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Miller, Catriona

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Becoming Queen: Inanna and Claire Underwood

In the ancient Sumerian story called *Inanna and Ebih*, Inanna is appalled to find the mountain Ebih is not prepared to offer her the respect she is due as a goddess. She appeals to her grandfather, An, whose name means 'heaven', but he is unwilling to help. Then, in a memorable turn of phrase, 'fury overturns her heart' (de Shong Meador, 1999, p.99) and Inanna takes care of the mountain herself. The story concludes with the building of a temple for the worship of Inanna.

The Netflix Originals drama series *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-2019), portrays the rise of power-couple Frank and Claire Underwood to the top of the US political system. Claire (Robin Wright) has always been shown to be as ambitious as her husband (played by Kevin Spacey), but in Season 3, a brutal exchange between the two makes it clear that Frank, now president, will not help Claire rise further than First Lady, a ceremonial role with no real power. Like Inanna, however, Claire does not accept that this is the end of the matter and by the end of the final season, Frank is dead and Claire is president.

These stories were created at least four and a half millennia apart and yet they contain points of contact, for although different in a great many respects, both tell the rare story of a female protagonist who stakes a claim to agency and power, then backs up that claim through acts of violence. This is an accepted route to power for many male protagonists, but women who exhibit such forms of aggression are often considered aberrant, or even pathological. In many ways, the two stories are shocking and surprising because their central protagonists are female and as Jungian clinician Austin has pointed out, in contemporary culture "women's aggressive energies remain somehow contrary to an assumed natural order" (Austin, 2005, p.4).

Using a specifically Jungian understanding of the purpose of myth, this chapter will explore the psychological territory of the two stories, examining their similarities and what they might tell us about a woman's path to autonomy and leadership.

Jung and Myth

Comparing two stories whose origins lie so far apart in time is a difficult analytical

task which perhaps threatens to trample over the specific cultural and historical contexts of both stories. However, I take a specifically Jungian view of mythology as a starting point, a view which sits in contrast to other approaches to myth which, for example, have viewed it as a kind of primitive science, such as Edward Tylor's influential *Primitive Culture* from 1871 or as a form of disguised wish fulfilment as in the psychoanalytic view. For Jung, however, myth was always symbolic, not literal, and its subject matter was really the psyche, where the function of myth is to elucidate the unconscious for the purposes of achieving a better psychic balance, since the psyche in Jung's view is a homeostatic system. As he put it, "Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings" (Jung, 1968, p.154). Elsewhere he noted his view that myths are projections onto the external world, "in fact, the whole of mythology," he said "could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious... Just as the constellations were projected onto the heavens, similar figures were projected into legends and fairy tales or upon historical persons" (Jung, 1960, p.152-153).

This approach to myth then sees such stories as an expression of a psyche always seeking balance, through the mechanism of the transcendent function. The transcendent function "mediates opposites. Expressing itself by way of the symbol, it facilitates a transition from one psychological attitude or condition to another" (Samuels, Shorter & Plaut, 1991, p.150). In fact, the transcendent function is the key mechanism of the self-regulating psyche, a way of facilitating a shift in consciousness. Jung called it 'transcendent' not in any spiritual sense, but in the sense of transcending two opposites, usually conscious and unconscious, through symbolic images which contain both. In the Jungian model of psyche, the unconscious is an active participant in the psychic ecosystem, rather than a repository of repressed contents. As Samuels explains, the transcendent function allows dialogue. "The ego is holding the tension of the opposites to let a mediatory symbol come through – a facilitation of the process of the self which permits the unconscious-conscious transcendence" (Samuels, 1994, p.59).

The shift in consciousness that both these particular stories call to mind can be related to another Jungian concept, that of individuation, which is the process of becoming oneself, that is "whole, indivisible and distinct from other people or

collective psychology (though also in relation to these)” (Samuels, Shorter & Plaut, 1991, p.76). Jung thought that the first part of individuation was a necessary separation from the unconscious, where “Consciousness,” he said, “grows out of an unconscious psyche which is older than it, and which goes on functioning together with it or even in spite of it” (Jung, 1968, p.281). So the development of the ego and the persona (outward social adaptation) are the goals of the first part of that process. However, in the Jungian model, “Adaptation is never achieved once and for all” (Jung, 1960, p.73), and the second, life-long part of individuation is work to listen once more to the ‘other voice’ of the unconscious (Jung, 1960, p.88). Stein has described these two ‘great movements’ of individuation as analytic and synthetic where the first part focuses on separation and the second part on (re)synthesis (see Stein, 2006, p.xviff). Hero narratives have been explored extensively as examples of the first part of individuation with Strauss (1962) and Covington (1989) for example seeing the hero as a symbol of separation and differentiation. There are, however, particular issues with this model for women who live within a patriarchal culture, where the route to becoming an autonomous adult entity still contains paradoxes and contradictions, which will be discussed more fully below.

I extend this Jungian view of myth to audio-visual narratives (film and television drama) so prevalent in contemporary life. Following Jung’s lead I suggest that contemporary audio-visual narratives act to elucidate aspects of the unconscious psyche, through the transcendent function. Whilst of course, much media is consumed without great thought or attention, sometimes audiences develop very intense relationships with stories that deliver ‘psychological savour’: images, characters and emotional dynamics that can speak to them very deeply, sparking an engagement that goes beyond mere entertainment. So the approach adopted here is a kind of comparative mythology, which sees both stories offering similar psychological dynamics to a modern audience. It is not an examination of what the story of *Inanna and Ebih* may have meant to the Sumerians themselves, or indeed what it may have meant to the priestess Enheduanna who wrote the story down in around 2300BCE. Rather it is a closer look at the common psychological threads that run through both.

Inanna and Ebih

The story of *Inanna and Ebih* is one of several major works relating to the goddess Inanna, which have survived to the present day. Inanna is not a goddess of the domestic sphere – she is the ‘lady of blazing dominion’ and ‘foe smasher’ in *Inanna and Ebih* (de Shong Meador, 2000, p.91), and ‘keen for battle queen’ in *Lady of Largest Heart* (de Shong Meador, 2000, p.117) also known as Hymn to Inanna C. She is also an erotic figure, featuring in songs of courtship and consummation such as *The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi*. Indeed, 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 wonderous to behold.

Rejoicing at her wonderous vulva, the young woman Inanna applauded herself (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983, p.12).

She is an important figure in the Sumerian pantheon which did not have a fixed hierarchy. There were around five thousand minor Sumerian deities (Hallo, 1996, p.233) and about a dozen major ones, and it is interesting that the assembled gods were often referred to collectively as the *Anuna* which means ‘princely offspring’ (Black & Green, 1992, p.34), leading one writer to describe them as a committee, with an executive branch often, though not always, led by the god Enlil (Vanstiphout, 1984, p.226).

Inanna was certainly a member of the executive committee, but their relationship is not always cordial. Some hymns describe the *Anuna* bowing to Inanna or even crawling before her (see *Hymn to Inanna C*, ETCSL, 2016b), or fluttering away from her like bats from a ruin (see *Exultation of Inanna*, or *Hymn to Inanna B*, 2015). One hymn has Inanna proclaim that “The gods are small birds, but I am the falcon” (see *Hymn to Inanna F*, ETCSL, 2016c) and at one time or another, Inanna seems to have come into conflict with many of the major male gods. Nevertheless, Inanna is indisputably one of the major gods of the Sumerian pantheon, and her name probably means ‘Lady of Heaven’.

Relatively complete texts of Inanna’s major exploits, including *Inanna and Ebih*, have survived thanks to their inclusion in what has been called the Decad – a group of ten compositions which were used extensively to train scribes. It is even suggested that *Inanna and Ebih* was “intended to introduce apprentice scribes to more complex

grammar and longer, continuous texts” (Delnero, 2011, p.141). When renowned Sumeriologist Samuel Noah Kramer first summarised the work in 1944, only eight sources were known, but the number of preserved duplicates has since grown to eighty sources (Delnero, 2011, p.124).

The story is a relatively straightforward one, at least in terms of its action. Inanna is outraged when the mountain Ebih will not bow down to her and offer her the respect that she is due. She threatens it to no avail and so Inanna prepares herself, putting on her best jewellery and make up – in a ‘queen’s robe’; paints fire beams on her face; fastens red carnelians around her throat, takes her seven headed mace and goes to visit An who as the head of the pantheon ‘gives [her] word weight over all others’ (de Shong Meador, 2000, p.95). However, although he is pleased with her and her offering, when she explains the disrespect of the mountain, he addresses her, “Little One, my Little One” and goes on “you ask for the mountain, you want the heart of it” but when he looks down and sees the beauty of the mountain, he grows in awe of it and says “I will not set my head with yours against the fiery radiance of the mountain” (de Shong Meador, 2000, p.98-99), concluding “Maiden Inanna, you cannot oppose it” (*Inanna and Ebih*, ETCSL, 2016a).

Inanna, however, does not like this answer.

Fury overturns her heart!

with screech of hinge
she flings wide the gate
of the house of battle..”

...

bedlam unleashed
she sends down a raging battle
hurls a storm from her wide arms
to the ground below (de Shong Meador, 2000, p.99).

Inanna is victorious and has no compunction about celebrating this in the final section of the composition. Inanna ‘wrestles the mountain to its knees’ (de Shong Meador, 2000, p.100) and then builds a temple to herself.

Inanna's roots go back to the 'old, old gods', as de Shong Meador puts it (2000, p.92), though the gods are actually named in the Sumerian text, however as Attinger (2015, p.40, fn.123) points out, we know nothing else about them except that they came 'before'. But now Inanna must stake her own claim, not relying on An to back her up. The mountain itself, though a beautiful paradise, seems to represent a pull back to an undifferentiated state, which must be resisted and more, it must be made to respect the goddess (de Shong Meador, 2002, p.90). This is a point reiterated in Attinger (2015, p.38) where he mentions this Jungian interpretation alongside the more standard historical explanation of the work which relates it to a campaign of conquest of the mountainous region Jebel Hamrin (in modern day Iraq). To re-state this moment, the ego must separate itself from the unconscious and stake a claim to autonomy, but in fact, Inanna must undertake two separations here. She must separate herself both from the pull of Mount Ebih's paradise, *and* from the previously doting patronage of An, representing social acceptance, or at least the collective identity of the Anuna with An at its head, from whom at least some of her power and authority derives.

The parallels in this story with the very modern television drama *House of Cards* are perhaps not immediately apparent, but Claire Underwood too has her moment of 'asking for power' that is turned down and thus must undertake two separations in order to achieve autonomy.

***House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-2018)**

House of Cards was a flagship original drama for the streaming service Netflix, being their first directly commissioned big budget drama designed to encourage audiences to subscribe. It was based on a 1990 series for the BBC, adapted by Andrew Davies, from a novel of the same name by Michael Dobbs, published in 1989. Michael Dobbs had worked in the Conservative party in the 70s and 80s as a speech writer and Government special adviser. He said, "Most of the stuff I put into *House of Cards* was material from events I'd either seen, or participated in, or done, or watched other people do" (Chakelian, 2015) although one hopes that does not also include the murders! Dobbs is now a Conservative life peer in the House of Lords. Both Davies and Dobbs became executive producers for the Netflix show, but the

American adaptation was created by Beau Willimon, with David Fincher and Kevin Spacey also on board as executive producers. The story tells of the rise to power of Francis (Frank) Underwood through fair means or foul, but mostly foul, in a series of manipulations of a personal and political nature alongside outright skulduggery, all accompanied by sly asides and self justifications to the camera (a Shakespearean technique drawn from *Richard III*). It all combined to make the character of Francis a favourite anti-hero with audiences.

House of Cards was an important series for Netflix in 2013, designed to position the streaming service as a rival to the more established HBO as a source of 'quality' drama. *House of Cards* was key to this, with Jenner pointing out that the combination of "authorship, Hollywood stars with an emphasis on dramatic roles, complex narrative structures, 'serious' subject matter, accomplished aesthetics" (Jenner, 2018, p.172) were all important elements that worked to establish the Netflix Originals brand. Finn (2017) however makes clear the critical importance of Netflix's knowledge of its audience base in the decision to commission original drama in general and this drama in particular. "Netflix commissioned its hit series *House of Cards*..." he explained "based in large part on its algorithmic calculus: it had significant statistical evidence to suggest that its users would embrace a reboot of a BBC political drama starring Kevin Spacey, with director David Fincher at the helm" (Finn, 2017, p.98). The company bid \$100 million against HBO for the rights to the show, and moved straight to a two series order, eschewing any need for a pilot proof of concept. Finn goes on to point out that what looked like an immense gamble to traditional broadcasters was simply a careful calculation by Netflix, which was confident about the formula components (as articulated by Jenner above) and because of its "immense power to capture the attention and interest of its customers" (Finn, 2017, p.99).

The series ran for six seasons, although the final series was shortened to eight episodes rather than the more usual thirteen, after a scandal hit the actor Kevin Spacey, where a series of accusations of sexual misconduct in the US and UK were levelled against the actor (see Jang, 2017). In December 2017 Netflix announced that the final series would be produced without Spacey, with the focus fully on Frank's wife, Robin Wright's character Claire. It is interesting that Netflix did not just

cancel the show as they might have done, given that their 'star' and a major element of their algorithmic calculation, not to mention the central protagonist of the drama, was being removed from the story. However, presumably the popularity of Claire's character must have grown sufficiently to justify the resolution of the show's narrative. Robin Wright's role had been growing, shaping the direction of the show and the storylines for her character. From Season 2 onwards, she had directing credits, and from 2016 (Season 4) an executive production role, along with parity of pay with her co-star. Spacey had been executive producer since the first episode but was dropped at the end of Season 5. He had no directing credits. Wright's creative influence on the series mirrors Claire's rise to political power.

The Netflix version of *House of Cards* diverged significantly from its forebears in many ways, but one of the most obvious changes was that it developed the role of the wife, Claire Underwood, very substantially. In the BBC version Francis's wife is an almost invisible supporter with no obvious agenda other than loyalty to her husband. In the American version, however, Claire becomes a highly visible and an explicit partner to Frank, with some definite ideas and agenda of her own which gradually becomes clearer as the series progresses. Claire appears at first as if she is playing the role of the "partner, or partner-to-be of the hero", that is "women who play a waiting role, resisting the flow of time, and whose aim is to be united with the hero" (Covington, 1989, p.243-244), but her agency begins to evolve away from her position as a simple supporter of her husband.

Other than narrative placement, of course, part of what makes Frank the central protagonist is that he is permitted to directly address the camera, to explain his thinking, his goals, and his feelings to a complicit audience, thus drawing them into his world. This 'breaking of the fourth wall' which acknowledges that there is audience viewing events is still relatively rare in television drama as it tends to jolt an audience out of its willing suspension of disbelief. It was a major stylistic decision by the show's original adaptor, Andrew Davies, and a change to the novel which was delivered entirely in the third person. Davies used the direct address to camera to give the audience entry to the "thoughts and feelings of an unsympathetic character, compelling us to engage with him. The programme grants us access to [Frank's] subjectivity and voice" (Cardwell, 2005, p.94). This special kind of dramatic voice is

one Doane calls a “privileged mark of interiority” (Doane, 1980, p.41) manifesting the inner lining of the body and displaying the inner life of the character, but in this case it is even more than that. In *House of Cards*, the audience is also treated to the direct *gaze* of the character, and Frank’s point of view becomes the inescapable core of the drama. This is worth mentioning because one of the ways that Claire’s shift to a more central role is marked is through her own relationship with that direct address.

At first, Claire’s character is opaque. There is no insight into her thinking as with the monologues of her husband, and instead the audience must read her character through speech and action, and from the external cues on offer through the *mise en scène*. The show’s *mise en scène* is austere, minimalist, deliberate, where the lighting is largely naturalistic, making much use of motivated lighting (such as windows, lamps and so on), even though this often leaves faces in shadow. The colour palette is ruthlessly restrained, nothing flashy or attention grabbing, neutrals abound and control is all, which is, in fact, a fair description of Claire’s character. Her self-possession is extraordinary, with every expression and gesture carefully controlled to the extent that often her body language is almost silent, often said to be a marker of leaders who have no need of self-calming gestures or movements to attract attention. Far from being a trivial matter, Claire’s personal style is an important clue to her character. Like the production design more generally, Claire’s fashion style is also almost brutally simple and equally controlled: clear lines, neutral shades, short hair carefully cropped to retain its femininity, figure strong and slim, the height of her high heels impressive.

In fact, the physical composure and perfect grooming demonstrate to the audience once again a level of control (physical and mental) that are a clue to her own abilities and desires. Kemal Harris, stylist on the final season, explained that Claire is under a “lot of pressure, she’s female, she has a lot of battles with people who were working closely with her husband. It feels like Claire against the world this final season, and she doesn’t really have that many close friends. She’s in battle this final season” (Fratti, 2018). Her clothes function as her armour. As Andò puts it, her “style is an integral part of her personality and behaviour. Her style seems to be able to enhance an unconventional femininity and an unusual capacity for power

management in a very familiar way for the audience” (2015, p.216). It is familiar because Claire’s costume is reminiscent of ‘power dressing’, a style developed in the 1980s to allow women in top business positions to mimic masculine norms (suit, white shirt and tie) whilst retaining their femininity through pencil skirts, high heels and red lipstick. Claire’s costume, for example, often incorporates an Oxford shirt, a staple of smart upper class men’s fashion, but in her case it is tailored to be very close fitting to the female form. It is perhaps an unconventional femininity because it is designed to display strength rather than prettiness. The closer to power she gets, the darker Claire’s colour palette becomes and in Season 6 she is wearing military style colours in navy blue and olive greens, with very limited detailing in brass buttons, contrast seaming, or French cuffs (to show off her presidential cuff links).

Such ‘effortless’ elegance demonstrates a powerful will, because its very flawlessness requires determination and precision, as well as planning, focus and discipline. The perfect outfit for every occasion, maintaining the figure and complexion to carry it off, the requirement to be perfectly groomed at all times are all tied to ‘rituals of beauty’ that are intended to keep women subordinate to male approval, but Claire’s appearance of perfectly executed femininity is camouflage, making it subversive even because she is melding masculine *and* feminine visual cues for power. Like Inanna who adorns herself in jewels and make up to seek An’s help, Claire ensures that she appears as the patriarchally acceptable woman, and yet this is a performance, and a concealment of the steel beneath, which is perhaps most evident in her body language. As noted, Claire does not fidget or wave her hands about and she seems to have an emotional self control that only very occasionally breaks, such as in Episode 3.12 when Francis tells her that a political rival is threatening to publish an old journal of Claire’s, which contains details of an abortion. During the phone call with Frank, along with the threatening music, there are more than the usual number of cuts in the editing, and close ups of Claire’s face and of her hands shaking, as her voice seems to lose its authority and belong to a much younger woman. It is a relatively brief moment but one which suggests Claire still has one or two chinks in her armour. Season 6 plays more openly with expectation and assumptions about Claire’s emotional control. In 6.5, Claire makes it clear that she is in full control to the audience even as she pretends to have an emotional breakdown to draw out her enemies in the cabinet. After listening to her

vice president pleading with her, she turns to the camera with her tear streaked face suddenly dead pan to say “Don’t worry, I have a plan.” Then in 6.6 in a more ambiguous moment, Claire enumerates the number of her enemies that she has eliminated either politically or actually through assassination, but must then leave the room to vomit, leaving the audience on screen and off to wonder if it is horror and guilt at her actions, or merely a side effect of her about-to-be-announced pregnancy?

Despite these moments of emotion, Claire’s narrative trajectory within the show demonstrates ever more clearly that discipline and desire for power. Although with little political experience, in Season 3 she is appointed to the UN as ambassador by Frank who has become president, but she is then forced to give up that job when Frank trades her resignation for a diplomatic agreement with Russia and she becomes only the First Lady again. She wants more but Frank is unwilling to accommodate her. In a brutal exchange in the Season 3 finale, she finally articulates herself. She explains that she is unhappy that, ultimately, Frank really makes the decisions and that she had to ask for his help to get the nomination to the UN in the first place. She resents having to ask. Later in the same scene she is even clearer. “Look at us, Francis,” she says, “We used to make each other stronger, or at least I thought so. But that was a lie. We were making *you* stronger. And now I’m just weak and small and I can’t stand that feeling any longer.” Frank’s reply is unsparing. “When we lose [the election] because of you there will be nothing. No plan. No future. We will only be hasbeens. You want to amount to something? Well, here is the brutal fucking truth and you can hate me, you can be disgusted, you can feel whatever it is that you want to feel because frankly I’m beyond caring. But without me you are nothing. You’re right. This office has one chair. And you have always known that from the very beginning. And if you can’t stomach that, then I’m a fool for having married you in the first place.”

He is the president and she is not. The couple who had been such firm allies are now rivals. Like Inanna, Claire’s request for help from a more powerful male is turned down, but she resents having to ask for it in the first place. And like Inanna, Claire begins to take the matter into her own hands. In Season 4, she begins looking for a nomination to a congressional seat, and leaking hostile information against Frank. An assassination attempt puts Frank in hospital and Claire into a

powerful position with the weak vice president. On Frank's return, she persuades him to make her his vice-presidential running mate. Season 4 ends with a long, slow pan up the incident room table to where Claire and Frank sit together at the head, culminating in Claire joining Frank in looking directly into the camera. Claire is starting to claim the direct address as her own. Towards the end of Season 5, Claire finally speaks to the camera, acknowledging the audience's presence (5.11), and in the final episode of that season she stands over the desk of the Oval Office, having replaced her husband as President. He is expecting her to issue him with a presidential pardon, but instead, she refuses to take his phone call and announces "My turn" to the camera. The direct address is now hers and, as it turns out, hers alone. In retrospect, it may have looked like Frank's story, but throughout Claire's power is rising. She is younger than Frank, more telegenic, and more flexible, and when interviewed before the premiere of Season 6, Robin Wright intimated that it had always been the plan from Day One to have Claire end up as president: "We knew that that was going to be the final chapter. How she got there was questionable" (*Variety*, 2018).

The final series of *House of Cards* sees Claire consolidate her hold on power in a more effective and ruthless way than Frank had ever managed. By the end of Season 6, Frank is dead, and Claire has arranged to have all her enemies either politically isolated or assassinated, whilst maintaining a public persona as a caring champion of women, for example choosing to replace her disloyal cabinet entirely with women. In Episode 6.7, she even abandons her married name 'Underwood' and returns to her maiden name, becoming President Hale, and further distancing herself from her husband's influence and the last vestiges of his powerbase. Her timely (and surprising) pregnancy also works to soften her public image, helping to cement her caring public persona as 'mother of the nation'. Exactly how Claire becomes pregnant with her dead husband's child, is not directly addressed in the drama, but a 'blink and miss it' moment in Episode 6.5 shows Claire taking a tablet of folic acid, making the suggestion that she used her time out of the spotlight to see a fertility specialist. It is a timely pregnancy because Frank's will, in the event of no direct heir, left everything to Doug Stamper (Michael Kelly), his most trusted *éminence grise* and keeper of his secrets.

The series concludes with a final death. Claire now several months pregnant with Frank's child, is confronted by Doug Stamper. An increasingly distraught and troubled Doug admits that he is the one who killed Frank to preserve his legacy, and he intends to kill Claire for the same reason. Instead, Claire stabs him with the letter knife he threatened her with, and then suffocates him. The final shot of the series is of Claire, a dead Doug in her arms, the final possible challenger to her power gone, as her eyes slide to stare into the camera one last time. There is no one left to confront her, or to comfort her, only the promise of the child to come. Like Inanna she has become the 'foe smasher', alone in the 'temple' of the White House.

Agency, Power and the Autonomous Ego

A Jungian approach to any text (see Miller, in Hockley 2018) often seeks to pay attention to an echo or a thread of psychological significance, a hint or whisper of unconscious processes revealed within a consciously organised narrative, and then to amplify that whisper, as Jung suggested in his own approach to mythology. As Rowland puts it, the aim is to pay attention to the "fleeting momentary presence of something that forever mutates and reaches beyond the ego's inadequate understanding" (2005, p.3). The whisper being considered here is the unequivocal desire for power from the two protagonists, and their equally unequivocal determination to do whatever it takes to achieve it. The two heroines demand recognition of themselves as powerful individuals worthy of respect, and, perhaps also, fear, and if the function of myth is to throw conscious light upon the workings of the unconscious, these two stories are expressing a route to agency and power for their protagonists through aggressive energies, a route usually denied to women.

In English, the etymology of the word 'power' lies in the Latin verb *posse* meaning 'to be able'. Thus, implied in the word 'power' is an element of agency. To have power is to have the ability to act. However, there is a complex chain of association around the issue of power and autonomy that makes it difficult territory for women to own because these concepts are a kind of ouroboros. To have power, to be an autonomous individual, requires agency and the capacity to exercise power, but to be a person *with* agency requires external (social) validation of that capacity to act. So although agency is in theory a universal capacity, in reality it is "realised in a variable and unequal fashion" (Mcnay in Disch & Hawkesworth, 2016, p.39) because

both agency and power have long been coded as masculine. Men are socially validated from a very young age for displaying them (independence, self reliance, and even unruliness), while women are, at best, ignored or, at worst, punished for displaying the same traits. Instead, women are socially validated for being 'nice', that is helpful, quiet, and caring, and socially in-validated for being loud, demanding or putting themselves first. Patriarchal power, acting in a myriad of small social interactions, creates gendered subjectivity or selfhood, constituting male subjects in a privileged position with agency, and constituting female subjects who struggle to claim agency. Social affirmation states in so many small ways that women 'are *not* able to'.

Inanna and Claire do not have their request for power validated, but instead of complying they become angry and they rally themselves to fight back. Austin articulates an uncomfortable reality that to feel aggression and hostility contains the seeds of agency, because with it one realises one is not merely 'done to' one can also 'do to others' (2005, p.7-8). She goes on to point out, as noted above, that the links between aggression and agency are more complex for women because of the social construction of femininity, where once again "stoppiness in women is commonly seen as dangerous and negative, while in men it is often seen as an expression of an original and individual mind" (2005, p.23).

This must also affect the idea of individuation, because to achieve growth, to become an autonomous, mature personality, women's sense of self has to disentangle itself both from the unconscious *and* from social expectations. Social adaptation for women is often a limiting factor rather than endorsement. Adaptation to outward reality means, as Pratt put it, "young girls grow down rather than up ...[where] the reward of personal power makes the conquering hero a cultural deviant" (1981, p.168).

For a woman to achieve autonomy therefore, she must work against the weight of social expectation that forms her persona in particular directions. To resist or rebel against this is hard work, creating contradiction and tension between the ego and persona, where the ego is moving towards greater consciousness and separation, while simultaneously the persona requires relatedness and *loss* of ego. This is in

contrast to men where socially acceptable masculinity insists on autonomy as essential to the successful performance of masculinity. As Austin makes clear, there are few paradigms that allow the viewing of female aggression as meaningful and important, more usually they are unacceptable, ugly, absurd or indeed irrelevant.

Inanna and Claire challenge these norms. Through fury and violent action, they clear the decks of their challengers and take up the mantle of queendom. Although for those hearing these stories, the audience, ambivalence may remain. For example, some academics have described Inanna's subduing of the mountain as petulant and capricious – “Inanna decides to subdue Mount Ebih without any real provocation from the mountain. She complains that when she approached it, it did not prostrate itself before her. It is Inanna's hurt pride that makes her want to subdue Ebih” (Karahashi, 2004, p.117) – before concluding that “Inanna's aggression has no legitimate cause, therefore giving the impression that she acts to satisfy her own desire, which is to be taken as one of her many capricious acts (Karahashi, 2004, p.118). Yet she is a goddess, and as such presumably worthy of respect. The mountain *should* prostrate itself before her. It is a direct attack on her position and requires a direct response. It is interesting that many of Inanna's stories feature the goddess acquiring power of some kind through robbery (*Inanna brings the first sky house to earth*), trickery (*Inanna and Enki*), special daring (*The Descent of Inanna*) or in this case, direct violence. She is a goddess fighting to maintain her place. It is interesting to speculate that Inanna, who wears the robes of the ‘old, old gods’, might trace her origins to a pre-patriarchal period, which could explain her confused family relationships (variations of sister, wife, daughter, grand-daughter to various major gods), fractious relationship with the rest of the *Anuna* and her bold challenges to their authority with her demands for rights, privileges and power at every opportunity.

For the character of Claire, the audience was divided, and websites and discussion boards debated her style, her hair, her interior design choices, and whether she was a psychopath, a sociopath, or just plain evil. Others however were drawn to her style and confidence, but also her ruthlessness. As the feminist campaigning Women's Media Centre put it, “Claire Underwood breaks the rules and does ugly things. She's not there to convince men that powerful women aren't scary, that their rise is

somehow good for everybody. She's there to take what she believes to be rightfully hers and she does *not* apologize" (Evdokimova, 2018) On a more personal note, one blogger articulated her reluctant attraction to the character:

One thing I'm rather ashamed to admit I *like* about Claire is that while she's selfish, she's very clear and intentional about it. It's not that she's against what good may come out of her success for other people, she's just not motivated by it...There's something about Claire's selfishness that I *yearn* for; it seems odd to say, I suppose, but I have this strange admiration for her because she's just so unapologetically concerned with herself.

The blogger ends her piece "Claire Underwood has to be a villain because we aren't ready for a world where she's a heroine" (Norman, 2016).

Neither of these stories are about 'good girls', that is patriarchally sanctioned, polite and empathetic, who are rewarded with marriage – the breakdown of Claire's relationship with Frank shows how quickly male approval can melt away when challenged – but then to become Queen, an autonomous individual in one's own right, requires the acquisition of power. Power is not 'nice' and those with it are rarely 'likeable'. Inanna and Claire are not nice or likeable but they are unquestionably powerful. Inanna's story ends with the building of a temple or palace confirming her divinity, with Inanna "rejoicing in her fearsome terror" (see *Inanna and Ebih*, ETCSL, 2016a), while Claire, having reached the pinnacle of political power, is only able to glance towards the camera, her expression complex. Inanna does not accept the persona of femininity and goes her own way seemingly no longer reliant on An for her position, a possibility that arises even more clearly in another, albeit more fragmentary, story, where Inanna takes the Eanna (a temple in the sky) from An and brings it to earth to become her important temple in the city of Uruk, leaving An bewailing the possibility that Inanna is now greater than he (see *Inanna and An*, ETCSL, 2016d). Claire must take a more negotiated stance, using her femininity and motherhood as a disguise for her ruthless acquisition of power, with no celebration at the end of it. Both stories, however, are an expression of an unequivocal assumption of agency – Inanna and Claire take power and become fearsome individuals with power, i.e. they are 'able to'.

Conclusion

In comparing an ancient myth with a modern television drama, I hope to bring into focus a powerful and terrifying aspect of the feminine that is rarely directly apprehended in contemporary culture: the female acquisition of power through aggressive means for its own sake. The two stories highlighted in this chapter are extraordinary in the full sense of the word – from the Latin *extra ordinem* meaning outside the ordinary course of events. Stories about women who become queens through their own actions, not married to the hero who becomes king, not even forced into reluctant heroism to save the world, but simply because they wish it, are rare. The female protagonists in these two stories cannot sit idly by and hope to get the power and respect that they feel is their due. They have done what they were asked, they have been good daughters of patriarchy, but there will be no reward of personal power for them unless they take it for themselves. They must be ‘not nice’, not modest, ‘not consensual’ but ruthless, powerful and autonomous, and in doing so they suggest that one route to agency for women is to embrace anger, aggression, and demand, and to embrace ‘the keen for battle queen’ within.

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