

Inanna's descent to the netherworld and analytical psychology: what has the mistress of all the lands done?

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What has the mistress of all the lands done?:¹ Contextualising *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld*

Introduction

In *The Dream and the Underworld*, analytical-psychologist James Hillman makes a startling claim: “a fundamental tenet of archetypal psychology” he says is, “the interchangeability of mythology and psychology. Mythology is a psychology of antiquity. Psychology is a mythology of modernity.”² This cuts both ways. One publication including though not restricted to considering Sumerian mythology, contained this rather striking line: “Myth is ... imaginative and reflective, rather than analytic or scientific... yet it remains grounded in the concrete, relying on imagery derived from human life, motivation and experience transferred to the divine sphere.”³ Mythologists sometimes look to psychology to better understand their source material. Why are these stories (these old, old stories) still exerting such a fascination? Because we intuit, as Hillman went on to say, that “that classical myths are not simply part of the past... Myth lives vividly in our symptoms and fantasies and in our conceptual systems.”⁴ We suspect that exploring myths from a psychological perspective might give us some fresh insights into ourselves. In considering myth from a more specifically Jungian perspective, rather than exploring archetypes or archetypal images, I want to draw your attention to one particular idea which examines what we are actually doing with such imagery, what Jung called the transcendent function.

Jung and the Transcendent Function

The transcendent function is a psychic activity that weaves together symbols of conscious and unconscious in order to foster a transition from one psychological attitude to another. Jung called it ‘transcendent’ not in a spiritual sense, but in the sense of transcending two opposites, in this case conscious and unconscious, through symbolic images which contain both. And for Jung, the transcendent function was a core process of the self balancing psyche, where both the conscious

¹ <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr141.htm> Descent of Inanna Enki speaking

² Hillman, J., 1979, *The Dream and the Underworld*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York. p.23

³ Foster, B. ‘Sumerian Mythology’ in Crawford, H (2013) *The Sumerian World*, Oxon, Routledge p. 436

⁴ Hillman, J., 1979, *The Dream and the Underworld*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York. p.23

and the unconscious are active participants. It is a way to mediate opposites and facilitate a transition from one psychological attitude to another. [Longer exploration of the transcendent function.]

Stories of descent, Jung makes clear, are an encounter with the unconscious. They are “no aimless and purely destructive fall into the abyss,” he says, “but a meaningful descent into the cave of initiation [*katabasis eis antron*] and secret knowledge”⁵. He draws on the term for ‘going down’, ‘katabasis’ which according to one writer, “Etymologically, ‘kata-basis’ could refer to a place from which descents are made, such as a cave mouth, or to a military manoeuvre involving a descent.”⁶ For Jung, a successful descent is one which results in renewal. “In the act of sacrifice, the consciousness gives up its power and possessions in the interests of the unconscious. This makes possible a union of opposites resulting in a release of energy.”⁷ Thus I am making a connection between stories and myths of journeys to the underworld, and psychological stories about journeys into the psyche, exploring more closely a very old myth indeed, the *Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld*.⁸

The Sumerians

Sumerian culture is perhaps the oldest human civilisation Archaeological finds in the region date back to at least 5,000BCE though the height of Sumerian civilisation, dates to between 3,500 and 2,350BCE, where Sumerian was spoken, cuneiform developed along with urban civilisation with cities such as Uruk, which is around the time the very first settlement of the Nile valley was taking place in Egypt. But Sumerian was the classical culture of the ancient world - Sumerian remained the written language of the educated, and scribal schools lasting into the Babylonian period (1750BCE till about the 6th Century BCE) continued to use and circulate Sumerian texts.

⁵ Jung, C.G., 1966, *Spirit in Man, Art, And Literature*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, Hove. para 213, page 139-40 [NB I've prioritised the English, Jung has the Greek first.]

⁶ Falconer, R., 2005, *Hell in Contemporary Literature: Western Descent Narratives since 1945*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. p.2

⁷ Jung, C.G., 1956, *Symbols of Transformation*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, Hove. para 671page 432

⁸ This is the actual Sumerian underworld of dust and desert (not the *abzu*). Although we know so little about it it - See Barrett (2007) re grave goods which gives a different flavour. Its location is also mysterious - usually considered an ‘underworld’ or ‘netherworld’ and yet the descent isn’t to be taken for granted. CF translation of Sumerian word *kur*.

The Descent of Inanna was written down a lot, (Katz (2003, p.251) notes that there are about thirty copies of the piece, which is why there is a near complete text, but the length of time and the relative lack of historical contextualisation does make its meaning and significance quite difficult to fully understand. Some concerted scholarly effort continues to be devoted to understanding how the Sumerians conceptualised the world in which they lived (or cosmic geography as one of them describes it)⁹ and the place of the netherworld in it - was it really 'under' in the way we think of it or was it 'beyond the mountains' or was it just 'not here'? Trying to reconcile written evidence with archaeological evidence¹⁰ raises further questions. The written evidence suggests the netherworld¹¹ was conceptualised as a dry, dusty place of perpetual thirst, and yet the grave goods suggest an expectation of a more comfortable place that might have use for musical instruments and even board games.¹² [*This section on the Sumerian conception of the underworld to be expanded in more detail.*]

However, *The Descent of Inanna* was clearly an important story and it remains fascinating today. Inanna was a goddess who 'wears the robes of the old, old gods'¹³ and whose power seems to reach back into a pre patriarchal period and she decided to go to the underworld.

The Descent of Inanna

The Descent of Inanna is quite a long poem in two parts. [There is evidence to suggest it is really two separate pieces. See Katz's (1996) argument that the rest of the poem is really about Dumuzi, Inanna's sometimes spouse, which was added to bring two myths together, which I will expand upon. My focus will remain on the first

⁹ See *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, and *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources*

¹⁰ Barrett, C.E., 2007, Was Dust Their Food and Clay Their Bread?: Grave Goods, The Mesopotamian Afterlife and the Liminal Role of Inana/Ishtar, *Journal of Ancient and Near Eastern Religion*, 7(1), pp. 7-65.

¹¹ This is the actual Sumerian underworld of dust and desert (not the *abzu* another cosmological region that might be regarded as 'under'). Although we know so little about it it - See Barrett (2007) re grave goods which gives a different flavour. It's location is also mysterious - usually considered an 'underworld' or 'netherworld' and yet the descent isn't to be taken for granted. CF translation of Sumerian word *kur*. Which means mountain, as well as referring to the underworld.

¹² See Barrett, C.E., 2007, Was Dust Their Food and Clay Their Bread?: Grave Goods, The Mesopotamian Afterlife and the Liminal Role of Inana/Ishtar, *Journal of Ancient and Near Eastern Religion*, 7(1), pp. 7-65.

¹³ de Shong Meador, B., 2000, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, Univeristy of Texas Press, Austin. p.92

part. I will also discuss the several different translations of the poem.] To summarise the action briefly:

Part 1

- The Goddess Inanna decides to visit the underworld. She dresses in her best, (not the warlike accoutrements of her fight with the mountain Ebih. It is instead the more seductive outfit she puts on to go and ask An for help in that poem - make up and jewellery and 'come hither' perfume). She picks up her symbols of power and sets out.
- On her way she gives detailed instructions to her right hand woman/man¹⁴ Ninshubur on what to do while she is away.¹⁵ Ninshubur is to mourn Inanna (loudly and publicly) then she/he is to go to three senior Gods in turn: Enlil, Nanna and Enki.¹⁶
- Inanna knocks aggressively and even rudely on the gates of the underworld palace and demands to be let in.
- The gate keeper asks Ereshkigal the Queen of the Underworld what to do. Ereshkigal agrees to let her in, but at each gateway, Inanna must remove one of her garments.
- By the time Inanna arrives in front of Ereshkigal she is naked.
- In a frustratingly brief moment in the poem, Inanna seems to attempt to replace Ereshkigal on the throne.¹⁷
- The gathered underworld gods are appalled and Inanna is killed and her

¹⁴ An intriguingly non-binary character. Sandars has masculine, all the others translate as feminine.

¹⁵ *Sandars (1971)* 'I am on my way, the way to hell, but when I have gone'

Wolkstein & Kramer (1983) 'if I do not return'

Jacobsen (1987) 'if I stay gone'

de Shong Meador (1992) 'when I reach that place'

ECTSL (1998) - 'when I have arrived in the underworld'

¹⁶ *Sandars (1971)* 'at the end he will redeem my life'.

Wolkstein & Kramer (1983) 'surely he will not let me die'

Jacobsen (1987) 'may he make me come alive'

de Shong Meador (1992) 'he is the one, to restore me, to life'

ECTSL (1998) - 'he is the one who will restore me to life'

¹⁷ *Sandars (1971)* 'Naked Inanna dropped on her knees for great Ereshkigal had mounted the throne'.

Wolkstein & Kramer (1983) 'Ereshkigal rose from her throne. Inanna started towards the throne.'

Jacobsen (1987) 'Holy Ereshkigal she made get up out of her chair, and in her chair she sat down'

de Shong Meador (1992) 'with Inanna bowed low someone brings her in. Her sister stands up from her wooden throne. Inanna sits on the throne in her sister's place.'

ECTSL (1998) - 'Then she made her sister **Erec-ki-gala** rise from her throne, and instead she sat on her throne'

corpse hung on a hook.¹⁸

- Ninsubur carries out his/her instructions and Enki sends two little creatures made from the dirt under his fingernails into the underworld.
- They find Ereshkigal in a sorry state, perhaps giving birth,¹⁹ with no one looking after her.
- As directed, the two little creatures empathise with the goddess and when offered, ask for the corpse of Inanna. They sprinkle her with the water of life and the food of life and she is revived.

Part 11

- As she is leaving, the Anunna (the assembled gods of the underworld) decide suddenly that someone has to take Inanna's place, and the second part follows Inanna as she decides who that will be. She returns home²⁰, accompanied by minor underworld deities (demons), eventually to discover that her husband Dumuzi has not been mourning her as he should and is, instead, sitting on her throne. Inanna makes her decision. Though eventually with help from his sister, Inanna decrees that he will spend half the year in the underworld, and his sister the other half.

I will concentrate on Part 1 of the narrative.

Who is Inanna?

¹⁸ *Sandars (1971)* The Anuna pass judgement 'Inanna instantly sickened to death, her body was a corpse hung on a spike'.

Wolkstein & Kramer (1983) Ereshkigal passes judgement 'She struck her. Inanna was turned into a corpse, a piece of rotting meat, and was hung from a hook on the wall.'

Jacobsen (1987) The Anuna pass judgement 'killed she was, and turned into a slab of tainted meat, and the slab of tainted meat, a man hung from a peg'

de Shong Meador (1992) The Anuna pass judgement 'they beat the doomed woman into a piece of meat, hang her rotting flesh on a peg'

ECTSL (1998) - The Anuna pass judgement 'The afflicted woman was turned into a corpse. And the corpse was hung on a hook'

¹⁹ *Sandars (1971)* 'She is sick, mother Ereshkigal is in labour'.

Wolkstein & Kramer (1983) Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld, is moaning, with the cries of a woman about to give birth'

Jacobsen (1987) 'the mother who gave birth, Ereshkigal lies sick (with grief), for her little ones'

de Shong Meador (1992) there Ereshkigal, great with child, lies moaning'

ECTSL (1998) - 'The mother who gave birth, **Erec-ki-gala**, on account of her children, is lying there'

²⁰ To Kullab which was a suburb of Uruk, originally a separate village, where worship of Inanna was very old indeed. See de Shong Meador, B., 2009, *Princess, Priestess, Poet: The Sumerian Temple Hymns of Enheduanna*, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. p.121

Inanna is one of the major gods of the Sumerian pantheon²¹, which had somewhere around 5,000 minor deities²² but about a dozen major ones, of whom Inanna was one, but as one writer points out “her relationship to the rest of the pantheon is far from clear.”²³ Her name probably means ‘Lady of Heaven’. She is also the ‘lady of blazing dominion’²⁴. She is proud, sure of herself and capable of great violence. In one narrative she single handedly destroys the mountain Ebih that will not offer her proper respect. She is well known for her delight in violence. One hymn describes her so eager to get to battle that she has not even finished putting on her shoes:

fighting is her play
she never tires of it
she goes out running
strapping on her sandals²⁵

She is the ‘battle planner’²⁶ and ‘foe smasher’.

She also appears as a maiden, a young woman who delights in eroticism, desire and sex. There are many instances of Inanna’s pleasure in sex, both for herself and for others. Her temple at Uruk is described as “a perfectly shaped fresh fruit, dazzling in [its] irresistible ripeness”²⁷ One poem begins with Inanna’s delight in her own sexual self. As she takes a rest:

She leaned back against the apple tree.

When she leaned against the apple tree, her vulva was wondrous to behold.

²¹ It did not have a fixed hierarchy, unlike the Greco-Roman or Norse pantheons for example, having said that, Inanna is always pretty near the top and one of the major dozen or so about whom we know the most. One can also see that the goddesses as a group show a marked decline in prestige over the period of Sumerian culture, with Enki gradually replacing the goddess Ninhursag in the top three, for example, though Inanna fights a good rear guard action.

²² Hallo, W (1996) *Enki and the Theology of Eridu* *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 116, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1996), pp. 231-234 p.233

²³ Vanstiphout, H.L.J. 1984, Inanna/Ishtar as a Figure of Controversy, in HG Kippenberg & I Finkel (eds), *Struggles of Gods: Papers of the Groningen Work Group for the Study of the History of Religions (Religion and Reason)*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 225-38. p.225

²⁴ de Shong Meador, B., 2000, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, Univeristy of Texas Press, Austin. p.91 [NB IF/WHEN WRITING UP A CHAPTER, LOOK AT OTHER TRANSLATIONS MORE CAREFULLY]

²⁵ de Shong Meador, B., 2000, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, Univeristy of Texas Press, Austin. p.118 From ‘Lady of Largest Heart’

²⁶ de Shong Meador, B., 2000, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, Univeristy of Texas Press, Austin. p.91 ‘Lady of Blazing Dominion’

²⁷ de Shong Meador, B., 2009, *Princess, Priestess, Poet: The Sumerian Temple Hymns of*

Rejoicing at her wondrous vulva, the young woman Inanna applauded herself.²⁸ And there are a great many hymns celebrating the sexual prowess of Inanna and her husband Dumuzi in the 'sacred marriage'.

At times her power is described as coming through An or Enlil²⁹ (who is sometimes her father), the two gods most often at the head of the pantheon. Or sometimes through Nanna (who is also sometimes) her father. Power, for the Sumerian deities is usually expressed in terms of how many *mē* they possess. The *mē* are a distinctly Sumerian concept which is difficult to translate, but can be described as the knowledge and accomplishments of civilisation. Inanna has a lot of them. In *Inanna and Enki*, while Inanna is visiting, Enki drinks a lot of beer and in a moment of drunken largesse, gives Inanna a lot of the *mē* in his keeping. In the morning he wants them back, but Inanna has already left and declines to hand them over. Two of the *mē* she receives from Enki are 'descent to the underworld' and 'ascent from the underworld'³⁰

Sometimes her power seems to rival the other gods and she frightens them! One hymn describes:

the magnificent lady who gathers up the divine powers of heaven and earth and rivals great An, is mightiest among the great gods -- she makes their verdicts final. The Anuna gods crawl before her august word whose course she does not let An know; he dares not proceed against her command.³¹

In *Enki and the World Order*, Inanna complains that Enki (who has been sailing the cosmos, handing out *mē* to various deities) has not assigned *her* any special responsibilities. Enki reacts with surprise, taking some time to praise her and enumerate her powers and abilities before asking "What more could we add to you?"³²

Enheduanna, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. p.117

²⁸ Volkstein, D. & Kramer, S.N., 1983, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*, Harper & Row, Publishers Inc., New York. p.12 From the opening of 'Inanna and Enki'

²⁹ Executive head of the 7 god committee as Vanstiphout puts it.

³⁰ Volkstein, D. & Kramer, S.N., 1983, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*, Harper & Row, Publishers Inc., New York. p.15 From the opening of 'Inanna and Enki'

³¹ <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section4/tr4073.htm> Hymn to Inana C line 1-10

Lady of Largest Heart as de Shong Meador translates it.

³² Kramer, S & Maier, J (1989) *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God* Oxford University Press

Inanna is always upsetting the apple cart, so to speak. “Inanna,” says Enki later, “you heap up human heads like piles of dust, you sow heads like seed. Inanna, you destroy what should not be destroyed; you create what should not be created.... You never grow weary with admirers looking at you. Maiden Innana, you know nothing of tying the ropes on deep wells.”³³

But actually Inanna is right - she doesn't have an obvious purpose, a dominion. In contrast to the other major deities, Inanna has gotten hold of a lot of the *mē* but it doesn't seem to add up to anything very focussed. Inanna is loud, sometimes hair-raisingly violent, actively desiring, and insistent on her due respect, and open to receiving more power if the opportunity presents itself. Her powers encompass heaven, earth and perhaps the even underworld. She's always being accused of wanting it all. In fact, Inanna in the round is perhaps a bit too much! [Or is that just because she is a goddess, rather than a god?]. However Jacobsen points out that perhaps her special feature is that “she is a goddess of infinite variety”³⁴. Another writer points out that the Mesopotamian pantheon are remarkably peaceable, at least with each other, and that Inanna's ‘gift’ is controversy and strife. Inanna is always moving things around. She mixes things up.

Analytical Psychology Reading

Jungians have found plenty of ‘psychological savour’ in engaging with the *Descent of Inanna*. Both Brinton Perera (1981) and de Shong Meador (1992) read from a Jungian perspective, and found invigorating images of reorientation and renewal in this oldest of descent narratives. Brinton Perera - explored the myth as route for modern women to reconnect with their ‘dark sister’, the deep primal feminine of Ereshkigal, suffering and alone, buried by the every day world of patriarchy. de Shong Meador also used the narrative to explore “the drama of individuation as the innate self strives for full realisation against the demands of cultural adaptation.”³⁵

New York, Oxford p.55

³³ <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr113.htm>

Enki and the World Order

Lines 437-444

³⁴ Jacobsen, T., 1976, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

³⁵ de Shong Meador, B., 1994, *Uncursing the Dark: Treasures from the Underworld*, Chiron

'The descent' in her reading is that which strips a person of that adaptation to culture. A necessary task for women trying to uncover their authentic selves from the accretions of patriarchal expectation.

But I want to circle around the story again, in what another Jungian therapist Berry called a 'restatement'. "If we are stumped by a dream [or an image]," she says "there might be nothing better to do than replay it, listening until it breaks through in a new key."³⁶ Let's see if there is another emphasis or way of understanding the poem's psychological interest.

There are, in fact, three major deities invoked in the first part of the *Descent*³⁷: Inanna, Ereshkigal *and* Enki.

I have previously suggested³⁸ that Enki can be seen as the god of consciousness: he is described as a shaper-creator³⁹, 'he of the vast intelligence'⁴⁰, 'understanding/knowledge personified'⁴¹ and he is the keeper of the *mē*. Enki has a close association with Inanna and they are linked in no fewer than three major mythological narratives.⁴²

When it comes to Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, it will be no surprise that I want to associate her with the unconscious, but specifically the deep collective unconscious, which cannot be directly apprehended by the conscious mind. Most of the information about her realm the underworld is really about the approach to the underworld. "Despite the numerous references to the underworld and the large number of names for the region, little is known about the geography or interior of the

Publications, Illinois. p.xi

³⁶ Berry, P., 1974, An Approach to the Dream, *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture*, pp. 58-79 p.73

³⁷ At least in the first part. Dumuzi and Geshtinana are there in the second part.

³⁸ Miller, C. 2018, Enki at Eridu: God of Directed Thinking, in L Gardner & P Bishop (eds), *The Ecstatic and the Archaic: an Analytical Psychological Inquiry*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 147-60.

³⁹ Galter, H.D. (2015) The Mesopotamian God Enki/Ea' in *Religion Compass* 9/3 (2015): 66-76, p.69

⁴⁰ Jacobsen, T (1987) *The Harps that Once... Sumerian Poetry in Translation* Yale, Yale University Press, p.154

⁴¹ C. A. Benito, "Enki and Ninmah" and "Enki and the World Order" (1969), p. 22, line 12, and commentary on p.49" cited in Espak (2006) p.117

⁴² Descent of Inanna; Enki and the World Order; Inanna and Enki

underworld. Most of the available information concerns the approaches to the underworld, including a road that leads to the underworld, a river that flows at the entrance to the underworld, and the gates that lead into the underworld.”⁴³

This reading would then suggest that Inanna is a personification of the transcendent function. She spans paradox and contradiction. The essential aspect of the goddess’s configuration is the ability to incorporate “fundamental and irreducible paradoxes.”⁴⁴ [NB not in the way that the Trickster figure tends to exacerbate paradox - more discussion here on this distinction]. Her sigil, the reed post, (or ring post) the gatepost that stood either side of the doorway to the store house. As de Shong Meador puts it, the “emblem that signified her presence was made of the common building material that fills the marshlands, that liminal space separating the river waters and the dry land. The doorway to the storehouse marked the transitional spaces between secular outside and hallowed inside.”⁴⁵

Inanna is the personification of the transcendent function because what Inanna actually *does* in this narrative is to connect Ereshkigal and Enki. There is a mutuality between the three in the story that is often overlooked. *The Descent of Inanna* is a story about an approach to the unconscious. In order for it to happen, however, Inanna, Ereshkigal and Enki are *all* doing things that they shouldn’t.

Inanna sets off to the underworld, arrayed like a Queen, an equal, and rudely demands to be let in, though when asked directly she says that she is there for the funeral of Ereshkigal’s husband. She makes claims of kinship, stating Ereshkigal is her sister, but she is making demands that cannot be satisfied, by insisting on entrance to a place she is not supposed to be. As a furious Nanna says later “Who, having got to that place, could then expect to come up again?”⁴⁶ [The conscious cannot directly apprehend the unconscious.] But Inanna has planned ahead in sending her right hand wo/man to ensure that Enki will come looking for her. She has drawn Enki’s attention to the situation, and she is sure that he is the one who will

⁴³ Horowitz, W., 1998, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN. p.349

⁴⁴ Rivkah Harris quoted in de Shong Meador, B., 2009, *Princess, Priestess, Poet: The Sumerian Temple Hymns of Enheduanna*, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. p.119

⁴⁵ de Shong Meador, B., 2000, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, University of Texas Press. p.15

⁴⁶ <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr141.htm>

help.

Meanwhile, Ereshkigal is also doing something that she shouldn't. She should tell Inanna to go away. But curious about Inanna's approach, she cautiously agrees to let her in... although she takes the precaution of sneakily arranging for Inanna to have all her finery and symbols of power removed step by step as she approaches.⁴⁷ A direct attack wouldn't work on Inanna, but this one by one approach seems to confuse her and she complies.

Inanna arrives in front of Ereshkigal naked and divested of her usual gifts of seduction and violence. None the less, she can't help having a go and tries to replace Ereshkigal on the throne. It is an awful, terrible moment, that almost can't be spoken about or even described. As Katz, points out, the grammar is complex those two lines are difficult to unpick. "Because of the indeterminate syntactic structure, the obscure subject and object of the verbs, and the suffix/-ta/ in line 166,⁴⁸ these lines are still in dispute."⁴⁹ There is confusion over subject and object and "the two motion verbs are in opposite directions"⁵⁰. [The conscious cannot directly apprehend the unconscious and vice versa.] It is over in a flash. It seems to be a total disaster. The Anunna are furious, raging. And it results in Inanna becoming a piece of spoiled meat (not just dead, but *rotting*) and hung on a hook. What a catastrophe.

Ereshkigal tricked Inanna into entering a place where she shouldn't be, with no powers to deploy in her defence.⁵¹ But *at the same time*... Inanna has tricked Ereshkigal. Inanna has opened a way to the underworld goddess and her presence forces Enki, the god of consciousness, to *listen* to Ereshkigal. Enki sends the little creatures made from dirt under his fingernails into the Underworld. He *knows* that Ereshkigal is sorely neglected. He tells them: "Her nails are like a pickaxe The

lines 209-216 *Descent of Inanna*

⁴⁷ Ereshkigal gives instruction for the gates to be bolted, which suggests that they weren't already.

⁴⁸ 165 She raised her sister from her throne

166 And took her seat in her throne.

⁴⁹ Katz, D., 2003, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources*, CDL Press, Bethesda, MD. p.261

⁵⁰ Katz, D., 2003, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources*, CDL Press, Bethesda, MD. p.261

⁵¹ Katz, D., 2003, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources*, CDL Press, Bethesda, MD. p.265

hair on her head is bunched up as if it were leeks.”⁵² She is in a bad way, perhaps mourning a husband *and* giving birth, but regardless no one is looking after her. The little creatures empathise with her pains, and Ereshkigal is so grateful that she eventually gives them Inanna’s corpse and after they sprinkle her with water and food, she comes back to life.

Inanna is different to others who venture to the underworld. “Inanna is not a mortal being, yet, unlike other divinities who went to the netherworld, she did not retain her divine essence and did not turn into a netherworld deity (compare Dumuzi, Ningishzida, Nergal or Utu and Nanna, who appear in heaven and the netherworld alternately). On the other hand, unlike human beings, her spirit did not survive but ceased to exist. Her revival required a special cunning procedure and the account of her rescue from the netherworld holds more than half the myth.”⁵³

In this story, Inanna is the audacious *agent provocateur*, facing up to a dangerous task of forcing confrontation and dialogue between conscious and unconscious. She is the transcendent function in action bridging (for a moment) conscious and unconscious in the symbol of the dead/alive goddess. She actively seeks out Ereshkigal *and* Enki and becomes the link between them. “In the act of sacrifice,” Jung says “the consciousness gives up its power and possessions in the interests of the unconscious. This makes possible a union of opposites resulting in a release of energy.”⁵⁴ Ereshkigal is soothed, because Enki listened to her pain, and the final line of the narrative reasserts her importance. “Holy Ereshkigal, Sweet is your praise.”

The transcendent function then “mediates opposites. Expressing itself by way of the symbol, it facilitates a transition from one psychological attitude or condition to another.”⁵⁵ This function is the bridge between which “involves a dialogue between consciousness and the unconscious through the instrumentalities of fantasy and

⁵² <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr141.htm>
lines 226-235 *Descent of Inanna*

⁵³ Katz, D., 2003, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources*, CDL Press, Bethesda, MD. p.263

⁵⁴ Jung, C.G., 1956, *Symbols of Transformation*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, Hove. para 671page 432

⁵⁵ Samuels, A., Shorter, B. & Plaut, F., 1991, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*, Routledge,

symbol.”⁵⁶ Ereshkigal cannot be overcome, but she is sorely neglected. Enki is too busy doling out the *me*, the accomplishments and activities of civilisation to pay much attention, till Inanna forces his hand by going somewhere she shouldn't. Inanna is the one who piques Ereshkigal's curiosity and gets invited in even though Ereshkigal shouldn't be making that invitation. Inanna is the one who calls Enki's attention to Ereshkigal and ensures that he empathises with her.

[Discussion of the 'transcendent function' in some of the other major Inanna poems - *Inanna and Ebih*; *Inanna and Enki* which has some similarities, in that Inanna sets out to go somewhere she shouldn't, in this case the abzu and Eridu, to get the *me* for Uruk, in which she succeeds; *Enki and the World Order*; *Inanna and Shu-kale-tuda* - the shepherd who rapes her while she's sleeping. Again Inanna gets help from Enki again to find the perpetrator. *Inanna and An* in which she steals the Eanna temple from An with the help of her brother Utu.]

Conclusion

Inanna is the goddess who embodies the transcendent function. She contains paradox and contradiction, transcending two states in order to bring about a third, and with it transformation. In so many of her hymns and stories she is energetic, fierce, restless, always on the move, mixing things up, but in the Descent of Inanna, she is brought to a halt in order to bring about change for Ereshkigal and Enki. Her sigil is that of a threshold. Inanna is the one who stands between, a personification of the transcendent function.

References

London p. 150

⁵⁶ Miller, J.C., 2004, *The Transcendent Function*, State University of New York, Albany. p.54-55