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Spring 3-15-1988

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### Recommended Citation

Westbrook, Dee Anne (1988) "The Souls of Animals: Evolution of the Combative Ideal," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 14: No. 3, Article 2. Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol14/iss3/2>

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### The Souls of Animals: Evolution of the Combative Ideal

#### Abstract

Examines two stages in the life of the Northern European hero—initiation, and “end of his career, when he becomes victim.” Associates this with the mythology of animals and the hunter/warrior.

#### Additional Keywords

Animals—Religious aspects; Beowulf; Hunting mythology in literature; Initiation in literature; The Mabinogion; Northern European mythology; Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

# The Souls of Animals

## Evolution of the Combative Ideal

Dee Anne Westbrook

More monsters have been met on the  
moors of that land  
Than anywhere else I know of since  
earliest times.

(Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, I, 2,  
22-3)

For some of theses,  
It could not be the place  
It is, without blood.  
These hunt, as they have done  
But with claws and teeth grown perfect,  
More deadly than they can believe.

(James Dickey, "The Heaven of Animals")

The ritual and mythology of the great hunt lie behind the worldview of the North, helping to shape its religions, cultural metaphors, and enduring images. Early European manifestations of this belief system are to be found in the paleolithic temple caves of Spain and France (17000-12000 B.C.E.) It is a shamanistic, phallicist (associating phallus with weapons and horns) system which structured, supported, and celebrated the labor, courage, danger, and life's progress of the hunter, the man whose landscape was the great plain and dense forest of the European North, whose opponent, mystical guide, brother, and indeed other self was the animal whose flesh he survived. This hunter inhabited a world in which the first law of survival was, as Joseph Campbell says, "to eat or be eaten" (1983, p. 51), or, put another way, to eat and be eaten.

The pictorial and plastic evidence of ancient hunting cultures reveals a system of ritual and, one supposes, accompanying mythic narratives, in which the central theme was the mysterious and magic hunt in which hunter and hunted were experienced as sharing both a physical and psychological identity. The human figures in such scenes are typically depicted as partially theriomorphic, and the abundant beasts of the hunt swarm about as their willing victims. Campbell explains:

In such a context, the hunter and the hunted beast -- in ritual terms, the priest and his sacrifice -- would have to have been experienced in some psychological dimension as one and the same -- even as the mixed form of the presiding presence of the Sanctuary, the semi-human, semi-animal, dancing Animal Master... suggests." (1983, p. 76)

Here the animal prey is interpreted as "a knowing participant in a covenanted sacred act wherein the mystery of life, which lives on life, is comprehended in its celebration" (76). The shamanistic leader of both ritual and hunt demonstrates such identity through his donning of animal skins, feathers, masks, and horns, a practice reflected in much later rites which included ritual costuming in bear-skins, wolf-skins, boars' tusks and so forth.

It is only by seeing the Celtic and Germanic myths and early literature against such a backdrop that one can begin to understand the worldview of these ancient men of the North and the legacy of metaphors they have bequeathed us, metaphors in which life is viewed as a scheme of naturally ordained combat and fight to the death, where self and other are mystically one, and each participant plays only a temporary role as killer or killed, hero or adversary, human or animal.

With the insights provided by the mythologies of the hunt, we can begin to understand why, among the Indo-European tribes, it is especially in the North -- where hunting as a way of life, together with its associated mythology, survived long after they had been transformed in the South by agriculture and myths of the earth -- that the combative ideal endures long enough to enter history and literature as an organizing metaphor. It is in the North too that the hunter-become-warrior serves as the measure of man. And it is in the North that one finds Odin (Woden), the Indo-European god of wind and furious leader of the wild hunt, evolved into the chief deity of the pantheon, the Allfather, leader of souls, god of warriors, and selector of heroes for his own exclusive paradise, Valhalla, the home of the slain. Within the societies of the North, the privilege held by the hunter-warrior was not relinquished, even after agriculture and domestication of animals rendered hunting, and the use of weapons for hunting or plundering unnecessary.<sup>1</sup> These Northern aristocrats never beat their swords into plowshares, for to have done so would have been unthinkable: The class of hunter-warriors, the ancient elite whose combative ideal served to define the aristocracy, would find too many cultural pressures to maintain their ways, even against Christianity's and the agriculturist's espoused politics of peace.

A grim but logical progression may be traced in the evolution of the paleolithic hunter-nomad (represented most prominently by the shamanistic animal-master as priest and leader of the hunt) to hunter-warrior (whose weapons of the hunt are now turned against human foes), to warrior-hunter, the true child of the ruthless, doomed, divine leader of the wild hunt and god of heroes. As the patterns of the hunter's ritual and myths survive and evolve, they find their way into both literature and history -- there to provide archetypes for heroic life and metaphors for existence.

An illustrative (perhaps apocryphal, but no less telling) episode occurs in *King's Harald's Saga*, Snorri Sturluson's biography of an eleventh-century king of Norway, whose life and career exemplifies the ease with which the ancient mythological ideal of the hunter-warrior is transported into "history." As a three-year-old, the future king and his two brothers were asked by King Olaf, "What would you like to have most of?" The older brothers said that they would like farm land and cattle. Harald, however, replied that he would like to have warriors, "so many that they would

eat all of [his brother's] cattle in one meal." King Olaf's response indicates that he recognizes here the aristocratic ideal when he says to the boy's mother, "That's a king you're bringing up...!" (31). King Harald fulfilled his childhood ambition and led a life of unremitting warfare and plundering -- on the assumption, it appears, that such activities are by their nature kingly. He eventually met his fate in 1066 at Stamford Bridge in England.

*King Harald's Saga* reveals the nature of the king, defined by tradition, and pronounced as history. The kingly nature is given similar expression in the mythological "Lay of Rig," a tale recounted as myth by Snorri Sturluson. There the genesis of the earls (yarl), the aristocratic stratum of Northern society, is shown to have occurred in the birth of the prototypical warrior-hunter. He is the child of the god Rig and a clearly superior human mother. During his childhood Earl displays the attributes of his class. He began to "wield bucklers,"

and the bowstring fasten,  
gan the elmwood bend and arrows shaft;  
gan hurl the spear and speed the lance,  
gan hunt with hounds, and horses ride,  
gan brandish swords and swim in the

sea.

(Hollander, p. 126)

After such training the god Rig teaches him runes, names him king (Rig) and sends him out plundering; he soon seizes eighteen estates and distributes the booty among his men. Of great interest here is the early training of the youth in hunting, and the fact that the future warrior-hero reveals his destined greatness by skill in trapping, tracking, and killing animals; the tests against animal and human opponents are similarly perceived, and for good reason, for the Germanic world was one in which men might have the attributes of animals and animals the minds and motives of men.

The legacy of the hunting mythology among the Celts is similarly strong. Their ancient gods tended to be theriomorphic, horned, ithyphallic deities of the hunt who gradually evolved into war gods. It is surprising to notice that by the time of the Roman occupation, Celtic deities revealed their functions as gods of warriors by the fact that no fewer than sixty-nine were identified through their basic attributes and realms of power with Mars, the Roman god of war (Piggot, p. 46). Other gods had both human and animal aspects and might appear in either form, or both forms simultaneously, or they might display the abilities of animals while in their human forms. Epona, the horse goddess, is a case in point, as is what appears as a dog deity. The identification of human and animal aspects manifests itself as well in the many tales of metamorphosis into animal form and in the tales of transmigration of souls among human, animal, and monstrous composite forms.

Already in the earliest artifacts of the Germanic North is evidence that the animal victim of the hunting mythology is evolving into a being perceived as a monstrous, semi-human opponent, an evolution that parallels that of the hunter into hunter-warrior or, perhaps more accurately, into the warrior-ho-hunts, the hunting serving as preparation for battle in youth or as a means of maintaining skills between battles. Yet even in such artifacts, as in the extant literature, the hero himself is revealed as likewise partially

animalian or semi-human. It is clear that for many centuries -- even into historic times -- the taxonomic barriers of modern science had not yet been erected between species; and both hero and opponent had attributes of beasts; both had, in a sense, the souls of animals.

A most useful source of information about the religions of early peoples of the North in the period of the Great Migrations exists, as Margaret Arant shows, in the pictorial representations on weaponry and armor from archaeological finds in Sweden, south Germany, and England. She argues persuasively that such depictions focus on and illuminate two crucial events in the life of the hero, first his initiation rites as a full-fledged member of the adult male group, and secondly his responsibility and fate. The ritual scenes, in other words, depict the beginning of the hero's career, when he proves himself as hunter or warrior, and on the end of his career, when he becomes victim.

In the discussion that follows, I shall examine the ideas, images, and events that are connected with these two basic rites, exploring the ways in which they inform our reading of myths, literature, and history of Celtic and Germanic antiquity. In the process I shall try to show the extent to which the ancient rituals have become structuring metaphors for the life of the hero and serve to define the crucial confrontations of his career.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Hero as Killer: initiation, metamorphosis, confrontation.

While initiation rites mark the official beginning of the hero's career, his future greatness has sometimes been signaled by early manifestations. Largely from the Celtic tradition, with its greater emphasis on the birth of the hero, we have tales with a recurring motif associating the hero's birth with that of a "helper" animal -- a horse (Ford, pp. 4-12) or dog -- the animal manifestation of the child born to the Fertility Goddess simultaneously in her human and animal aspects. For example, Pryderi, of the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, on the night of his birth to the goddess Rhiannon, suffers a "death" in the slaughter of simultaneously born puppies and a rescue from death with the simultaneously born colt -- the advent of all occurring on May Eve, the beginning of summer. The Irish hero Fin MacCumhail is raised secretly by his grandmother in a hollowed-out oak, together with a talking whelp of the same age as the boy who becomes his helper in battle; the grandmother's training of the boy reveals both her own and the child's horse attributes (she later carries him on her back and outruns for a while the king's horses which pursue them) (Curtin, pp. 135-9). Cuchulainn, of the Irish epic, *The Tain*, has a name which means "hound," a name he received while he was serving in the place of a guard dog he had slaughtered at the age of six (83-4). True to his animal aspect, the future hero grows at a pace more appropriate to the infant animal than to the child.<sup>3</sup>

The Northern hero's identification with the animal helper or victim was, however, probably more frequently made at the time of his initiation rites or his first tests as a warrior. As suggested, archaeological evidence reveals a mythico-religious origin and nature for initiation rituals in which both initiate and opponent appear similar (or nearly identical), sharing animal or "monster" characteristics. This similarity, as Argent argues, suggests that as part of the ritual the



initiate was thought to undergo a transformation, acquiring the strength, fury, and other attributes of his animal opponent. Such a transformation would be induced psychologically and, at least from the archaic point of view, physically through the donning of animal skins, masks, horns, and tails. "It was not just an act of costuming," Arent says, for "the warrior so attired underwent in fact the transformation, felt and acted like a wolf or bear" (137).

We must conclude that such ritual transformations are reflected in the surviving texts in numerous narrative guises -- most obviously in tales of metamorphosis; tales of the transmigration of the hero's soul may be related to ritual initiation and transformation; the habit of ascribing animal characteristics or abilities to the hero surely is.

The remainder of this section concerning the hero's initiation focuses on certain figures whose stories are clearly stories of initiation: Gawain, of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late fourteenth century), whose name in its earlier form "Gwalchmai" meant "hawk of May;" Beowulf (650-750 b.c.e.), whose name is a kenning for "bear," i.e., the "bee wolf;" and the dual heroes of the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy (recorded fourteenth century, but containing older material). In each case, the animal nature of the hero is revealed as the initiation ritual takes narrative form.

Each of the heroes undertakes one or more initiatory journeys. Beowulf actually has two, one during which (he says) he chained five great giants and "chased all of that race from the earth," and in addition swam for five nights and killed nine sea-monsters -- all in full armor. "Afterwards," he says, "sailors could cross that sea-road and feel no fear" (567-8). These initial hunting tests against animals and monsters behind him, the hero is ready to face his other self in the form of Grendel. He says, "Now Grendel and I are called Together, and I've come" (425-6). It is in the confrontation with Grendel that his bear-like qualities manifest themselves, as well as his monstrous aspect, seen in his similarity to the creature. Beowulf prefers to fight like Grendel without weapons, crushing his opponent to death, and possesses a bear-like grip equal to the strength of thirty men. Grendel too fights without weapons, depending on his brute strength to slaughter thirty men at a time. Both represent extremes, and both "have an affinity with the monstrous" (Arent, p. 151). Such facts indicate a process by which the human community ritually creates in the figure of the hero one who so matches or imitates the character of the adversary, that he is capable of defeating it on its own terms.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, Gawain and his adversary, the Green Knight, stand as distorted mirrors of each other, bound together through the bargain struck at the beginning of Gawain's initiation (each has agreed to take from the other an axe stroke to the neck). A member of a youthful, untried band of warriors -- all in a sense initiates -- Gawain (King Arthur's nephew) is one who acts ritually for all in undergoing his tests and trials. Like Beowulf, Gawain dispatches a fair number of terrors on his way to the confrontation with the Green Knight. Among the creatures are dragons, wolves, wood-satyr, bulls, bears, boars, and giants. We notice again what seems to us an ill-sorted conglomeration of beings -- natural and mythical, bestial and human-like -- like those dealt with by the youthful Beowulf, and suggestive again of the

hero's initiatory journey to prove himself ready for full adult status in the community of warrior-hunters. As with Beowulf, too, these monsters and beasts killed on the journey are merely preparatory to the crucial test awaiting him at the hands of the Green Knight, his ritual other.

This test takes the form of two confrontations -- one in the white castle, the home of Bertilak (the human transform of the green giant whom Gawain is pledged to find), and the other at the Green Chapel, when he must face the Green Knight in his most menacing aspect. In both situations the Green Knight serves as initiator, an evolved form of the ancient animal-master, for the young hero.

The first contest takes the form of a hunt -- one played out on a literal level by the Green Knight and on a figurative level within the castle by Gawain. The two "hunts" are metaphorically identified through a pun on the word *venery*, which means both hunting and lustful behavior.

For each of three days the Green Knight demonstrates his nature as lord of the hunt, playing the role of the shamanistic priest and animal master of ancient ritual. On successive days he kills, first, numerous barren female deer, second, a monstrous wild boar, and, third, a fox. Each day's game is present to Gawain, thus making him a surrogate lord of the hunt. At the same time, Bertilak's wife engages in *venery* of the other sort, with Gawain her prey. The kisses she gives to Gawain -- metaphorical wounds to his intact innocence and chastity -- he passes along to Bertilak, thus making his host the surrogate victim.<sup>5</sup> It is an elaborate, ritualized sharing and exchanging of the roles of hunter and hunted in the course of which Gawain undergoes a basic initiation and proves himself adept in the arts of *venery* -- as both master hunter and animal victim. The animals killed thus represent the enabling characteristics of the hunter -- the speed of the deer, the ferocity of the boar, and the guile of the fox; however, in this Christianized poem, the dead animals must also embody the sinful tendencies of the flesh -- feminine weakness, sexuality, and deceit. It seems no coincidence, for example, that Gawain is dressed in fur on the evening when he is presented with the fox. Thus the nature of Gawain's metaphoric transformation has two facets: an ancient assumption of animal attributes, the better to defeat them, and a Christian overlay revealing a broad distrust of the flesh, the animal aspect of humanity typically associated with deceitful, dangerous feminine sexuality. That this latter is the more overt message is revealed by Gawain's long oration on the dangers posed throughout history by the female (19).

After the remarkable double hunt at the white castle, Gawain travels to his last trial, which brings him face to face with Bertilak in his monstrous form as the green giant whose head Gawain has earlier struck off -- a figure with a clearly vegetal aspect, capable of surviving decapitation like a tree. The place where Bertilak will conduct this final ritual is called "the Green Chapel," designating a sacred grove, stream and grave mound, all suggestive of a pagan place of worship and ritual, a site appropriate for the initiation involving a death and rebirth -- death as a child and rebirth as a man. The ritual of circumcision so frequently associated with such rituals is here curiously sublimated -- displaced upward to the wound in the neck.

The ceremonies complete, Gawain is ready to return to the community of warriors as one of them. In the course of his ordeal he has assumed an animal nature, exchanged blows with his ritual "other," and survived all the tests of the hunter-warrior's initiation. The Green Knight's last role makes explicit his sacred, priestly function in Gawain's rite of passage, a function now assimilated to the role of Christian father-confessor.

Thus the Green Knight's roles, although superficially Christianized, are still identifiable as those of the pagan shaman-priest and lord of the hunt. The events and images associated with Gawain's rite must be seen as central elements in a ritual widely known and practiced, for they recur together in altered form in the initiation of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy in the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*. These include Gawain's shifting nature as hunter and animal victim, his curious ritual relationship with Bertilak's wife, and the initiatory, semi-adversarial role of the avuncular Bertilak. Whereas, however, Gawain's tests have been rendered partially figurative, made polysemous by the Christian overlay, the account in the *Mabinogi* is relatively "pure," revealing, it seems, something more of the nature of the ritual ideas partially obscured in the Gawain romance.

The Fourth Branch focuses on the royal family of Math, an aged magician-king, his nephews Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, and Gwydion's nephew, Lleu Llaw Gyffes. It marks a time when inheritance passed to the sister's son, so that within the tale Gwydion is the legitimate heir of Math (a means of succession suggested as well in Gawain's relationship with Arthur and his figurative nephewship to the Green Knight through the fact that Morgan Le Fey is his mother's sister). As Gwydion and Gilfaethwy approach the age of initiation, Gilfaethwy develops a terrible love melancholy for the King's virgin "foot holder," Goewin. Math, we learn, can only live while his "feet were in the lap of a maiden — unless the turmoil of war prevented him" (Ford, p. 91). There are sexual implications here whose exact meaning is uncertain. What does seem clear is that the maiden is a source of energy and vitality for the king, who must draw his life force either from battle or from the foot holder. Gilfaethwy's passion for Goewin is thus from its inception a threat against the king, who depends on the maidenhood of his attendant for his life.

Gwydion and Gilfaethwy hatch an elaborate plot to draw the king into war against a southern cantref so that he will leave Goewin, and so that Gilfaethwy can have access to her. This situation parallels that in Bertilak's white castle, where Gawain has access to the wife of Bertilak while the Lord of the castle is engaged in the turmoil of the hunt. Unlike the chaste and circumspect semi-Christian knight, however, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy have no compunction against violating the king's virgin (later wife), and having drawn the king away from his home to fight, they circle back and rape Goewin.

When the king learns of his nephew's treachery, he punishes them by using his staff of enchantment to put them through a series of three metamorphoses, each of which lasts a year. The series recalls the three days' hunt of Gawain's story, for the two are changed first into a hind and a stag, next into a sow and a wild boar, and finally into a wolf and a wolf bitch. Gilfaethwy's transformations are particularly interesting, for we recall that it was his passion for

Goewin which led to the treachery and rape. His first metamorphoses is a female deer (a hind), his second as a wild boar, and his third as a wolf bitch. The first two of these match both type of animal and gender of Bertilak's first two days' hunts. The third, the wolf, may be seen to correspond to the third of Bertilak's animal victims, the fox, for both fox and wolf were considered treacherous and wily; neither was primarily a food animal; and both were valued for their skins. Because of the sexual assault on Goewin, Math sentences his nephews in their animal forms to procreate, changing gender from year to year so that each must spend time as a female, bearing one or more sons in that form.

The correspondences lead to the conclusion that Gwydion and Gilfaethwy's story is a mythic narrative constructed to account for aspects of a widely known initiation ceremony involving the ritual assumption a series of animal disguises and behaviors, and perhaps a time spent as a symbolic female.

The similar involvements of the initiates with the wife or (in the case of Goewin) the future wife of the older initiator suggest that a sexual rite was part of the ordeal, a rite which posed at least a figurative threat to the existing chief, ruler, or animal master.<sup>6</sup> The merging of hunting and sexual initiations makes explicit the metaphoric identification so common between weapon and penis.

In any case, the Fourth Branch identifies the initiates successively with the common animals of the hunt and thus a symbolic status as animal victims, their ceremonial deaths as one pair of transformations yields to the next, and finally their rebirths as men.

All three tales of youthful heroes associate them with animals: all suggest a ritual in which the future hunter-warrior assumes animal attributes or status (symbolically, through psychic transformation, through acquired physical attributes, or through shape-shifting) and serve to identify the hero with both killer and victim, self and other. There are crucial differences among the tales, to be sure, but these initiatory confrontations establish evocative patterns that are similar and telling.

#### The hero as victim: fate and responsibility.

For the warrior aristocracy of the North, then, youth was a time of training (often in fosterage) in the arts of killing; the transition into manhood brought the hero his arms, his first trial by blood, and his transformation into animalian strength, ferocity, and speed. If his youth was preparation for this moment, the initiation itself ushered in an adult life which, however nasty, brutish, and short it would turn out to be, was valorized by a society which honored its hunter-warriors above all others and cloaked them in glory. For a society which nourished the combative ideal and harbored within itself the animalian hero, life would be perceived as one long combat, and indeed could only be validated in that combat.

As for the initiate, he is typically short-lived, and his fate sealed when he is armed for the first time. For instance, the Irish hero Cúchulainn receives his arms from King Conchobor and in the next moment receives the prophecy of his fate. The Druid Cathbad asks, "Do I see a hero newly armed?" and then, "... Woe to his mother's son." When asked to explain, he responds, "he who arms for the first time today will



achieve fame and greatness. But his life is short." Cuchulainn replies that this is a fair bargain: "If I achieve fame I am content, though I had only one day on earth." A stanza from the *Havamal* echoes Cuchulainn's sentiments: "Cattle die, kinsmen die, I myself shall die, but there is one thing I know never dies: the reputation we leave behind at our death" (Hollander, p. 25).

And so, the life of the initiate is predictable. He will hunt, fight, and die. He will usually die young, and if he survives into maturity, he will die in the grip of some monstrous being who is his own animal nature grown keen, sharp and powerful, and if he is a great hero he will take his adversary, archenemy and other self with him.

Thus the aged Beowulf dies with his dragon; Thor with his world serpent; Odin, chief of hunters and warriors, perishes with his animal adversary who has become at Ragnarok perfectly powerful, its jaws reaching from earth to sky. In the end, "the wolf will seize Alffather between his jaws and swallow him." The man has fed on the animal, and the animal feeds at last on the hero. Wolves and ravens, especially, haunt the mental battle grounds of the Northman. Beowulf's young companion sends a message following his lord's death, "Spears shall be lifted, many cold mornings, lifted and thrown, and warriors shall waken to no harp's bright call but the croak of the dark-black raven, ready to welcome the dead, anxious to tell the eagle how he stuffed his craw with corpses, filled his belly even faster than the wolves." As Beowulf has his Wiglaf to aid in his dragon's death, Odin has help from Vidar, his son. Vidar will tear the wolf apart, but it will be too late: "The nine worlds will burn and the gods will die. The Einherjar will die, men and women and children in Midgard will die, elves and dwarfs will die, giants will die, monsters and creatures of the underworld will die, birds and animals will die. The sun will be dark and there will be no stars in the sky. The earth will sink into the sea" (Crossley-Holland, p. 175).

The heroic pattern thus established itself in the consciousness of the North. As hunter became hero, the old rituals were not left behind, but adapted to the broader fields of endeavor of the warrior. Mythic narrative evolved, the pantheon changed to reflect back the human face, literature was written, and the hero after many centuries emerged into historic times bearing the pattern of existence, as well as the instruments and attitudes, ideals and terrors, of the ancient hunter, projecting these into the otherworlds of the gods, into the insipid literary tradition, and into the annals of history.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Piggot describes a similar situation for the Celts from antiquity (25-46).
- 2 The ritual life-cycle reflected in the life of the traditional hero (as described by Lord Raglan) is focused for the northern hero on the warrior's rituals -- initiation and death. This practice is stronger in the Germanic sources than in the Celtic, which give rather more attention to the birth, childhood deeds, and marriage of the hero than do the Germanic.
- 3 As noted above, birth and childhood stories are relatively rare in Germanic sources; the mythological material focuses for the most part on the gods who, while they are kin to the giants, have no

recorded "childhood" as such; giants, however, are associated genetically with animals and monsters, as Loki's infamous offspring illustrate. Loki is not only father to a wild and a serpent, but mother as well to Odin's eight-legged colt.

- 4 An interesting contrast can be seen when one considers the Greek hero Odysseus. Odysseus defeats his adversaries (Polyphemus, for example) by being a great tactician, not by taking on the characteristics of his adversary.
- 5 The function of the war goddess, witch, or wise woman in the hero's initiation, with the implication of an accompanying sexual initiation, are matters of some interest. Consider, for example, that it is Morgan le Fay, a human transform of Morigan, who sets in motion Gawain's initiatory adventures. The lady of the white castle may well be the witch in her youthful aspect. Scathach in *The Tain* is a witch and trainer of warriors; Cuchulainn is sexually initiated while he is with her. Aranhod is a witch and blocking figure for her own son in the Fourth Branch, but it is she who names and arms the youth.
- 6 We recall that when Absalom decided to displace his father as king, his first act was to claim the King David's harem.

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