon) has donned my body (as) a garment.

Sleep covers me like a large hunting-net  
(*Ludlul bêl nêmeqi*, II.71-2; Butler 44; Rensberg 1995).

This type of demon was regularly referred to as causing sexual dreams and nightmares; it “*afflicts* [literally, *hits a man as in a dream*” (CT 16, pl. 27, lines 32-33; Butler 51). In the poem, the Righteous Sufferer is tormented in this way, until the god Marduk intervenes:

<p>Heavy was his hand upon me, I could not bear it! Dread of him was oppressive, it [ me]. His fierce [pun]ishment [ ], the deluge, His stride was ..., it ... [ ] [Ha]rsh, severe illness does not ... [ ] my person, I lost sight of [aler]tness, [ ] make my mind stray. I gro[an] day and night alike, Dreaming and waking [I am] equally wretched.</p> <p>A remarkable young man of extraordinary physique, Magnificent in body, clothed in new garments, Because I was only half awake, his features lacked form. He was clad in splendo[u]r, robed in dread --- He came in upon me, he stood over me. [When I saw him, my] flesh grew numb. [ ] "The Lady(?) has sent [me]," [ ]...</p>	<p>A second time [I saw a dream]. In the dream I saw [at night], A remarkable purifier [ ],... He pronounced the resuscitating incantation, he massaged [my] bo[dy]. A third time I saw a dream. ... [He applied] to me his spell which binds [debilitating disease], [He drove] back the evil vapo[u]r to the ends of the earth, He bore off [the head pain] to the breast of hell, [He sent] down the malignant spectre to its hidden depth, The relentless ghost he returned [to] its dwelling, He overthrew the she-demon, sending it off to a mountain, He replaced the ague in flood and sea, He eradicated debility like a plant, Unpleasant sleep, the pouring out of slumber, he took far [away] like smoke with which the heavens get filled</p>
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(Foster 2005: 402-4; composite trans. from Lambert 1960 [1995]: 53, for the final lines)

Through most of the poem, the narrator presents himself as oppressed by a single evil entity, depicted subjectively in terms of the misery it causes him: he is wretched “day and night... dreaming and waking.” Then he receives a new kind of dream-visitor, whose features “lack form,” because the dreamer is in a liminal state, ill and half-asleep (notice that Gilgamesh’s dream protector is also “strange of form”). This second figure – Marduk or his messenger – “drives back” what are now categorised as a whole array of variously personified illnesses and demons, “to the ends of the earth, to the breast of hell” etc. Once they become plural in the text, these demonic ills are described objectively, and also ascribed agency (they have malignance, relentlessness etc). After the cure, a couple of images in the praise of Marduk’s actions are worth attention:

It was Marduk who put a muzzle on the mouth of the lion who was eating me

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Marduk despoiled my pursuer of his sling and turned aside his slingstone  
(Lambert 1960[1995]: 56)

So, the demonic dream-attack in these lines is characterised as tearing and shooting (note the teeth of the lion).

#### One-Two-Many: Sickness Demons and Dreams

Let us consider in more detail how protective multiplicity could be structured into ancient and traditional dream representations. Formally, multiple figures may be introduced at either end of the dream, bracketing the scenario in various ways. So, the resolution of the threat may involve a multiplication situated in the dream-text itself: thus the protector of the Righteous Sufferer in the end dispels a sheaf of disease-spirits. Or, multiplication of personnel may occur outwith the frame of the dream, as part of formal therapy or counter-charm; thus representations of Classical incubation cures position groups of presiding priests or worshippers at the edges of the scene (e.g. fig. 3); in the same way, the duo of healer saints, Cosmas and Damian, perform their trademark surgery during the patient's dream with onlooking angels around the bed (cf. fig. 4; Herrold 2007; Rutt 1994). Or, the initial attacking demon as well as the protectors may be construed as multiple.

The multiple nature of fever demons is an old and tenacious idea. The "she-demon" mentioned by the *Righteous Sufferer* evokes the famous Babylonian monster, Lamaštu. She recurs in Akkadian compilations of demonic illnesses:

The *di'u*-disease is the Lamaštu(-demoness), the Obliterator. It does not let (one) sleep, nor does it make sleep pleasant [good]  
(CT 17. pl. 25, lines 5-7; Butler 51).

Lamaštu is depicted in a rich body of amulets and incantations, dating from the 2nd-1st millennium BCE.

She is singular but with seven names – an attribute inherited from her Sumerian parent, the seven evil Dimme damsels – and she brings forth sevenfold evils (Wiggerman 217-8).<sup>14</sup> Best known as a demon of childbirth (itself, of course, a highly liminal and dangerous state), she was also nocturnal, attacking sleepers and causing nightmares. Among her standard names: *Sword that splits the Head*, *She who Lights the Fire*, *Goddess whose Face is Wild* (Farber 2014: 145).

In the oldest Lamaštu representations, she was given some variant of a dog-head form. A huge corpus

of amulets depict her with outspread arms and fingers: *her hands are a net, her grip means death* (Old Babylonian, BM 120022); *furious and with very long hands, very long fingers and nails... she entered the house through the front door* (Old Babylonian, BIN 2 72.3f; cf. Wiggerman 231-2). Later, she was represented as a more complex hybrid – lion-headed and taloned – and embedded in an iconography. She stands on a boat (to travel through the underworld), carries a bundle of snakes, or holds a snake (or snake and dagger) in each hand (cf. fig. 5). She is associated with biting animals (dog, snake and scorpion). She inhabits the wilderness, lies in wait like a wolf and sniffs out victims.

Here is a common spell (Hulbazizi no. 60) against attacks in sleep, to be accompanied by incantations specific to Lamaštu (among others). It is voiced by the patient:

Spell. Something passes by the edge of my bed  
 frightening me, and making me panic  
 showing me fearful dreams  
 let them commit it [the demon] to Nedu, the great [doorkeeper] of the Underworld  
 At the command of Ninurta, firstborn son, beloved progeny.  
 At the command of Marduk, who lives in Esagil and Baby1on.  
 Oh door and bolt, may you know  
 that I have fallen under the protection of  
 these two divine lords. Spell.  
 (Finkel 2001: 61-2; cf. Wiggerman 2000: 246)<sup>15</sup>

This spell has a visual equivalent. The Late Babylonian amulet (fig. 6a & b; Becker 1993: 5, no. 7) is probably the earliest extant depiction of a nightmare-demon. The lower register dramatises the action of the Hulbazizi incantation. As Wiggerman (2000: 224) describes it, “the scared sufferer is sitting straight up in his bed [around] which crawls a little dragon, attacked by someone with a spear.”<sup>16</sup> This dragon creature by the bed is the bad dream itself. In the upper register, two *Ugallu* (“Great Lions” – protective lion-men) brandish maces to deter such demonic intruders. The *Ugallu* creatures (and the figure with the spear) exhibit the same traits (predator heads, sharp weapons) as the dragon-demon. The whole scene thus multiplies and re-distributes among the protectors the generic characteristics of the nightmare (teeth, claws, monstrous body, commotion, terror).

The Lamaštu corpus also exemplifies how the image of a demon could come to be used as protection against that demon (and, by extension, other demons). This is a key strategy in apotropeic visual cultures: the demon is to be deterred by its own representation, or by a representation with the same qualities.<sup>17</sup> Against the likes of Lamaštu, Babylonian magical medicine tries to break up the deadly One-Two encounter

in two main ways. The dreamer is provided with a bodyguard of creatures whose characteristics match those of the attacker. And, an even more monstrous demonic protector may be invoked: Pazuzu, Breaker of the Winds (sometimes termed the “husband” of Lamaštu).

Thus, in the Neo-Assyrian “Hell Plaque” (fig. 7), a complex exorcism ceremony is underway, depicted in low relief in four main registers. In the third register, the patient lies in bed, flanked by two fish-costumed priests. Above are two registers of cosmic symbols and animal-headed protectors; below, a larger-scale Lamaštu rides through the underworld (home of demons), with Pazuzu following, presumably to dissuade her. Presiding over all this, above the frame of these registers, rises the head of another Pazuzu, sculpted in the round, his two paws resting on the top rim of the plaque. The change in scale, depth and formal position clearly situate him in a different dimension of being. Solo Pazuzu heads (cf. fig. 8; Lambert 1970: T4) were used also as standard apotropeic representations, like the later Gorgoneion.<sup>18</sup>

The Ancient Egyptians used the image of Bes, the lion-headed dwarf, as an apotropeic monster-god.

Thousands of Bes figurines testify to his popularity. By the first millennium BCE:

[Bes was] equated with Shu, god of the air, who filled the cosmos with the breath of life... [Bes’s] nakedness, his ithyphallic form, his hideous face and stuck-out tongue [repelled] hostile forces... Bes’s dancing and noisy music-making... also [drove] away evil powers... men and women... dressed up in Bes masks to perform protective dances... (Pinch 44).

Bes commanded wide apotropeic powers, including protection in childbirth, and also could be deployed in dreams. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Bes appears in the context of incubation cults, as practiced, for example, in the temples of Asklepios-Imhotep (Omran 2014: 70-112). Suites of rooms where pilgrims came to sleep were known as the chambers of Bes, and decorated with representations of the god (cf. Lang 2013: 77-8).

As a defender against nightmare demons, Bes was carved in multiple on a customised funerary head-rest<sup>19</sup> owned by the royal scribe Qeniherkhepeshef (19th Dynasty, c. 1210 BCE) whose grave goods included a book of spells relating to dreams (cf. Milne 2017: 82-6, figs. 2a-c).<sup>20</sup>Qeniherkhepeshef’s carries a row of Bes figures holding knives, positioned at the point where the sleeper would lay his neck. A larger, more elaborate solo Bes figure dances and waves a clutch of snakes on the other side of this block. As in the Bes dances, knives, snakes, noise and commotion – as well as the monstrous faces of Bes, singular and multiple – are there to repel oneiric attacks.

## Multiplicity in the Nightmare Scenario

Patterns established in antiquity for conceiving and representing nightmare had great longevity.

Rhetoric in the large corpus of medieval curses, from the Middle East to Northern Europe, testifies to these continuities. In an early medieval incantation bowl (fig. 9) from a region once ruled by Babylon, the text (though garbled and incomplete) mentions *migraine* caused by a *she-demon*, associated with *spells in a dream of the night*. Apparently a counter-curse, it starts with a catalogue of gruesome bodily ills:

the flux of the body, spittle, the effusion (of) water upon the breast, [...] devouring flesh, shedding of blood... Now [...] (the woman) that curses Mahperoz son of (6) Hindu. Now the bewitchment that cursed El - (that) have I loosened I sen[d] ... Dissolved are the bones of snapping (fingers), dissolved are the tubes of pipes, [...] [...] (dissolved are) the bones, dissolved the sinews, and migraine [...] of the she-demon, that you bring to an end the vows and spells that appear in a dream of the night [...] (BM 91719; trans. Segal 2000)

Other incantation bowls are more explicit: Mahlefa son of Batšittin wishes against Mar Zutra son of

Ukkamay:

knocking and flinging and hanging... send against him fever & shivering ...& headache & groaning... & demons & devils & liliths... [they will] heat him & inflame him & set him on fire & affright him," ending with the injunction that all these creatures together, *will not give him sleep for his eyes & they will not give him rest in his body in his dreams & in his visions* (counter-charm incantation bowl, 6–8C, Iraq, BM 91771; trans. Segal 2000)<sup>21</sup>

The call for nightmare here is the climax for piled-up imagery of commotion (knocking, flinging, etc), tied together in a package with fever, headaches, desert creatures and dark powers.

Much further North and West, over the next thousand years, illness was perceived in terms of attack by a multiple demonic agency. The late medieval Blæsinge amulet (Zealand, Denmark; MacLeod and Mees 133-4; Stoklund 1986: 189–211) names seven sisters<sup>22</sup> as fever demons:

+ I conjure you, *seven sisters ... Elffrica (?), Affricea, Soria, Affoca, Affricala*. I conjure you and invoke (you?) through the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that you may not harm this servant of God, neither in the eyes nor in the limbs nor in the marrow nor in any joints of the limbs... *agla* (Simek 2011: 34; cf Bozóky 2013: 102-3)

An incantation from c. 1000 (Codex Vaticanus Latinus 235) refers to these sisters as “shivers and fevers,” active at specific times, and during sleep:

[against] the midday ones, the nightly, the daily, the bi-daily, the three daily... or whatever sort you are: I conjure you... you may not have leave to harm this servant of God by day or night, neither waking or sleeping... (trans. Simek 2011: 36).

In the Irish *Serglige Con Culainn* (*Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn*; earliest extant version probably composed c. 9C; earliest MS late 11C-early 12C), the hero's nightmare-illness is central to the action. Cú

Chulainn is with a group by the water, hunting birds for their feathers. They see an otherworldly pair of seabirds, joined by a golden chain, singing a magical song. Cú Chulainn is advised not to harm them, but he shoots at them anyway, hitting one. He then falls into a feverish sleep – a sojourn in the Otherworld – during which the two sisters at whom he shot – now in human form – take turns at thrashing him. This goes on for a long time; they leave him for dead, he is ill for a year.

Multiples enter into this tale first at the start, with the group attack, the flock of birds, then Cú Chulainn's attack on the paired birds. Cú Chulainn then subjectively experiences a One-Two nightmare scenario with a twist (there are two attackers, only one at a time hits him). Then the text gives another view of this dream, from the outside, where the spirits causing the hero's illness are described as multiple. Cú Chulainn's charioteer, Lóg, makes this comment:

<p>Mór espa do láech laigi fri súan serglige, ar donadbat genaiti áesa a Tenmag Trogaigi condot rodbsat, condot chachtsat condot ellat, eter bríga banespa.</p>	<p>Great folly for a warrior to lie under the sleep of a wasting-sickness for it shows that spirits/demons, the folk of Tenmag Trogaigi, have overwhelmed you, have captured you, have taken possession of you, through the power of womanish folly.</p>
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(trans. Dillon 1953: 11. 316–23; cf. Hall 2004: 143)

So, externally, the wasting sleep is read as a sign that not merely one or two but a horde of demons (“the folk of Tenmag Trogaigi”) is in possession of the hero.

In an Old English *Journey Charm*, a traveller guards himself against a horde of nocturnal supernatural enemies, and the fear they bring. These are again concrete in their means of attack, enigmatic in form:

<p>Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce and on godes helde bebeode wið þane sara stice, wið þane sara slege, wið þane grymma gryre, wið ðane micela egða þe bið eghwam lað, and wið eal þæt lað þe in to land fare. Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic me wege... ne me mere ne gemyrre ne me maga ne geswence, ne me næfre minum feore forht ne gewurþe...</p>	<p>I lock unto me this stave and entrust [myself] in God's protection; Against the stab of the pains, against the blow of the pains, Against the terror of the grim ones, Against the great horror that is hateful to everyone, And against all loath [things] that fare in upon the land. I sing a victory chant, I bear a victory-stave... May the mare [night-mare] not mar me... Or ever be fearful against my life...</p>
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(Mid-11C, Corpus Christi College MS 41, 350-53, trans. Hill 2012: 148)

The charm delineates a dream-cultural view of nightmares wherein internal affect (terror, horror) and external effect (stabs, blows) are tangled together, linked to inchoate creatures of the night, abroad in the



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Here, the effect of multiplicity is wound down into a singular enemy, which is then extinguished.

The church worked hard to replace pagan supernatural entities with an *interpretatio christiana* which recuperated all such agencies as rebel angels.<sup>25</sup> Thus, for example, the late 13C *Southern English Legendary* – in a section on the Archangel Michael (lines 223–60) – explains that dreams are brought by the spirits of angels which stayed neutral in the battle between God and Lucifer:

<p>223 Boþe þe luþer &amp; þe gode ali 3 teþ ofte adoun</p> <p>224 And to men in slepe comþ and in auision</p> <p>225 And sseweþ hom in metinge moni a wonder dede</p> <p>226 Ac þe gode of gode þinge &amp; þe luþer euere of quede</p> <p>227 And derieþ ofte men in slep &amp; bodieþ sorwe &amp; care</p> <p>228 And ofte hi of liggeþ men þat me clupeþ þe mare...</p> <p>231 Mest hi greueþ selimen wanne hi liggeþ upri 3 t</p> <p>232 Op hom hi liggeþ heuie inou nere hi nere so li 3 t...</p> <p>233 Hi of liggeþ as an heui stok as hi wolde a man astoffe</p> <p>234 Þat he ne ssel wawy fot ne hond ne vnneþe enes poffe</p> <p>235 Dai þat such luþer chamberlein þat awakeþ men so sore</p>	<p>223 Both the bad and the good [spirits] often alight down</p> <p>224 And come to men in sleep and in a vision</p> <p>225 And show them in dreams many a wondrous deed [thing]</p> <p>226 But the good [spirits show men visions] of good things and the bad ever of bad [things]</p> <p>227 And [they] often harm men in sleep and announce sorrow and care</p> <p>228 And often they lie upon men, which men call the [night]mare...</p> <p>231 Usually they oppress goodmen as they lie down [asleep]</p> <p>232 they lie on them heavy enough whether they [the spirits] were ever so light</p> <p>233 They lie on men like a heavy [tree] trunk as if they wanted that a man suffocate</p> <p>234 So that he shall not move hand or foot nor scarcely draw a breath</p> <p>235 Curst be such an evil chamberlain that waketh men so painfully</p>
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(Hall 2004: 141; D'Evelyn and Mill 1956–59: II, 409-10)<sup>26</sup>

The text moves from the idea of demons bringing all good and bad dreams, to bad demons causing suffocating, pressing nightmares (*maren*), to the same demons impregnating women and seducing men:

<p>239 Þe ssrewen wolleþ ek oþerwile mankunne to bitraie  240 Ali 3 te adoun in monnes forme bini 3 te &amp; bidaie  241 And liggeþ ofte bi wymmen as hi were of fleiss &amp; blode...</p> <p>243 And ofte in forme of womman aday and eke ni 3 t  244 Hi leteþ men hom ligge bi and bitraieþ hom outri 3 t  245 For hi weteþ wuch beoþ men þat to folie habbeþ wille  246 Al one in som deorne stude hi stondeþ þanne wel stille  247 And mani fol hom liþ so by in wode and eke in mede  248 Ac þer nis non þat so deþ þat ne acoreþ þe dede</p> <p>253 And ofte in forme of womman in moni deorne weie  254 Me sicþ of hom gret companie boþe hoppe &amp; pleie  255 Þat eleuene beoþ icluped...  256 And bi daie muche in wode beoþ &amp; bini 3 te upe heie doune  257 Þat beoþ of þe wrecche gostes þat of heuene were inome...</p>	<p>239 The evil creatures desire also at other times to betray mankind,  240 alight down in human form by night and by day,  241 and lie often with women as though they were of flesh and blood...</p> <p>243 And often in woman's form, in the day and also night  244 they let men lie with them and betray them outright:  245 for they know which are the men who have desire of folly:  246 Alone in some hidden place they stand then very quiet/still,  247 and many a fool lies with them thus, in the wood and in the meadow.  248 But there is none who does so that does not suffer from the deed...</p> <p>253 And often in the form of woman on many a hidden path  254 men see a great company of them both dance and play,  255 that are called <i>eluene</i> ...  256 And by day they are often in the wood, and by night upon high hills;  257 [They] are from among the wretched spirits who/which were taken out of heaven...</p>
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(Hall 2004: 141; D'Evelyn and Mill 1956–59: II, 409-10)

So a close linkage was felt to exist (at least among priests) among nightmare, forbidden desire and sexual dreams. Notably, the bad spirits are said to actually sense which men desire to lie with them (a point to which we will return). Illness and death comes from such congresses, which happen in wild “hidden” places.<sup>27</sup> After listing three kinds of malign One-Two encounters, the section ends with the spirits in multiple form: *en masse* they constitute the “great company” of elves (cf. Hall 2004: 141 n. 184), “hidden” in woods and hills, who “dance and play” in woman-form (cf. the Trooping Fairies motif, ATU F241.1.0.1).

Against a multiple entity, multiple protectors could be listed; sheer iteration (cf. Rudan-Tomasic, this volume) of personnel is characteristic of many written ancient and medieval charms.<sup>28</sup> The legendary Seven Sleepers of Ephesus<sup>29</sup> comprise a protective entity which is already multiple. Muslims and Christians alike inscribed amulets with the names of the sleepers (cf. MacDonald 2009). In the Anglo-Saxon charm *Against a dwarf* (*Wið dweorh*), one starts the proceedings by writing on separate wafers the magical names of the Sleepers:

<p>Wið dweorh man sceal niman VII lytle oflœtan, swylce man mid ofrað, and writtan þas naman on œlcra oflœtan: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion.</p>	<p>Against a dwarf one must take seven small holy wafers, such as one makes holy communion with, and write these names on each wafer: <i>Maximian</i>, <i>Malchus</i>, <i>John</i>, <i>Martimian</i>, <i>Dionysius</i>, <i>Constantine</i>, <i>Serafion</i> [i.e. the names of the sleepers]</p>
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(BL MS. Harley 585, c. 1000 CE; Griffiths 1996: 188)

The charm must then be sung in each ear and over the patient's head, and a packet (of the wafers?) hung around a maiden's neck for three days.

The mysterious *dweorh* emerges in this scenario from the general context of European folklore and dream-culture, wherein nightmare creatures – like the northern *mara* or the eastern *trute* – could also be identified as minor spirits: goblins, elves, fairies, kelpies, etc. The condition the *dweorh* causes is a kind of compelled soul travel, described in the main charm text that follows:

Her com in gangan, in spiderwiht,  
hæfde him his haman on handa, cwæð þæt þu his hæncgest wære,  
legde þe his teage an sweoran. Ongunnan him of þæm lande liþan;  
sona swa hy of þæm lande coman, þa ongunnan him þa liþu colian.  
þa com in gangan dweores sweostar;  
þa geændade heo and aðas swor  
ðæt næfre þis ðæm adlegan derian ne moste,  
ne þæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte,  
oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cuþe. Amen. Fiað.

Here came walking in, in here, a spider-creature [?] –  
he had his coat in his hand, said that you were his horse,  
laid his reins on your neck. They began to travel away from the land;  
once they came from the land, then the limbs began to feel cold.  
Then came walking in the dwarf's sister;  
she made an end to it and swore oaths  
That this [riding] would never be permitted to harm the sick one,  
or one who could obtain this charm, or know how to chant this charm. Amen. Let it be so.  
(Glosecki 1952: 186–187; Grattan and Singer 1952: 160–162; Dobbie 1942: 121–122).

In my previous discussion of this imagery, I related it to traditions of night riding or soul travel (Milne 2017: 102-3). Here, the relevant aspect is how it manages number. Whatever the identities of its key supernatural figures may be, the ordering of their action is clear. First, come the seven sleepers (multiple and magical), ritually invoked, and three humans: the charmer, the patient and a maiden (multiple and mundane). The *dweorh* (or *spiderwiht*?) is the primary dream-antagonist, riding the soul of the patient (One-Two). Into this scenario, the historiola of the charm brings a third figure, the enigmatic *dweores sweostar* (dwarf's sister?). Whatever her provenance, she intervenes as a supernatural protector, blocking the malignant action of the *dweorh*. Finally, multiplicity is enfolded into the ending, as the charm ends by evoking a belief-community of

future users.

Apart from the unusual motif of skin-riding, the text follows a recognisable apotropeic pattern of numerosity: the therapeutic effect is achieved by “breaking in” to the One-Two scenario, introducing an opposing supernatural guardian. For good measure, the action is bracketed by multiples: an honour guard of the Seven Sleepers, and a believing audience of future healers and beneficiaries.

The One-Two-Three structure is also followed, more surprisingly, in an account by Guibert (1064?-c. 1125), Abbot of Nogent-sous-Coucy, of a nightmare experienced by his mother:

When it was midnight (since it is the habit of the Devil to invade souls weakened with grief), as she lay in her bed full of deep anxiety, suddenly, while she lay awake, the Enemy himself lay upon her and the burden of his weight almost crushed the life out of her. As she choked in the agony of her spirit and lost all use of her limbs, she was unable to make a single sound: completely silenced but with her reason free, she awaited aid from God alone.

Note that, though she cannot move or speak, she is aware of what is happening. Then comes a strange intervention:

Then suddenly from the head of her bed a spirit, without doubt a good one, began to cry out in loud and kindly tones, "Holy Mary, help her." The spirit spoke out in this fashion for a bit. She fully understood what he was saying and was aware that he was thoroughly outraged. [Then] he sallied forth burning with anger. Thereupon he who lay upon her rose up, and the other met and seized him and by the strength of God overthrew him with a great crash, so that the room shook heavily with the shock of it, and the maidservants, who were fast asleep, were rudely awakened. When the Enemy had thus been driven out by divine power, the good spirit who had called upon Mary and routed the Devil turned to her whom he had rescued and said, "See that you be a good woman." (Guibert de Nogent, Book 1.13, composite trans.)<sup>30</sup>

Guibert is aware that a “good spirit” is a theological difficulty, which may be part of the reason he has the benevolent spirit pray to Mary. But the interest here is that the dream-narrative thus has a prayer embedded in it, and that the pivot and conduit for occult protection is the third dream avatar. Mary, implied as the ultimate source of the help, remains off-stage. Especially interesting are the references to the dynamics of desire among the three personae. Malevolence on the part of the attacker is clear: this is the Enemy himself, not just any incubus. The human victim is physically in agony, but characterised as mentally free, and open to divine aid. In other words, she anticipates, *in media res* of the dream-scenario, the enactment of the apposite cultural script. The good spirit manifests first as a “kindly” disembodied voice above and behind her head, as it prays to Mary (recall the secret utterances of the *dweores sweostar*). During this repeated prayer, two things are said to happen: first, the woman “fully understands” the good spirit’s intent; two, the good spirit itself fills with outrage and anger. This effectively maps a focus of energy and desire in the guardian,

building up, until the latter reaches a kind of tipping point and surges forward, suddenly embodied. This is the point which breaks the attack: the devil releases the woman, and turns to fight. So now all the desire is focussed in the two occult agents. The spirits clash; the good one overthrows the Enemy with a mighty bang. The maidservants then rush in as witnesses, woken by commotion.

#### Violent Emotion in Nightmares, Spells and Curses

The business of switching desire – controlling, deflecting, or relocating dangerous occult energy on to a third party – is, of course, the *raison d'être* of many charms and all curses. In the ego-shattering dream, desire can switch, as in were, in midflow from one extreme to another. We might speculate that this is because there is really only one source of desire in the dream. Despite the impression of profound alterity concerning the dream-creature, it remains an avatar animated by the dreamer's own desire; that is, its umbilical connection to the ego is disguised, the negatively polarised desire embodied in the avatar is absolutely alienated; yet still all the affect in the dream emanates from the same source. This fluidity of affect is central to the ways in which cultural scripts can work to intervene in the nightmare.

So far we have seen examples of affect turning from negative to positive in the serial dreams of the Righteous Sufferer, and a dynamic movement of energy through the personae of Guibert's mother's nightmare. In the summer of 1898, the Irish writer J. M. Synge (1871-1909) had an ego-shattering dream that started ecstatically and ended in terror. Here is his account:

Some dreams I have had in this cottage seem to give strength to the opinion that there is a psychic memory attached to certain neighbourhoods. Last night, after walking in a dream among buildings with strangely intense light on them, I heard a faint rhythm of music beginning far away on some stringed instrument.

It came closer to me, gradually increasing in quickness and volume with an irresistibly definite progression. When it was quite near the sound began to move in my nerves and blood, and to urge me to dance with them.

I knew that if I yielded I would be carried away to some moment of terrible agony, so I struggled to remain quiet, holding my knees together with my hands.

The music increased continually, sounding like the strings of harps, tuned to a forgotten scale, and having a resonance as searching as the strings of the cello.

Then the luring excitement became more powerful than my will, and my limbs moved in spite of me. In a moment I was swept away in a whirlwind of notes. My breath and my thoughts and every impulse of my body, became a form of the dance, till I could not distinguish between the instruments and the rhythm and my own person or consciousness.

For a while it seemed an excitement that was filled with joy, then it grew into an ecstasy where all existence was lost in a vortex of movement. I could not think there had ever been a life beyond the whirling of the dance.

Then with a shock the ecstasy turned to an agony and rage. I struggled to free myself, but seemed only to increase the passion of the steps I moved to. When I shrieked I could only echo the notes of the rhythm.

At last with a moment of uncontrollable frenzy I broke back to consciousness and awoke. I dragged myself trembling to the window of the cottage and looked out. The moon was glittering across the bay, and there was no sound anywhere on the island.  
(Synge 1992 [1907]: 54-55)

The context of this dream corresponds in key ways with traditional emic world-views connecting dream, illness and the otherworld. Synge was staying in the Arran Islands, off the West coast of Ireland.

Convalescing after a serious illness the previous year – the disease that was soon to kill him – he was indeed, so to speak, in the shadow of death. He spent weeks among the islanders, talking with them, intentionally immersing himself in their tales and culture. In a sense, he wanted to join their dream-culture, which he saw as a stronger, purer version of traditional Irish dream-culture; more precisely, perhaps, he reshaped his own birth dream-culture (Protestant, Anglo-Irish upper-class) through contact with theirs.<sup>31</sup> Context, “set and setting,” thus inform his nightmare, which sounds very much like a close encounter with the *sidhe* (or *si*), the fairy host (cf. e.g. Wilde c. 1887; Thompson 2005). And there were equivalents for this host in “Anglo-Saxon” dream-culture, some of whom we have encountered: recall those whom the *Legendary* called *elune* (elves), the “great company” who “hoppe & pleie” (dance and play) in wild places, and who can sense desire in men.<sup>32</sup>

In Synge’s dream, he is swept up with the host in huge excitement, at first intensely pleasurable, then changing “with a shock” to “agony and rage.” Note again the rhetoric of commotion. For Synge, the emotional climax expresses as dance and music; elsewhere, as we have seen, imagery of fighting, wild animals, noise and frenzied movement could be used to signify the same kind of escalating affect.

The 11C Sigtuna amulet (fig. 10) banishes an ogre of wound-fever – a personified sickness – in these terms:



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 he  
 fought  
 the  
 fever  
 and  
 fucked  
 the  
 sorcerer.  
 Wounded . . .  
 has  
 taken  
 full.  
 Fly  
 away,  
 fever!

(MacLeod and Mees 120)

This scenario exists in reverse: a sorcerer may send a nightmare to attack a distant victim. The *Ynglinga saga* (13C, drawing on a 9C source), relates the story of King Vanlandi of Norway and a Sami princess, Driva, whom he marries, then abandons. Driva employs the witch Huld, first to compel the King's return, then to send a night-demon (*mara*) to kill him:

Once [the King] took up his winter abode in Finland with Snae the Old, and got his daughter Driva in marriage; in spring he set out leaving Driva behind, and although he had promised to return within three years he did not come back for ten. Then Driva... bribed the witch-wife Huld, either that she should bewitch Vanlande to return to Finland, or kill him. When this witch-work was going on Vanlande was at Upsal, and a great desire came over him to go to Finland; but his friends and counsellors advised him against it, and said the witchcraft of the Finn people showed itself in this desire of his to go there. He then became very drowsy, and laid down to sleep; when he had slept but a little while he cried out, saying that the Mara was treading upon him. His men hastened to help him; but when they took hold of his head she trod on his legs, and when they laid hold of his legs she pressed upon his head; and it was his death.

(Snorri Sturlson, *Ynglinga saga* 16, *Heimskringla*, trans. Laing 1844; cf. Finnur Jónsson 1912: I, 7; Morris 1991: 85; Lindow 1995: 10).

The desire that comes over Vanlandi to rejoin Driva is the standard aim of a love charm or sex spell; but it doesn't work, his friends restrain him. The witch then redirects that energy into the violence motivating the *mara*.

In the famous curse of *Skírnismál* (13C), Gerðr is threatened with multiple ills:

26. Tamsvendi ek þik drep / en ek þik temja mun / mær, at mínum munum / þar skaltu ganga / er þik gumna synir / síðan æva séi.	26 With taming stick I touch you / for I will make you tame / girl, to my wishes. / There you shall go where sons of men / never see you again
28. At undrsjónum þú verðir / er þú út kemr / á þik Hrímnir hari / á þik hotvetna stari...	28 A monstrous sight may you be / when you move out of doors / let Hrímnir speechless stare at you! let every creature glare at you!...
29. Tópi ok ópi / tjösull ok ópoli – / vaxi þér tár með trega / sezk þú niðr / en ek mun segja þér / sváran súsbreka / ok tvennan trega:	29 Idiocy and howling / plaguing pang and unbearable need / may your tears grow with grief / Sit down / and I shall describe to you / a heavy sea of sorrow / and a double grief.
30. Tramar gneypa / þik skolo gerstan dag...	30 Evil sprites will bow your neck / through the bitter day...
31. Með þursi þríhöfðuðum / þú skalt æ nara / eð[a] verlaus vera; / þik geð grípi / þik morn morni; / ver þú sem þistil[l] / sá er var þrunginn / í önn ofanverða.	31 With a three-headed ogre / you must for ever eke out your life / or have no husband / May passion seize you / pining consume you! / Be like the thistle / that was crushed / at the end of the reaping!
33. Reiðr er þér Óðinn / reiðr er þér Ásabragr / þik skal Freyr fíask / in firinilla mær / en þú fengit hefr / gambanreiði goða.	33 Enraged with you is Odinn / enraged with you is Æsir's Prince / Freyr shall turn his hate on you / -most vicious girl!- / for you have gained / the gods' powerful wrath!
34. Heyri jötnar / heyri hrímþursar / synir Suttungs / sjalffir áslíðar / hvé ek fyrbýð / hvé ek fyrirbanna / manna glaum mani / manna nyt mani.	34 Let the giants hear / let the frost ogres hear / the sons of the Suttungar / the Æsir hosts themselves – / how I forbid / how I deny / the joyous noise of men to this maid / the joyous fruit of men to this maid!
35. Hrímgrímnir heitir þurs / er þik hafa skal / fyr nágrindr neðan...	35 Hrimgrímnir the ogre is called / who will have you / down below the corpse pens...
36. Þurs ríst ek þér ok þrjá stafi, / ergi ok æði ok óþola...	36 'Ogre' I carve for you / and three characters: / 'Lust' and 'Burning' / and 'Unbearable Need'...

(composite trans. Dronke 1997: 382-4; Harris 2013 [1975]: 86-7)

This text has, of course, a multitude of meanings;<sup>34</sup> for us, the relevant points are how it mobilises the constellation of nightmare elements – sex with a hybrid monster, overwhelming affect – orchestrating these in terms of numerosity and polar extremes of desire. Mental and physical commotion are stressed throughout. Desire, both as excess (passion, lust) and as deficit (need, grief), is wished on the victim; the rage of the gods is implied as its source; she is never to know the “joyous noise” of men (i.e. sexual joy). A supporting cast of human and supernatural multiples are brought on to augment these effects: “the sons of men” to never see her (or sleep with her), “every creature” to glare at her, “evil sprites” to bend her neck, etc.

And, the audience for the curse is also a set of multiples: hosts of gods and giants are named to hear and bear witness. The whole is delivered at the point of a stick (the taming wand); and, in a brilliant metaphor, spikiness is inverted in the case of Gerðr herself, made fragile and vulnerable as a dry thistle.

There are parallels, then, between the dream-culture of the archaic nightmare – nocturnal attacks by demons – and spells designed to overwhelm a victim with sexual desire or pain, by means of demonic attack. The magical papyri are filled with such spells (whose resemblance to Skírnir's curse has long been noted; cf. Dronke 1997: 398-9). In the Formulary, “Wondrous eros-binding spell” (Betz 1992: II, 336–356), the user invokes chthonic powers and ghosts to raise “the daimon of a dead person,” who will then visit on his behalf:

every place and every street and every house [to] lead and bind [the woman] whose magical material you have [i.e. presumably her hair, clothing etc] in order to love [me]... [she must] not have sexual intercourse... nor do anything with another man for pleasure except with me alone (NAME), so that she (NAME) may not be able to drink or eat, that she may not be content... not have peace of mind, that she (NAME), may not find sleep without me (NAME).  
(Patchoumi 2013: 304-5)

Such spells routinely promise to take away “sweet sleep” from the victim (cf. Betz 1992: 9; Milne 2017: 98).

Modern Roumanian love charms go further in this direction. The charmer works on behalf of her client, to bring the “fated one” – the client's love object – to her.

she asks the moon or the belt to transform themselves into a dragon snake, or into a rooster *with a beak of iron*, [to] go after her fated one *in this village... in the second village... in the ninth village... beyond nine seas... beyond nine iron groves* and steer him toward her; she asks “her” star to go out in the world/over the world while she sleeps and bring her her fateman: *through woods, through thickets / ...through fields with no roads / over rivers with no bridges / over fences with no stiles...*  
She asks Sir Fire... to turn himself into an agon-dragon *with scales of gold... with the muzzle of a she-cuckoo* or into a *fairy she-snake*, find her fateman and give him no rest until he comes to her; she throws a kerchief down the chimney asking it to turn into a rooster: *with forty-four wings / with forty-four claws / with forty-four beaks / with forty-four tails* [and to] peck him with its beak, smite him with its wings, scratch him with its claws and drive him to her... (Golopentia 2004: 168)

Notice the emphasis on impossible distance, the visual elements of the nightmare demon in terms of beak and claws, made more powerful by multiplication, and the sense that the client's desire (“her star”) is fuelling the trajectory of the monster while she sleeps.

The reference to sleep as the place where this kind of magic can happen may be a standard formula, as in the medieval fever charms cited earlier: “not by day nor by night, neither awake nor asleep, nor in any place” (*nec in die nec in nocte, nec uigilandi nec dormienti, nec in ullis locis*; cf. Simek 2011: 31; Franz 1909: II. 483). In charms, spells and curses not otherwise concerned with dreams, this rote usage itself testifies to

widespread belief in attacks during sleep and by night.

In Romano-British curses,<sup>35</sup> from the Temple of Mercury at Uley (south-west England), the wording is: *...nec eis sanit[atem nec] somnum perm[itt]as nisi ...* (Uley 43); *...ne meiat, ne cacet, ne loquatur, ne dormiat, n[e] vigilet nec s[al]utem, nec sanitatem nessi...* (Uley 4).<sup>36</sup> *Defixiones* (curse tablets) of this kind, throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Empire, were typically deposited at “standard transition-points between worlds, such as tombs, rivers, fountains and wells, bath-houses, and rubbish-dumps; and at key points in the vicinity of the intended target, such as the threshold of the house...” (Gordon 2013: 266; cf. Mees and Nicholas 2012; Mees 2009). As Gordon comments,

Where death is the aim [of the curse], we can say that the desire to re-assert parity through physical suffering has tipped over into a desire for the ultimate reversal of the initial asymmetry, the point at which the principal triumphs utterly over his or her opponent. More often, however, especially in thief texts, the physical suffering is not an end in itself but is understood [as] producing insight or recognition on the part of the target – the physical suffering is to be accompanied by mental suffering.

... the principal [i.e. the author of the curse] either pairs physical and mental suffering or picks out the latter for special attention.

(Gordon 2013: 271-2)

The constellation of negative desire, mental suffering (*per mentem, per memorium*), the common formulae about sleep and bodily penetration – especially of the “obscure but vital parts” (*intestum*=digestive organs; *medullae*=vital parts; cf. Gordon 2012; 2013: 272) – presents clear parallels between the rhetorics of curses and nightmares.

Some curses, like the Roumanian love charms, evoke more specifically the characteristic imagery of dream-demons. A Roman example from Este, Italy, sets the three- and two-headed hounds of Hades – multiple, hybrid, uncanny predators – “to rip the senses and ability to think out of the target” (*...tibi trado ut tu il[l]u(m) mit[t]as et deprem[as], tradito tuis canibus tricipiti et bicipitibus ut ere[repi(n)t] capita, cogita[tiones?], cor... ; AE 1915: 101,<sup>37</sup> in Gordon 2013: 272).*

A spell recorded during the witchcraft trial of Ragnhildr tregagás, in Bergen, Norway in 1324, sent the “magical minions” of an evil valkyrie, Gondul, to “bite” and stir passion against the victim:

I send out from me the spirits of (the valkyrie) Gondul.

May the first bite you in the back.

May the second bite you in the breast.

May the third turn hate and envy upon you.

[The caster should then spit on the person to be cursed]

(Mees 2009: 128-9; Macleod and Mees 37)<sup>38</sup>

Ragnhildr's target was her ex-lover, and her intent was to destroy his marriage to someone else. In this case, the performed context of the spell is known from the trial. On the wedding night, Ragnhildr hid herself in the bedchamber to speak the incantation, having concealed bread and peas in the bridal bed, and a sword at the head of the bed (Mitchell 2011: 56-7, 169-71). The day after, she revealed what she had done, publically mocked the groom, and declared to the bride:

“My mind rejoices that, since [they are] bewitched, [his] genitals will be no more use for intercourse than this belt rolled up in my hand”  
(Mitchell 2011: 57, 232 n. 104)

So the elements of the nightmare mythos are present – biting demon(s), excess (hate, envy) and deficit (impotence) of affect (for the victim) – distributed through the constellation of spell, mythological imagery and performance. The sword is here used to attract rather than repel demons – knives and other sharp objects were a standard defence against the *mara* or *trute* (cf. Milne 2017) – more directly, it threatens castration as well as penetration. This bending of energies evokes the tale of Vandlandi and the *mara*. The demonic visitors in each case act as avatars for the thwarted desire of their principals. The nightmare mythos works in such instances like a set of railway points, a mechanism engaged to channel and redirect strong affect from positive to negative.

## Conclusion

Focussing on patterns of numerosity enables us, perhaps, to see somewhat more clearly some of the rhetorical mechanisms through which charms draw on the mythos of the nightmare; the latter understood as an elastic constellation (cf. Milne 2016) of elements in dream-culture, which can be arranged and rearranged for various therapeutic, cathartic, exorcistic or antagonistic purposes. The scenario of the nightmare, or affect-laden dream, lends itself to this kind of reframing or recuperation, for two main reasons. First, because of the paradox intrinsic to its existence: the nightmare avatar is both absolutely Other, and at the same time, umbilically connected – in a genuinely occult (i.e. hidden) sense – to the dreamer through his/her emotions. People appear to have always apprehended the potential for switching the polarity of desire in the affect-laden dream, from positive to negative and vice versa. Second, because the dream-text is retroactively constructed in the field of representation, it can be strongly (re)shaped through redaction; that is, it is amenable to transformation through cultural scripts. Threat is dealt with by splitting and/or multiplying

avatars in the dream scenario.

Finally, the materials presented here support Frye's insight, that the charm as a genre is indeed intimately woven into the "mythological universe of mysterious names and beings," to which the denizens of nightmare belong. It is clear also that there is an aesthetic dimension to the ways in which people have adapted, deconstructed and repurposed the basic constellation of the nightmare mythos: the invading hybrid, with its sharp extremities, bent on penetration, generates its own counter-imagery at every turn, and is readily harnessed by magical practitioners. Frye speaks of the "separate world" of the charm – from whence comes the nightmare – "reached through imagination... belief or acceptance of traditional authority." Perhaps we can turn this around, and say that the "mysterious names and beings" which make up the mythic system themselves reside in the rhetorics of charm and nightmare; rhetorics which then retain "traditional authority" precisely because of their inherent potential for variability, "selected for" – found fit for purpose – over so many generations.

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1. This is a companion piece to Milne 2017, which interrogated some of the same material from a somewhat different perspective. For more extended discussion e.g. of methodology and context, see this earlier essay.
  2. Frye 2006: 147 and 136.
  3. By "cultural scripts" I mean something close to R. L. Gordon's "widely-shared cultural representations... appropriated by individuals in particular situations" (Gordon, 2013: 262). As Gordon comments, "Social action in the absence of social scripts is scarcely thinkable. Social scripts, which vary greatly in scope and complexity, are internalised largely through the verbal communication of culturally-specific norms and expectations, and modified and refined through practice and experience. The norms and expectations in turn are derived from larger cultural constructions" (op. cit. 262-3). Cf. Schank and Abelson (1977) 2008.
  4. For general overviews of cultural institutions and traditions that shape dream-experience, see e.g. Tedlock, Shulman and Strousma, Hiller and Coxhead.
  5. For anthropological parallels, see e.g. Tuzin 1975 for an application of the Freudian concept of repressed desire in dreams, and Gordon (2013: 258-82) on the issue of magic and suffering.
  6. The terminology "set and setting" (i.e. mind-set and setting) comes from the cross-disciplinary literature on drug use; there is widespread consensus that the nature of the experience which follows imbibing a psychoactive substance is determined by the person's expectations (i.e. relevant cultural scripts) and the context in which the drug is taken. For literature and history of the term, see e.g. Hartogsohn 2017: 2-12.
  7. Research to date regards human numerosity as made up of two core systems, *subitization* (fast apprehension of small numbers, i.e. more than one, up to three or four ) and *magnitude appreciation* (the ability to apprehend "large but approximate numerical magnitudes"); also important is *ordinality*, "the ability to construct ordered sequences," however, for our purposes, the fact that people grasp number in terms of both small quantities and "many" is the key point; Coolidge and Overmann 2012: 205.
  8. For literature on the Scandinavian *mara* and its analogy legends, see Milne 2017: 98-101.
  9. On the "paranoic" aspect of cultures with strong and detailed witchcraft belief-systems, the classic account is Douglas 1966: ch. 5; for general anthropological models of witchcraft as to do with tensions among neighbours, while sorcery accusations come from afar, see e.g. Stewart and Strathearn 2004: chs. 1, 6, 8.
  10. As here, Akkadian demons fastened themselves to the bodies of their victims, and had to be removed through ritual; but "normally, the pair *lamassu* and *šēdu* occur in texts as two types of benevolent spirits, [as] designations for...personal deities..." (Butler 52).

11. Quite a few of the dream-texts cited here are in some sense fictions; I defend their usage as evidence of dream-culture on two main grounds. First, the function of a dream episode in the context of a longer fictional narrative text is invariably to foreshadow (the characters do not know the meaning of the dream, the audience for a mythological story, saga or folktale already know the outcome); but the interest for the cultural analyst is the imagery and action chosen to do this. Since all dreams are “texts,” fictional dreams can be regarded for our purposes as a dense (i.e. more redacted) type of dream-text. Second, dream-texts, though aesthetically crafted, demonstrably draw on the dream-culture and express the dream-rhetoric of their time and place: a dream episode must be recognisable as oneiric to the audience in that culture. On this question of fictional sources as evidence for cultural beliefs, see e.g. Harris 2013: 290.
12. Though efforts have been made to identify this scene as a mythological episode, possibly depicting Selene and Endymion, there is no consensus on the identification; the claws on the siren appear to rule out Selene, and Endymion should be an ageless youth, with no beard. See e.g. Woodford 64-5, fig. 39.
13. For examples of how cultural scripts can radically alter the interpretation and experience of pain, see e.g. Bynum 1987: 194-218; 246-59, and Scarry 1985: 161-80.
14. Note that other Assyrian and Babylonian demons were also sevenfold; Wiggerman 2000: 226, n. 45. The details which follow here about Lamaštu are drawn from Wiggerman’s detailed survey.
15. Wiggerman has the demon coming from under the bed; however Akkadian *mashdu* > *maldu* means “edge of the bed” or “side” (*Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, v. 10, M 1, 363), and the verb *eteequ* means “to go past, to go through, to cross (over)” (p.c., Vladmir Emilianov, 19<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2016).
16. I am indebted to Dr. Lutz Martin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, and Prof. Dr. Ricardo Eichmann, German Archaeological Institute, Berlin, for tracing this image for me. Wiggerman describes but does not reproduce it, referring us to the photo in Becker (1993, 5, no. 7), which is too dark to distinguish the scene. This amulet was not excavated and so does not come from a secure datable context; it was sold, presumably by a local, to the excavators in the 6<sup>th</sup> season of excavation, 1933-4 (p.c. Eichmann, 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. 2016).
17. According to Bahrani, in Akkadian, a *šalmu* (= image, representation): “rather than being a copy of something in reality... was seen as a real thing. It was not considered to resemble an original reality that was present elsewhere but to contain that reality in itself... ontologically equivalent... existing in the same register of reality... For the Mesopotamians, everything encountered could be read as a sign...” (2003: 127).
18. On Pazuzu heads, Lambert, 1970; Heeßel, 2002. For *gorgoneion* references and an illustration, see e.g. Milne 2017: 82-4, fig. 1.
19. Headrest of Qeniherkhepeshef, 1225 BC, 19th dynasty, Deir el-Medina, Egypt; limestone, British Museum no. EA63783. For illustrations see Milne 2017, fig. 2.
20. Many Egyptian head-rests survive – some intended as tomb furniture – others used for sleeping cf. Szpakowska 2003; Pinch 40-3.
21. Illustrated in Milne 2017: 95.
22. The number seven became effectively canonical for fever demons, Simek (2011: 38) argues: “The reason for a fixed number of seven demons may derive from the biblical statement that Jesus had driven out seven demons from the body of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2: *de qua septem daemonia exierant*). As this statement became proverbially linked with Mary Magdalene in the Middle Ages, seven demons became canonical.” See also Eliferova, this volume.
23. From the 20C on, these weapons are often modernised as knives, spikes etc.
24. Most of the Högstena amulet translation is agreed on ( 130, n. 19); for variant readings of first and last phrases: H. Jungner 1936: 278–304; Krause 1993 (1970): 55.
25. In the context of one such text, the Old Norse *Elucidarius*, Gunnell (2007: 128) speaks of “the medieval church’s deliberate attempt to equate all popular nature spirits with demons or fallen angels, an idea reflected in numerous *exempla*-based folk legends found all over the Nordic area,” going on to quote a late 19C Danish example: “when the Lord expelled the fallen angels from heaven, they fell on the earth and became the troll folk... some fell on roof tops and became *nisse*, some fell in the water and became water sprites...” (n. 79). An identical tradition accounts for the origin of the fairies in Ireland, cf. e.g. Wilde 208-15.
26. I thank Joseph Harris, Harvard University, for his invaluable help with the translation of lines 223-8 (p.c. 4<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2018). For bibliography on the MSS readings and later uses of the *Legendary* materials, in particular the term *eluen*, see Hall 2007: 75 n. 2.
27. Lines 248-52: “Ac þer nis non þat so deþ þat ne acoreþ þe dede / Hore membres toswelleþ somme & somme ofscapeþ vnneþe / And somme fordwineþ al awei forte hi be[o] ibro 3 t to deþe / More wonder it is iwis hou eni ofscapeþe of liue / For an attri þing it is to lemman oþer to wiue” (“there is none who does so /

that does not suffer from the deed: / their penises swell-up ?somewhat / and some [?men] survive with difficulty / and some dwindle completely away / whereby they are brought to death. / A greater wonder it is, for sure, how any escapes alive / for a poisonous thing it is / to a [male] lover or a woman.” trans. Hall 2004: 141).

28. Cf. Skemer 2006: 107–15. Simek 2011 (op. cit., 39) cites, as an extreme instance of the tendency to iteration, the 12C charm in Codex Vaticanus Latinus 510, f. 168r., likely to have emanated from the Abbey of Clairefontaine in Picardy, which invokes against the fevers an extraordinarily long list of sacred and biblical figures, including ranks of clergy, planets, rivers of paradise, and all the names of God: “Coniuro vos febres per deum patrem omnipotentem et per omnia [nomina] sua. Eloy, Evangelista, Sabaoth, Ely, Adonay, Tetragramaton, Immutabilis, Etemus, Christus, Messias, Soter, Emmanuel, Dominus, Unigenitus, Alpha et 0, principium et finis, [ver]bu[m],56 Stella I fulgens, Lux, Sol, Oriens, Pons, Mercator, Letitia, Sponsus, Zelos, Phebos, Karos, Pons, Agazas, On, Bonus, Incorporous, Perfectus, Creator, Fixus, Homo husyon, Veritas, Vita, Ymago, Forma, Agitus, Immaculatus, Altissimus, Admirabilis, Figura, Virtus, Sapientia, Pax, Pacientia, Humilitas, Splendor, Agyos, Kyrr[i]os, per omnia nomia sua adiuro vos febres, et non habeatis potestam super hunc famulum dei .N.”

29. For the wider background to this legend and its dissemination in Britain, see e.g. Magennis 1991: 43-56.

30. Composite translation: “Cumque ejusdem noctis fieret intempestum, et illa atroci anxietate plenissima proprium cubile foveret, sicut Diabolo consuetudinarium est, ut potissimum animis tristitia maceratis immergat, subito vigilanti illi ipse Inimicus incubuit, et gravissimo pene usque ad extinctionem pondere jacentem oppressit. Cum sub hac ejus spiritus suffocaretur angustia, et omnium membrorum ex toto libertate careret, vocis autem cujuspian sonitum nullatenus emittere posset, solumque Dei, muta penitus, sed ratione libera, praestolaretur auxilium, ecce a lectuli ejus capite quidam spiritus, haud dubium quin bonus, sic inclamare non minus affectuosa quam aperta voce coepit: ‘Sancta Maria, adjuva!’ Et cum aliquandiu sic dixisset, et quod dicebatur plene illa intelligeret, sentiente illa quoe tantopere vexabatur, cum grandi animadversione erumpit ; quo erumpente, ille qui incumbibat assurgit, quem ille obvius apprehendit, et utpote ex Deo violentus cum tanto fragore subvertit, ut; impulsu graviter cameram quatiente, asseculas sopore depressas insolenter nimis exciret. Illo igitur sic divinis virtutibus exturbato, pius ipse spiritus qui Mariam clamaverat et daemonem pepulerat, conversus ad eam quam eruerat: ‘Vide, inquit, ut sis bona femina’,” Guibert de Nogent, *De vita sua sive monodiarum suarum libri tres*, 1. 13; 1907: 43-4. For varying translations of the first clause, Guibert 1984: 69-70; 2011: 36-7. For medieval clergy, the Venerable Bede, in his widely used *De temporum ratione*, defines the hours of the day, and *intempestum* is the name of one of the seven divisions of the night; so here, Guibert refers to the middle of the night, or midnight. I am indebted to Steve Farmer (pc., 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2018), for kindly unravelling this issue, and for this reference to the authority of Bede.

31. On the great interest of Irish nationalist writers at this period in Irish folklore, especially in fairy beliefs, see e.g. Thompson 2005: 193-202. Arguably, this focus itself constituted an intervention to reshape Irish dream-culture *per se*, resulting in a willed intensification of associated dream imagery, at least among the tight-knit literary community participating in this effort.

32. See above, lines 253-6; Hall 2004: 141; D’Evelyn and Mill 1956–59: II, 409-10. Another parallel for this host is the Wild Hunt, with a complex mythos also connected to dreams, which I hope to explore in a future study (for a recent summary on the Hunt, see Hutton 2014).

33. The charm is written backwards, to increase its magical impact. On the *n-rune*, see Mitchell 2008.

34. See Mitchell (2007: 90-4) for literature on *Skírnismál*; Harris (2013: 90) for the thistle stanza especially.

35. For details of 27 British curse tablets found in south-west England, see biblio. in Milne 2017: 97-8 and n. 14.

36. See Tomlin 1993 for background on the Uley site in Gloucestershire; also Oxford University:

<http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/sites/uley-home.shtml>

37. *AE = L’Année épigraphique*; <https://www.cairn.info/revue-annee-epigraphique.htm>

38. Quoted in Mitchell 2011: 170: *Ritt ek i fra mer gondold ondu. æin þer i bak biti annar i briost þer biti þridi snui uppa þik hæimt oc ofund.*

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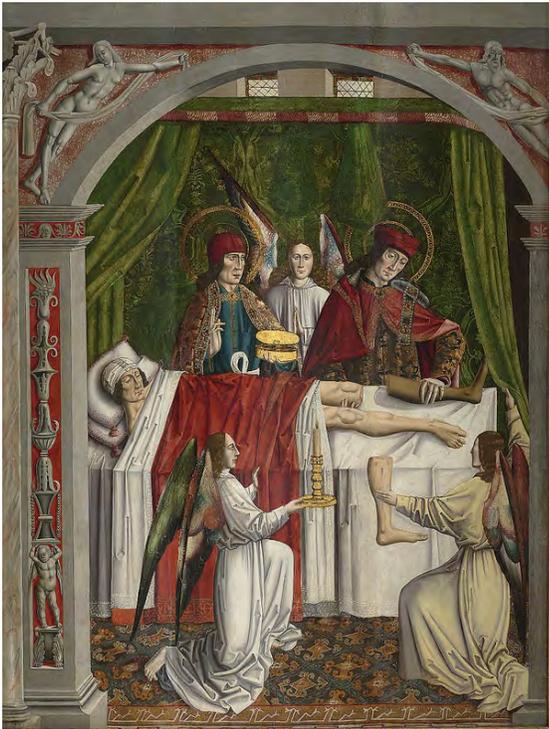


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