MYTH   AS   NARRATIVE:
STRUCTURE   AND   MEANING   IN
SOME   ANCIENT   NEAR   EASTERN   TEXTS

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I have composed this thesis myself and the
work is entirely my own.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

ABSTRACT

This study is devoted to the narrative analysis of ancient
Near Eastern texts.   In the first chapter an approach to myth is
developed and outlined based upon the structural analysis of the
folktale.   There are two axes along which narrative structures can
be apprehended, the syntagmatic, which describes the syntax of the
narrative, and the paradigmatic, the semantic axis upon which is
generated meaning.   The method outlined here utilizes three levels
of syntagmatic narrative structure: motifeme, motif and texture.
Initial analysis of a tale on these levels is followed by the
interpretation of its paradigmatic aspect according to the semantic
relations assumed by the specific contents of the narrative's
constituent parts.   Each of Chapters II-V presents the analysis
and interpretation of a particular Mesopotamian text.   In Chapter VI
three versions of the story of the descent of Inanna/Ishtar to the
nether world are analysed and interpreted.   The final chapter
assesses the usefulness of this method of narrative analysis for the
study of myth, and the contribution made by the interpretations of
the texts to the understanding of ancient Mesopotamian thought and
religion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND
ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

1. Introduction

In coming to any study of myth it is perhaps best to begin, as
do many myths themselves, at the beginning. Precisely which
beginning, however, is another matter.

The problem of the origins of myth has produced many various
answers, in much the same way as have myths themselves about the
origins of the universe and its divers inhabitants, and for some of
the same reasons. The distance and obscurity of these origins is
part of their attraction and power. The particular power of mythology
does not depend on knowledge of its original source; it is, in fact,
due in part to the tradition under which that source is buried. It
is the transmission through time of the myth which provides much of
its validity. The very lack of specific authorship contributes to
the hold of myth on the community out of which it arises and to which
it lends its share of that community's sense of itself. I do not
propose here to try and trace this phenomenon back to its sources.
Rather, I want to examine it in its context, and offer interpretations
of some of its specific instances from the ancient Near East.

The definition of myth can also prove a troublesome starting
place. Of course, the most common modern usage of the word, as a
synonym for falsehood, is a degraded one in this context. That it
is almost always used pejoratively in this sense though is indicative
of myth's relation to belief and systems of meaning. If one view is

categorized as 'myth' it is usually in the cause of advancing another in its stead.

When we speak of myth in the context of religion or as a specific and very real product of culture it is with reference to the stories which are expressive of various aspects of a tradition's beliefs and manner of understanding the world. Precisely how we define this particular body of stories in terms of form and function can be problematic. There are many types of stories told. As well as myths there are legends, fairy tales, epics, to name a few. Taxonomists of folklore concern themselves with delineating the various genres of traditional tales, and different categories emerge, with their diverse labels, according to different schemes of classification. A fundamental sense, however, of the Greek root <u>mythos</u> is, simply, 'story'. Myths, whatever else may distinguish them, are first of all stories, narratives. And they are readily recognized as such by the hearer. All narratives carry meaning and reflect, in one way or another, the culture which produces them. If we set ourselves the initial task of considering myths as the stories they are, in the context of the peculiarly human pastime of narrative, then the question of precise genre definition need not be the prerequisite to our central task of reading these stories for what they can tell us of the cultures from which they spring.

The suggestion, for instance, that myths must concern gods or the supernatural seems to me to be too narrow, if not patronizing. Even the most secularized corners of our own society have their myths. I would even suggest that human culture cannot do without. All cultural activity betrays a certain orientation to the existence which provokes it. Culture is an attempt to order, determined always by a particular conception of the nature of order itself. Look for a moment at the

term 'myth' as used by Barthes in his <u>Mythologies</u> (1957).   Here Barthes

seeks to expose the hidden ideological content of apparently neutral

cultural expressions.   In so far as these expressions are implicitly

oriented to a dominant ideology they partake of the mythological.   But

he is really using the word in both a formal (as we would have it) and

popular sense.   For his purpose in revealing the mythical aspects of

quotidian behavior is to bring the informing ideology into question, and

even to dismantle it.   He uses 'myth' in such a way as to capitalize on

its common or garden meaning of untruth, or even lie.   But again, in so

doing he implicitly recognizes its basic nature as forming a ground for

belief and action.   Moreover, his examples, wrestling, the Tour de

France bicycle race and so forth, are really the rituals, or sometimes

symbols, which are founded upon or refer to the culture's myths, and not

the myths themselves.   These he tries to reconstruct by 'reading' these

rituals.   This aspect of his enterprise refers back to myth as the

narrative expression of whatever ideology informs it.

Thus we are returned to the one firm fact about myths, that they are

narratives.   This is the point I have chosen as a starting place, from

which to consider specific tales.

In our own culture as in any other a myth tells a story.   A modern

example of such a story which expresses a particular orientation to the

world might be the Marxist description (read: narrative) of history as a

dialectical progression, by means of class struggle, toward the paradisi-

cal dictatorship of the proletariat and the eventual withering away of

the state.   This, indeed, might be considered an excellent example of

an eschatological myth.   To return for a moment to the question of

authorship, it should be remembered that Marx did not write this tale,

but rather discovered it in his material, in the narrative of history.
It is a story by means of which to read other stories. And it draws
power from this sense of independent and prior existence. There is
this symbiosis of myths and the ideologies, or metaphysics, which under-
lie them. Myth embodies the perspective which shapes it, and in so
doing seeks to posit it as truth.

So, given its fundamental status as narrative, I would, in the
beginning, suggest only one other possible criterion for distinguishing
myth from other forms of folktale: a myth is a story of particular
significance to the people who tell it. We might even say that it is,
within its milieu, considered to be 'true' (Pettazzoni 1954, 12f.).
But this can be a difficult distinction to pin down, especially among
different cultures' own classifications of their own various tale types
(Kirk 1970, 32). Lévi-Strauss, in support of the more, rather than less,
inclusive stance taken by Propp (1968, 90), points out that 'there is
no serious reason to isolate tales from myths; although a difference
between the two is subjectively felt by a great many societies.' He
attributes this perception to two factors. 'In the first instance,
tales are constructed on weaker oppositions than those found in myths ....
In the second place – and precisely because the tale is a weakened
transposition of the myth – the former is less strictly subjected than
the latter to the triple consideration of logical coherence, religious
orthodoxy, and collective pressure' (1977, 127-8). Such considerations
of content, however, still recognize that, as narrative, both folktale
and myth are constructed on the same principles, and are thus equally
amenable to the same methods of analysis. And it is analysis of a
narrative which discovers its message, the cultural status of which can then
be considered.

So then, whatever else myths may be they are narratives, and in this work I propose to examine some ancient Near Eastern texts as such. For it is as narrative that we can best approach these texts.   Their actual living context is very distant from our own.   But by the study of their structures of meaning we can come to understand much more about those of the culture and religion which produced them.

My particular method here will be based upon the sort of narrative analysis which has become prominent over the past few decades, especially among students of folklore; the analysis of narrative structures. There is, for all of their apparent variety, a marked uniformity in the compositional structures of traditional tales.   It might be said, given the fundamental unity of its nature, that a certain structural uniformity extends to all of narrative, whatever its surface sophistication.   But it is traditional tales with which I am concerned here.   These composition-al structures are also the ground for another, semantic, level of structure, a structure of meaning.   The method I will employ here is intended to make use of the first in order to discover the other.   Analysis of the tales themselves will seek not just to describe but to interpret.   All in the hope, ultimately, of providing a better understanding of Meso-potamian thought, about themselves and their world.

2. Narrative Analysis

There are two fundamental axes along which the structural analysis of narrative texts can proceed.   They correspond to the distinction Saussure (1960) made between the diachronic and synchronic aspects of a language system.   All discourse unfolds through time and this is its diachronic, or syntagmatic aspect.   But each element of the text is

also in a simultaneous relation to all of the other elements, as well as with such elements as do not, but could have, appeared in its stead. This is the synchronic, or paradigmatic aspect of the text. The syntagmatic structure is the organization of the events of the narrative, the syntax of the discourse. As such its analysis is primarily descriptive. It is the compositional structures which are so described. The paradigmatic structure orders the relationships of the contents of the discourse, its semantic aspect. Its analysis should therefore involve the meaning, or meanings, of the text.

Much of the folklore research of the past twenty years or so has concentrated on the syntagmatic axis, taking its impetus from the seminal work of Vladimir Propp on the structure of Russian fairy tales. Although actually written thirty years before, it was not until the English translation appeared in 1958 that Morphology of the Folktale (2nd. ed. 1968) began to receive widespread attention in the West. Propp was struck by the obvious inadequacy of various attempts to classify traditional tales according to particular features or motifs. He recognized that the fundamental problem lay in the failure to establish satisfactory criteria for classification. 'The accuracy of all further study depends upon the accuracy of classification. But although classification serves as the foundation of all investigation, it must itself be the result of certain preliminary study. What we see, however, is precisely the reverse: the majority of researchers begin with classification, imposing it upon the material from without and not extracting it from the material itself' (1968, 5, Propp's emphasis).

Propp considers many of the different means of classification which had been proposed. Tales had been distinguished according to types of characters, or of their circumstances, resulting in a division into

'categories'. Such categories, unfortunately, cannot be established
in any such suitable way as not to merge or overlap. Alternatively,
attempts had been made to classify tales according to 'theme'.
But, as Propp notes, 'if a division into categories is unsuccessful,
the division according to theme leads to total chaos' (p.7). The
fundamental problem with all such attempts lies in their preoccupation
with the immediate contents of the stories. In fact, these contents,
the specific manner of the characters and of their activities, are
the least stable aspect of the traditional tale. For such features
are only contingent and such typologies therefore always ambiguous.

A 'battle with a dragon', for instance, is, as a specific event,
quite common in folk literature. But much else happens around it in
each instance in which it occurs. The various tales may, in other
respects, be quite different. What remains in each at that point
is not immutably the physical fight with the dragon, but the act of
confrontation. Narrative, however, can be said to always involve
confrontation. So what matters is not the specifics or, even yet,
the fact of the event, but the position of it within a sequence of such
event-types.

Propp abstracted from his chosen corpus of 100 Russian fairy tales
a fixed sequence of thirty-one 'functions' which, he demonstrated,
forms the structural basis for all of them. 'Function is understood
as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its
significance for the course of the action' (p.21). The functions,
being types of acts, can be designated by single nouns or short phrases:
Villainy, Lack, Struggle, Liquidation of Lack, etc. No one tale
actually includes all thirty-one of the functions. Apart from the

choices made by the teller, some of the functions are mutually exclusive, such as in the initiation of the actual movement of the tale by means of either A: Villainy or a: Lack. The various functions do, however, always occupy the same position in the fixed order of the sequence (p.22). A complex tale consisting of more than one 'move' may eventually utilize all of the functions but is essentially a long tale made up of many short, simple tales. Propp's analysis is a strictly linear or syntagmatic one and as such remains solely on a descriptive level.

Considered in terms of the particular function they perform the myriad characters of fairytales can also be reduced to a small number of 'dramatis personae', defined by their 'spheres of action'. Propp finds seven such spheres in his material, those of the villain, donor, helper, princess (sought-for person) and father, dispatcher, hero, and false hero. These roles may be filled by any character, in as much as they are dependent solely upon the functions performed. Moreover, a character may perform just one role throughout a tale, or he may be involved in several spheres of action. Alternatively, a single role might be performed by more than one character (pp.79-83). The freedom of the storyteller, and consequently the variety of the tales, lies in his ability to fill these positions with the characters and actions of his choice. (Naturally, convention limits this freedom to some extent; witches are not found playing the role of 'hero'. This is, however, purely a matter of convention. Structurally, that is given the appropriate functions to perform, such a possibility is perfectly admissible.)

The importance of the notion of the function, as the basic building-block of the folktale, can be seen in the number of further researches it has inspired. Dundes (1964) uses it as the basis for

his analysis of North American Indian tales. He chooses to use the
term 'motifeme' rather than function, but this is basically an
alteration in terminology and not in definition. Dundes' analysis
is somewhat more abstract than Propp's. He uncovers in his material
a morphology based on ten motifemes grouped into five pairs: Lack/
Lack Liquidated; Task/Task Accomplished; Interdiction/Violation;
Deceit/Deception; Consequence/Attempted Escape. These appear, in his
material, in sequences of two, four, and six motifemes. The pairs
are logically connected so that in some instances only the second
term will appear in a tale while the first remains implied. Dundes'
simplified model results partly from working with somewhat simpler
material but derives also from the recognition that functions, defined
as they are by their effect on the action, can be assimilated into
more abstract categories.

The work of Bremond continues this process of abstraction. He
is looking for a model applicable to 'all types of narrative' (1970,
247). In this paper the model is based on an 'elementary sequence'
of three functions: Potential; Actualization; Achievement. This
process may proceed in two directions, from a state of deficiency to
a satisfactory state or the reverse. He also puts aside Propp's uni-
linear series of functions for a model based on interrupted and super-
imposed elementary sequences. In a later paper on the French fairy
tale (1977) he presents what he calls the 'ethical model'. This
returns to Dundes' notion of paired functions, but now further reduced
to only six in three pairs: Deterioration/Improvement; Unworthiness/
Punishment; Merit/Reward. He then identifies four types of episode
depending on how many of the paired sequences appear. The first is
obligatory and may appear alone, the other three types are formed by
the addition of either one or both of the other two pairs. This idea

of an ethical model, though, halts the process of abstraction in syn-
tactical models by its reference to the semantic content.   It may suit
the particular tales he is dealing with, but the specificity of its
functions tends to lead away from the concept of universal structures
which might be found in all types of narrative.

Jason (1977) also arranges the functions into groups of three, and
calls the resulting episode a 'move'.   The term, though not the usage,
is borrowed from Propp.   The three functions proceed in the order:
A: Stimulus (Test);   B: Response;   C: Result (Compensation).   These
terms are chosen precisely to avoid associations with an ethical framework
such as Bremond's.   Further, she divides the function itself into a tri-
partite structure.   The three basic units which make up her function are
the two tale roles and the action.   The two tale roles are those of the
Hero and of the Donor, either of which can be assigned one of two roles in
the function, that of the subject or of the object of the third term, the
action.   For example, the Donor (subject) puts a test (action) to the
Hero (object) (1977, 102).   The other basic category utilized by her model
is that of the Connective.   These connect the functions and moves of the
tale either by imparting information (information connective) or by indica-
ting a change in either state, time, or space (transfer connective).
Propp, too, had utilized the notion of the connective to describe certain
types of links in the narrative.   He, however, gave some, especially among
what Jason calls space connectives (for example, 'the woman returned
home') the status of full functions.   Jason cannot do this because such
an action does not have the second tale role required by her model to
make a complete function.   Like Bremond's, Jason's moves can be
superimposed upon each other, a new one beginning before all of the
previous ones have been completed.   The heightened level of abstract –
tion of Jason's model is, as with Bremond's earlier one, intended to

widen its 'field of application' (1977, 131).

Clearly, structural models must become increasingly abstract as they attempt to encompass a wider range of narratives. The problem encountered is that of differentiating such abstract structures without reference to their particular semantic contents, which tends to refer them back again to specific tale types. The contents, after all, are what make the tale, but certain structures of their arrangement are abstract universals of narrative while others may be only conventions of certain types of content and the stories in which they are found. An answer to this problem lies in recognizing that there are different levels of the syntagmatic structure. Doležel (1972) distinguishes three such levels: Motifeme, Motif Structure, and Motif Texture. According to Doležel's model the 'Motifeme (M) is a proposition predicating act (Act) to actant (Ant): M = Ant + Act'. It has the formal property, the motifeme function, of assigning specific sets of acts to particular actants. 'Motifeme function specifies the range of acts performed by the particular actants; it is a formal expression of Propp's assumption that each actant is characterized by its sphere of activity' (p.59). An example of this is 'the hero passed the test'.

The motifs specify the motifemes by assigning particular characters to the actants and particular actions to the acts; e.g. 'Ivan killed the dragon'. These, however, can be freely combined. 'No motif function assigning the particular actions to the particular characters can be defined; that means that a character can perform any action and, conversely, an action can be assigned to any character' (p.60). Thus a character can vary his actantial role from tale to tale and, more importantly, even within a single tale, depending on the sphere of acts to which his particular actions correspond.

Doležel uses motif only in the sense of ' "Dynamic" (action) motif' (p.70, n.16).   Thus, on the level of the texture he distinguishes motif textures from the rest of the verbalized story.   The motif textures are only those narrative sentences which assign an action to a character.   'In every narrative text motif textures are combined and, quite often, interwoven with narrative sentences verbalizing other blocks of the narrative structure (e.g. characters, setting)' (p.70).

In Doležel's scheme the motif texture is the 'verbalization' of the motif structure, in that a narrative sentence relates how a particular character performed a particular action.   The relationship between motif structure and motifeme is one of 'specification'.   The motif assigns a particular character to an actantial role and a particular action to a type of act (p.61).

A clear distinction between the motif and motifeme levels is essentially a refinement of Propp's system of functions.   His functions tend to intermix these two levels.   That he named his functions as he did, and then sub-divided them according to the manner in which they are fulfilled (e.g. H: Struggle; H^1: Fight in an open field; H^2: a contest; etc.), clearly shows that his model combines somewhat the filler and the filled.   The model I will be using is based on the three levels of the narrative structure, with some modifications concerning the manner of their relationships.

The universe of narrative is not infinite, but it is extremely varied.   Given a specific body of textual material, an appropriate syntagmatic model can only be arrived at by means of the confrontation of theory with event.   (The process is, perhaps, a narrative in its own right).   Theoretical coherence, though crucial, can only ever be

preliminary.   Ultimately, the value of any particular syntagmatic
analysis must be measured by its capacity to account for the material
it proposes to analyse.   And, in the project I have set myself, by
its ability to expose the paradigmatic units which lie at the center
of any attempt at interpretation by these means.

Doležel's recognition of different levels of narrative syntax is
very useful.   The idea of the progressive specification of these
levels can be used to describe the manner in which abstract narrative
form is actualized in the telling by a tale's particular contents.
But in utilizing the concepts of the successive 'specification' and
'verbalization' of each level I will introduce broader distinctions
between them.   Rather than a strict one-to-one correspondence
between the motifemes and their motif specifications, I prefer to
regard as motifemes the gross syntactical units of narrative, each
of which may subsume a number of motif manifestations.   These motifs
specify the abstract narrative syntax of the motifemes and in turn
are verbalized by the texture.   Thus the three levels of narrative
syntax which I will use in my syntagmatic analysis, and which are
called simply motifeme, motif, and texture.

Of the three levels of the narrative discourse the most immediate
is that of texture;   the actual text itself as transmitted, whether
verbally or in writing.   For the purposes of the syntagmatic aspects
of this study the textural level is essentially that from which the
features and components of the two deeper levels are extracted.   A
close study of the textural structure is primarily an exercise in
grammar or stylistics.   Any very detailed such study on this level is
beyond what I have set out to do in this work.   The ancient texts
considered here are taken in translation, and syntagmatic analysis is

intended, ultimately, as an adjunct to paradigmatic interpretation.
But for precisely this latter reason texture cannot be simply set aside
once the deeper levels of narrative structure have been abstracted
from it.   For description, metaphor, repetition and all such
textural devices must be taken into account when considering the
semantic relationships between a narrative's various constituents.
We begin with texture as the palpable expression of underlying
structures, passing through it to a consideration of those structures,
only to finally return to it again in examining the particular uses
to which those structures are directed.   Texture, as the repository
of symbolism, emphasis, tone, is, after all, the level upon which the
storyteller brings narrative structures to life.

The texture verbalizes a sequence of motifs.   These are the
particular events of the narrative.   Simply put, this is the plot,
the particular actions of particular characters.   But this level is
best approached from below, as it were, and I will discuss it last.

The motifs, in turn, manifest the third and deepest level of
narrative discourse, that of the motifemes.   Here the apparently
infinite permutations of characters and activities are found to be
assignable to quite limited categories of types of acts and classes
of actants.

In much the same way as Aristotle defined the story as
having a beginning, a middle, and an end and Propp discovered a
constant sequence of functions underlying a hundred different Russian
folktales, the motifeme level is only the formalized recognition that
the basic engine of all narration resides in the sequence: stimulus —
response — consequence.   However infinite the variety of narrative
possibilities appears to be, this criterion must be met for a 'story'

to result.   For this is the structure we respond to when we recognize 'narrative'.   Certain modern texts, conspicuously subversive of this rule, are precisely the exceptions which prove it.   An abrupt ending, or a concentration on character at the expense of action, can elicit in readers the sense that a text 'is not a proper story'.   Some of the experiments of 'experimental fiction' tamper with and explore this very fundamental basis of narrative as it is commonly, and intuitively, understood.   Of course, until this structure is filled in it is nothing, just the possibility.   A story presents a situation, deals with it, and thus alters it, or not (for such always remains a possibility).   That the alteration of the initial state might be nil, or inconclusive, points to the importance of the middle term, response, to our concept of narrative.

On the level of motifemes this fundamental narrative movement is expressed in the most general terms;   those of certain classes of actants performing certain appropriate types of acts.   Actant and act are interdependent, each determines the other in a relationship which itself is determined by its position in the motifeme sequence.   The number of such act types can be reduced to perhaps as few as five; association; dissociation; confrontation; capitulation; non-capitulation (Hendricks 1970, 111).   In other words, all the myriad particular ways a character can interact with other characters, and his environment, can be classed, on this level, according to a small number of such categories.   Similarly, the range of actants is also limited.   Greimas (1966) proposes a lexicon of six: Subject;   Object; Helper;   Opponent;   Sender;   Receiver.

Each block of narrative action which advances the tale from one state to another is based upon one motifeme act and the actants

appropriate to it.   It is then manifested in the story itself by the
motifs which assign particular characters (animate or inanimate) to
the actantial roles and a particular content action, or actions, to
the act.

There is another aspect, as well, to the relationship between
motifeme and motif.   The sequence of motifs is the narrative's plot.
It recounts a series of events, but it is under no constraint to
reveal these events in the actual chronological order of their occur-
rence.   Behind every plot however there is, in a sense, 'another'
story, which is that series of events in their proper logical order.
This historical version, as it were, we call the fabula.   The version
of the three level model used here assimilates to the motifeme level
this aspect of fabula.   That is to say, whatever the order of their
manifestation at the motif level, the motifemes are considered to be
ordered by their proper chronology.   This is another aspect of the
invariable/variable relationship between one level and the next higher.
To describe the fabula sequence as logical, however, is not in any way
to deny the internal logic of any particular plot.   Rather, it is
precisely the discrepancies between the two in some texts which
generates much of the meaning (see, for instance: Culler 1981;   Todorov
1977, 1981;   Genette 1980).   This 'disordering' of plot, such as the
beginning in medias res, is a prominent feature of much narrative from
at least Homer on.   And when it occurs it has a significant bearing
on the task of interpretation.   Traditional narrative forms, however,
are much less likely to exhibit this device.

The motifeme level is only that which must be filled in,
manifested, before a narrative can begin to really exist.   This
manifestation, more or less elaborate, of the motifemes takes place on

the level of the motifs.   These are the particular events which
realize the potential of the motifeme sequence.

In order to analyse the motif structure the text is first
'normalized' by listing all of the dynamic motifs in the form:
character + action (+ object).   The motif syntax has a highly
regular structure based on the three part 'motif function'.   This in
turn is again based on the basic tripartite nature of any activity:
stimulus-response-result.   The result of one series is usually the
stimulus of the next.   Rather than simply following one upon another
the functions are thus interlocking and the sequence assumes the aspect
of a chain (Grosse 1978, 165).   A more complex narrative which inter-
weaves different strands of motif sequences will, in shifting from
strand to strand, separate the end of one function from the beginning
of that sequence's next, in the telling.   But unless it leaves out
functions altogether, the syntactical identity between the end of the
one function (result) and the beginning of the next (stimulus) will be
maintained.   Another complexity which can be found in even the most
straightforward narratives is that of 'embedding'.   This can take the
form of an element in one motif function (usually the middle term)
being itself realized by another complete motif function, or it may
consist of the simple interruption of one function by the insertion of
another.

Because the motifs are the particular manifestations of the
general situations and movement laid down by the motifemes, they are
also the primary ground of narrative elaboration.   Any number of
complexities may be introduced by the motifs, even in the course of
fulfilling a single motifeme.   A common instance is that of the test
or task set the hero which he twice fails to win through, succeeding

only on the third attempt.   This is one example of what Propp calls
trebling — so universal is the convention of three that Olrik (1965)
considers it an epic law — and also an instance of his recognizing,
without quite specifying, the distinction of levels.   In this
instance a single motifeme is filled by three motif functions.
Sometimes a whole series of motif functions are enlisted in the mani-
festation of but one underlying motifeme.   For example, the entire
sequence may be once foretold and then acted out.   All of this activity
on the motif level only realizes the one motifeme which advances the
story from one state or situation to another.   In these various ways
the motifs are combined to build up the narrative itself.   Analysis
of the narrative syntax describes this construction of the text.

Syntagmatic analysis can aspire to a very high degree of complex-
ity.   Clearly, as we move upwards from motifemes through motifs to
texture, each level involves an increasingly complex structuring of
elements.   But to pursue this sort of analysis through all of its
increasing complexities would, finally, only tend to distract us from
our main purpose — paradigmatic interpretation.   For to do so would
lead to the consideration of compositional methods and questions of
stylistics.   This sort of work has been done by scholars such as Lord
(1960) and Peabody (1975).   Their studies deal with the actual compo-
sitional techniques of storytellers, and the way in which certain
structural conventions and formulae are utilized by them, particularly
in the oral production of sometimes quite lengthy poems.   This does
concern motifs and texture, but in its details reaches well into lin-
guistics.   Still, though it approaches the text in terms of its
verbal production, an understanding of these compositional techniques can
only help in the project of reading as well.   We must be aware of such
conventions and formulae when dealing with difficulties of translation,

and the frequent lacunae to which the long-buried ancient Near Eastern material is heir. Moreover, the better we understand the linguistic nature of the texture level the more transparent it will become to us as the verbal realization of underlying narrative structures. And my purpose here is to apprehend sufficiently the structural framework of traditional narrative such that its various elements may be considered in terms of their semantic relationships. For this reason I will be dealing primarily with the broader structural characteristics of the syntagmatic aspect of traditional narrative. In considering how tales are put together I am concerned less with storytelling techniques than with how the broader structural elements are deployed in the logical relations which generate meaning in the text.

First of all, though, there is the question of the relationship between the two, syntagmatic and paradigmatic, axes. Does an understanding of the syntagmatic structures really help us to analyse the paradigms? Obviously, I believe it does. It is, nevertheless, a question which has received a good deal of attention.

Propp leaves aside virtually all consideration of the para-digmatic axis and his analysis remains essentially syntagmatic and descriptive. In reaction to this Lévi-Strauss, in his review of Propp's book, rejects the Russian's 'formalism' in favor of a more exclusively paradigmatic approach. He even goes so far as to contend that 'formalism destroys its object' (1977, 132). This apparent polarization of methodological viewpoints actually reflects the different purposes of the two authors: Propp to describe and Lévi-Strauss to interpret. Or, to put it another way, Propp's concern

is with the aesthetic, Lévi-Strauss' with the logical structures of narrative.

Indeed, paradigmatic analysis of narratives can be done directly, or apparently so, if the way Lévi-Strauss proceeds in the four volumes of his Introduction to a Science of Mythology (1970, 1973, 1978, 1981) is anything to go by. But in fact, even Lévi-Strauss is by no means totally uninterested in the syntagmatic aspects of myth. He utilizes it explicitly, if somewhat roughly, in earlier studies such as his famous analysis of the Oedipus myth (1968) where he begins by breaking the story down into its constituent episodes. If formal syntagmatic structures are left aside in his later work on South and North American Indian myths, this is partly due to the extreme technical primitiveness of the material, but mainly because of his desire to concentrate on the highly complex semantic relationships between all of the various levels of episode, motif and context. But that syntagmatic analysis is a companion and aid to paradigmatic he himself has admitted, as, for example, when he says that 'I have deliberately avoided using the myths of the advanced civilizations of Central America and Mexico because, having been reformulated by educated speakers, they call for prolonged syntagmatic analysis before they can be used as paradigms' (1970, 177, n.18).

Meletinsky also argues the benefits of prior syntagmatic analysis.

> The definition of functions must be preceded
> by an exact breakdown of the tale into syntagms
> according to their temporal sequence; other
> wise the determination of the relations between
> the functions and their arrangement in bundles,
> the explanation of the symbolic meaning of
> these bundles, and the derivation of the paradigm
> will contain a great many arbitrary elements,
> and will not go beyond the scope of penetrating
> and partially correct speculations   (1974, 30-31).

It is precisely my intent, in developing and employing the method presented here, to move beyond partial interpretations, as will be seen in the analyses themselves.

Syntagmatic analysis, if pursued exclusively, leads to a descriptive stylistics. If pursued in conjunction with paradigmatic studies its primary usefulness is in delineating the various constituent units, on various levels, the relationships of which are considered in interpretation. In this study I have chosen to follow Todorov's advice. 'For our part, we refuse to choose between one or the other of these perspectives; it would be a pity to deprive the analysis of narrative of the double benefit it can gain from both Propp's syntagmatic studies and Lévi-Strauss' paradigmatic analyses' (1977, 224).

The important thing to notice about paradigmatic analysis, at least at this point, prior to consideration of particular texts, is that I cannot set out any one single systematic, and comprehensive, model of these structures, as was the case along the syntagmatic axis. Rather, we must take the various elements delineated by syntagmatic analysis and, restoring to them their specific contents, consider each myth on its own terms. There are, however, certain basic logical structures which experience, both my own and that of many others, teaches us to look for.

Lévi-Strauss, to rather grossly oversimplify, bases his studies on the idea that myths embody sets of oppositions and contradictions which it is precisely the work of the tale to mediate. One way the myth goes about this is by means of a homological relation of its parts (A: B::C: D). An irreducible opposition is presented in this relation to progressively weaker oppositions in the attempt to

mediate it.   Lévi-Strauss also presents an algebraic formula for
the mediating process:

$$Fx(a): Fy(b) \simeq Fx(b): Fa\text{-}1(y)$$

> Here, with two terms, a and b, being given as
> well as two functions, x and y, it is assumed
> that a relation of equivalence exists between
> two situations defined respectively by an in-
> version of terms and relations, under two
> conditions: (1) that one term be replaced by
> its opposite (in the above formula, a and a-1);
> (2) that an inversion be made between the
> function value and the term value of two elements
> (above, y and a) (1968, 228, Lévi-Strauss' emphasis).

Myth, by means of these transformations, presents its situations
for comparison, the purpose being 'to provide a logical model capable
of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it
happens, the contradiction is real)' (1968, 229).   This idea of myth
as mediating oppositions, as a way of 'thinking about' fundamental
problems, is a significant contribution to understanding them.   The
formula itself, however, has tended to generate more heat than light
among his commentators.   Lévi-Strauss seldom refers to it again ex-
plicitly, once (1973, 249) simply to point out that it has not been
abandoned, and even advises his readers not to take such 'logico-
mathematical' usages too seriously (1970, 30).   Maranda and Maranda,
though, in their own interpretation (1971), do seem to find it useful.

However, precisely what I want to avoid are attempts to slot the
material into pre-established formulae.   Rather, I shall proceed more
or less in the following manner.   The purpose of the syntagmatic
analysis is to delineate the episodic units which, semantically,
combine to produce a system of meaning in the text.   The primary units
are those of the motifemes, which chart the course of the tale from
initial to final situation.   The motifs which realize each motifeme
are considered to be so chosen as to place the larger units

in a logical relation involving simultaneous similarities and differences. It is possible, too, that sometimes these relationships might be manifested by the motifs themselves, within the motifeme. If, as is so often the case, the final situation presents a reversal of the initial state, then the semantic manifestations of the various syntagmatic elements in this progress from one to the other will involve some aspect of this transformation. On the one hand, the characters enter into a system of relationships according to the various actantial roles they fill. On the other, the various acts enter into a similar system according to the manner of their manifestation in particular actions.

In the realm of the characters the fundamental opposition is, of course, that between protagonist and antagonist. Olrik lists among his 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative' (1965) the Law of Contrast. 'The Sage is always polarized ... The Law of Contrast works from the protagonist of the Sage out to the other individuals, whose characteristics and actions are determined by the requirement that they be antithetical to those of the protagonist' (p.135). Considered in terms of their actantial roles each of a tale's characters is found to be aligned with one side or the other of this fundamental polarity.

Since actant and act are interdependent, and consequently so are their corresponding motif manifestation as character and action, it is often possible to utilize the homological model in the analysis of the characters (Hendricks 1970, 107). The repetition behind the proportion A: B:: C: D may be one of identity or of similarity (p.100), but in formalizing the relationship between actants (and characters) A, B and acts (and actions) a, b — A: B::a: b — it demonstrates the inherent polarity between character groups and, indeed, plot episodes. (p.107). Of course, the same characters may assume different

actantial roles in different motifemes.   This is particularly
significant if in so doing the character also moves from one side
of the protagonist-antagonist polarity to the other.   Such semantic
shifts indicate especially central oppositions, or contradictions,
which the text is concerned to mediate.

Taken together the character and action manifestations of each
plot episode often reveal a logical relation among episodes in the
form of the ' "semantic rectangle" ...   designed to diagram the way
in which, from any given starting point S, a whole complex of
meaning possibilities, indeed a complete meaning system, may be
derived'.

$$S \longleftrightarrow -S$$
$$\text{(crossing arrows)}$$
$$-\overline{S} \qquad \overline{S}$$
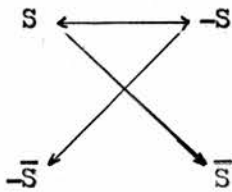
(Jameson 1972, 163).

This system of relationships is based on the logical concepts
of the contradictory and the contrary.   Structurally, any fact or
situation (S) presupposes a binary opposition in that it implies its
own contradiction (-S).   Along the path from one to the other
further, intermediate possibilities are explored, in terms of the
simple negation of each term ($\overline{S}$ and $-\overline{S}$).

Other semantic relationships, some simpler, some perhaps more
complex, will be uncovered in each particular narrative.   Some will
involve other terms of the manifested text, e.g. geography (both
physical and spiritual), social status, sex, etc.   In this much

that had been left aside on the textural level earlier will be
reincorporated into the analysis.

But to attempt to discuss semantic structures without reference
to the specific texts is not only very difficult, it also tends to
get us rather ahead of ourselves.   Syntagmatic structures are
describable in terms of the fundamental unities of the narrative
activity.   The various models of paradigmatic structures, however,
are only tools the applicability of which to any particular narrative
can only be confirmed, or disconfirmed, in the event of actual analy-
sis.   In one sense the application of the method mirrors the product-
ion of the tales themselves.   It is based upon certain fundamental
structures, but it uses in each individual expression (analysis)
whatever particular means are appropriate to the immediate task at
hand.   It is the poet's freedom to fill his syntagmatic structures
with characters and actions according to his inclination which
generates a paradigmatic level of structure.   And our method must
remain equally free, having delineated the compositional structures,
to consider this level according to the terms set by the poet's
choices.

3. Ancient Near Eastern Texts

In this study I will analyse and interpret, by the method outlined
above, a selection of ancient Near Eastern texts.   An initial problem
presented by these mythological and other literary materials is, of
course, their fragmentary nature;   fragmentary both in the selective
fortuity of their recovery as well as in the actual states of their
preservation.   A.L. Oppenheim, in a section of his book Ancient
Mesopotamia entitled 'Why a "Mesopotamian Religion" Should Not be

Written', argues that precisely because our information is limited to more or less complete fragments of poetry and ritual instruction it is impossible to reconstruct the actual religious milieu of this long dead civilization. 'All these works which we are wont to call mytho- logical should be studied by the literary critic rather than by the historian of religion' (1977, 177). I want here to take on this role of literary critic, at least in so far as considering, closely and individually, some of these myths. The texts will be analysed to discover their individual meanings, as manifested in their own terms. But I do not think this will be without benefit to the study of ancient religion. The interpretation of these texts, singly and together, will also speak to us of their context. We may never be able to reconstruct very fully the complex systems of actual religious practice in Mesopotamia. Yet there is much that we can learn about religious attitudes and thought. Rather than despair at what is lost, we should try to make the fullest possible use of what remains.

Among those who have sought to discover meaning and context in this material certain main currents of thought are discernible. The first of these, known as the myth-ritual school, now carries little, if any, weight. This theory, which can be traced back to Frazer and whose main proponents in this particular context include Hooke (1933; 1958) and Gaster (1961), holds that myth is the spoken part of ritual and, in fact, has its origins in ritual. The weaknesses of this position have been pointed out by a number of authors, in particular Fontenrose (1966) and Kirk (1970). Certainly some myths are associated with rituals, but many, perhaps many more, are not. Kramer is explicit in his opinion about this concerning the Sumerian materials. 'Practically all of the extant Sumerian myths are literary and etio- logical in character; they are neither "rite spoken", as myth has often

been erroneously categorized, nor verbal appendages to ritual acts'
(1963, 144). As for the notion that myths are derived from ritual,
well, this rather partakes of the nature of an origin myth itself.
That the structure of certain myths may reflect that of ritual is
another matter, one having to do with basic structures of cultural
activity itself. Culture, as an attempt to order experience, tends
to find certain satisfactory structures suitable to various manifes-
tations. The whole myth-ritual theory, the very idea of 'rite
spoken', is based on this recognition of different expressions
sharing similar formal qualities. To relate it to the structural
basis and terms of this study, it is a recognition of the narrative
qualities of ritual. We cannot, therefore, explain one by reference
to the other, though we could probably approach ritual as well as
myth by a method such as I have adopted here.

Two other approaches to the material are exemplified by two of
the most important scholars in the field, S.N. Kramer and Thorkild
Jacobsen. The interpretations of both are mainly allegorical,
though Kramer's are the more exclusively so. He holds that the myths
are primarily the symbolic expressions of physical observations. For
instance, in myths about the origin of the cosmos the gods merely
represent various elements of the material world: sky, water, air
etc. (1944). Jacobsen (1946) takes issue with this manner of
interpretation, in that he considers it to be incomplete, that it does
not go far enough in taking into account the emotional and psycholo-
gical aspects of myth. He sees in the mutual relations of these
nature gods not just the simple description of physical occurrences,
but an attempt as well to understand the natural world and to accept
it psychologically. Jacobsen's further understanding of Mesopotamian

religion as a patterning of the cosmos along the lines of the human state and its institutions also provides an important insight (1949; 1976). Certainly the tensions of those human institutions are reflected in the mythology. But in his actual interpretations of the particular myths his approach remains fundamentally allegorical. Various elements are all referred to some part of nature and subsumed into representations of natural, usually seasonal, processes. This aspect of the mythology is often real enough, but it is not altogether sufficient. It has a simplicity which does not finally account for all of the complexities of the material.

One scholar who has made the attempt to apply certain structuralist ideas to the Mesopotamian materials is G.S. Kirk (1970). His approach is based, although not all that strictly, upon the work of Lévi-Strauss. He demonstrates in a number of the myths the juxtaposition of such themes as human sexuality and natural fertility, nature and culture, and the working through of their relationships in both their correct and incorrect, their acceptable and unacceptable forms. His work is both useful and suggestive.

The work of philologists and historians of religion forms the foundation upon which any study of ancient Near Eastern myth must build. I will return to the specific interpretations of these authors, among others, in the course of my own analyses of the texts.

I will analyse five tales, or, more precisely, four texts and three versions of a fifth tale which survives in both Sumerian and Akkadian recensions. This last is 'Inanna/Ishtar's Descent to the Nether World', and besides the two ancient, base texts there is a third edition compiled from various Sumerian sources (Wolkstein and

Kramer 1983). This reconstructed version presents us with an interesting instance of the traditional storyteller at work, and of structure working backward and forward across the history of a text, informing both its reading and writing.

Four of the tales — 'Gilgamesh and Agga', 'Enki and Ninhursag', 'Enlil and Ninlil', and 'Inanna's Descent' — were originally set down in Sumerian. My primary sources for three of them are Kramer's translations in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Pritchard ed. 1955, hereafter referred to as ANET). The tablets on which they were found date from the first half of the second millennium B.C. (ANET, 38, 45, 52). For the fourth, 'Enlil and Ninlil', I rely mainly on versions presented by both Kramer (1944; 1963) and Jacobsen (1949; 1976). These tablets Kramer dates approximately 2000 B.C. (1944, 11).

The other two tales I will be looking at, 'Adapa' and 'Ishtar's Descent to the Nether World', are Akkadian and my primary sources for these are the translations by E.A. Speiser (ANET). Versions of both were discovered in the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, though the longest extant fragment of 'Adapa' is much older, having been found in the El-Amarna archives which date from the fourteenth century B.C. (ANET, 101, 107). This points up the fundamental problem of dating all of these compositions, that their place and archaeological level of discovery tell us little or nothing about their actual age and history as stories. They speak of a distant past and, as copied versions of traditional tales with possibly oral antecedents, they must in all likelihood have lengthy histories of their own. If anything, though, their transmission through time, and the act of writing them down and continuing this transmission through repeated copyings, can only have served to refine and crystallize their narrative structures.

An important factor in choosing these particular tales is their completeness. This is a practical matter, given the nature of this study. I have set myself the dual task of testing out a method of narrative analysis as well as interpreting and commenting upon Mesopotamian myth. In order to do this I need fairly complete narratives to analyse. These are what will give us the best initial picture of the structural forms utilized by Mesopotamian literature. The full system of meaning in any tale is also composed of the relations of all of its parts. It can be hoped that what is learned here will help in approaching more fragmentary texts, but we must first try to grasp them, where we can, whole, before we can go on to make sense of more isolated pieces. Only the analysis and interpretation of relatively complete tales can provide a context within which to consider the fragmentary remains of others.

The texts I will be analysing are translations. This should have no effect on the deeper structural levels of motifs and motifemes. It does mean, though, that my perception of their texture is dependent upon that of the translators. Of course, these are languages which have had to be deciphered to be read in the first place, and the philologists continue to have their own disagreements. Even they are still refining their understanding of the texture level. I remain at one remove further from it, but will be using what are considered to be the standard translations. Certain of the tales' strictly literary and stylistic qualities may be somewhat obscured, but as I am concerned primarily with their more concrete events and thematic elements this does not pose a significant problem for the kind of analyses I intend to do. It does require an awareness of the sorts of problems encountered by the translation of these texts. But given that, and the specifically structural extent of my descriptive

goals, these texts should provide suitably useful and important material for narrative analysis and, through that, insight into Mesopotamian thought and religion.

II. GILGAMESH AND AGGA

1. The Story

Agga, king of Kish, sends to Gilgamesh in Erech an ultimatum: submit or be conquered.

> [The lord] Gilgamesh before the elders of
>   his city
> Put the [matter], seeks out (their) word:
> 'To complete the [wells], to complete all
>   the wells of the land,
> To complete the [wells] (and) the small bowls
>   of the land,
> To dig the wells, to complete the fastening ropes,
> Let us not submit to the house of Kish, let us
>   smite it with weapons.'
> The convened assembly of the elders of his city
> Answer Gilgamesh:
> 'To complete the wells, to complete all
>   the wells of the land,
> To complete the wells (and) the small bowls
>   of the land,
> To dig the wells, to complete the fastening ropes,
> Let us submit to the house of Kish, let us not
>   smite it with weapons.'
> Gilgamesh, the lord of Kullab,
> Who performs heroic deeds for Inanna,
> Took not the word of the elders of his city to heart.
> A second time Gilgamesh, the lord of Kullab,
> Before the men of his city put the matter, seeks
>   out (their) word (lines 3-19).

Unsatisfied with the reply of the elders, the king turns to the 'men', the arms bearing males, of the city and presents his case to them precisely as he did to the elders. This time he finds a more receptive and encouraging audience. The men, praising Gilgamesh and their great city, agree that they must fight. This is what Gilgamesh wants to hear. 'At the word of the men of his city his heart rejoiced, his spirit brightened' (line 41). Preparations for battle are made. But the confidence of the Erechites proves unfounded.

The days were not five, the days were not ten,
Agga, the son of Enmebaraggesi besieged Erech;
Erech - its judgment was confounded (lines 48-50).

Gilgamesh calls for a hero to confront Agga and one called Birhurturri comes forward. But as he passes through the city gate the enemy falls on him. 'They crush his flesh' (line 62) and he is dragged before Agga. At this point another of Gilgamesh's soldiers, Zabar . . .ga, ascends to the top of the city wall. Birhurturri appeals to Agga, presenting Zabar. . .ga as the mighty king to whom he should have sense enough to submit.

Birhurturri says to him:
'O servant of the stout man, thy king
The stout man - is he not also my King?
Verily the stout man is my king,
Verily it is his ...forehead,
Verily it is his ...face,
Verily it is his beard of lapis lazuli,
Verily it is his gracious finger.'
The multitude did not cast itself down, the
    multitude did not rise,
The multitude did not cover itself with dust.
(The people) of all the foreign lands were not
    overwhelmed (lines 68-78).

The besieging army is not intimidated. 'Agga, the king of Kish, restrained not his soldierly heart' (line 81). Now Gilgamesh himself ascends the wall, to the great consternation of his people. 'After Zabbar. . .ga, Gilgamesh ascends toward the wall,/Terror fell upon the old and young of Kullab' (lines 84-85). But when Birhurturri now repeats his appeal it has the desired effect.

'O servant of the stout man, thy king
The stout man is my king.'
As he spoke,
The multitude cast itself down, the multitude
    rose,
The multitude covered itself with dust,
(The people) of all the foreign lands were
    overwhelmed (lines 91-96).

The siege is now lifted. Gilgamesh addresses Agga, thanking him. The tale concludes with praise for Gilgamesh (ANET, 44-47).

At one point the text is rather more ambiguous than I have presented it here. It is not made explicitly clear, in Birhurturri's two appeals to Agga, precisely to whom he is speaking nor to whom he is referring. The pronouns employed have no clear antecedents (see ANET, 46, n.19). However, I believe my reading makes the best sense and is both justified by the text and supported by the analysis which follows.

2. Analysis and Interpretation

The structure of this tale is very straightforward. It consists of two motifemes, each of which is filled by two parallel motif sequences. The first motifeme underlies lines 1-47 and is elaborated on the motif level by the deliberations of the leaders of Erech on whether or not to resist Agga's aggression. The remainder of the narrative manifests the second motifeme, detailing in its motifs the manner in which victory is eventually achieved. Both motifemes are elaborated by two motifs. The parallelism of each double series lies in their each employing the identical action in both. There are two in each motifeme, however, because by changing an actor in the second series of each the result obtained in the first motif is reversed. In the first instance Gilgamesh addresses his plea to defend Erech to the assembly of the elders. They turn him down and counsel submission. When in the second motif series, however, he addresses the identical plea to a different actor, the men of the city, they - and for the same reason given by the elders - agree to answer his call to arms. Similarly in the working out of the second motifeme Birhurturri first addresses himself to

Agga concerning Zabar...ga, but to no avail. Only when he attempts
a second time, now with Gilgamesh himself standing upon the wall, does
he succeed in his suit. The Sumerians, with their passion for
repetition and regularity (a passion which may perhaps have been even in-
cantatory, given the uncertainties of the natural world), might very
well have found a great deal of elegance in this mirror-like narrative
structure. Its aesthetic attributes aside, I think that our under-
standing of this structure is an important aid in reading this
sometimes fragmentary text. Even before going on to discover other
fields of meaning it immediately demonstrates one of the uses
of our method.

The difficulty with the fragmentary passages in the second part
of the tale, as Kramer points out, 'results from the ambiguity of the
"him" in line 68' (ANET, 46, n.19). After Zabar...ga ascends the
wall Birhurturri's speech concerning 'the stout man, thy king' is
prefaced only by 'Birhurturri says to him'. Does the 'him' refer
to Agga, or to Zabar...ga? The speech describes a countenance
which is supposed to be that of the king. But it has no effect:
'(The people) of all the foreign lands were not overwhelmed' (line 78).
Only when the same speech is used while Gilgamesh himself stands upon
the wall does it have the desired effect. The most sensible reading
then must be that Birhurturri's words are addressed to Agga and
concern the figures atop the wall. 'What', Kramer asks, 'is the
purpose of Zabar...ga's presence on the wall?'. Our answer is that
he is sent to fulfil the parallel motif structure upon which this
narrative is based. And furthermore, what the structure calls for
compositionally is given its own practical explanation on the texture
level in the great fear felt by the people of Erech upon seeing their
real king ascend to the wall: a decoy is sent first, and only when

he fails does Gilgamesh expose himself to the danger.

In trying to read beyond the narrative structure of this text
to its possible meanings our first impulse might be to see it
primarily as an adventure tale glorifying Gilgamesh, the legendary
ruler of Erech. And in this, as it turns out, perhaps for reasons
I shall suggest below, we would not find ourselves so very wide of
the mark. The text does establish a number of basic oppositions,
but within the confined compass of its structure they are not given
much room for elaboration. It is a simple, straightforward tale,
complicated only by the doubled motif functions of failure and
success. But while this complication does serve the aesthetic
purpose of supplying a certain suspense, it also does other duty
as well. For it is within the pairs of motifs which fulfil each
motifeme that we can begin to discover the basic oppositions with
which this text is concerned.

These oppositions are readily discernible. The fundamental
opposition upon which the entire tale rests is that between 'own'
and 'foreign'. Shall Erech be ruled by its own king or by the
house of Kish? The two motifs which embody the first motifeme
places the elders of the city over against its able-bodied men,
opposing young to old. They perhaps also oppose prudent wisdom
to decisive action. A certain problem arises in the use by all
contending parties of the same reasons for arriving at their con-
flicting choice of actions. Kramer sees in this a problem of
translation. We have all of the words, but because they can be
used to support the arguments of both sides he suspects an idiomatic
meaning which the translators have yet to penetrate (ANET, 45, n.4).
However I think the lines as we have them do make sense. They refer

to the digging of wells and generally to the improvement and
cultivation of the land.   Clearly these are appropriate activities
upon which to judge the relative merit of kings.   Perhaps reference
to these matters by all parties concerned represents a political
difference;   a disagreement as to which king would in fact make the
better ruler.   Gilgamesh is depicted elsewhere, quite explicitly so
in 'The Epic of Gilgamesh', as a venturesome and even over-zealous
ruler, perhaps therefore appearing as rather unsettling to an older
generation more concerned with livelihood than battle.   Thus both
groups could feel justified in using the future prosperity of Erech
as the basis for their own choice of the course of action to be
followed.

In the two motif series of the second part of the tale we find an
opposition established between the real and the false, embodied in the
stand-in king, Zabar...ga and the real 'stout man' Gilgamesh.   This
is a variation on the fundamental conflict of the tale between
Gilgamesh and Agga, the pretender or contender, to his throne.

These oppositions are simple and obvious.   They are really just
the sort of oppositions any tale must have to generate the narrative
movement.   They define the various protagonist/antagonist relationships.
They are narrative tools and their meaning does not reach much below
the surface of the text.

Nevertheless, this is a very tightly structured tale and its
movement does form a simple semantic rectangle using these oppositional
pairs.   To form such a rectangle we are obliged in this instance to
use the motif functions, of which there are four, rather than the
motifemes.   While it is in the nature of our method that the elements

of the paradigmatic analysis will be found on the motif level, and
in the texture, where content quickens structure, experience has shown
that usually each discrete motifeme contains a single set of meaning
elements and that they are then related, one to the others, in their
entirety.   In this case, however, we must separate each motifeme into
its two discrete motif functions, thus arriving at the four terms
necessary to establish the semantic rectangle.   What we have here is
a very tightly packed tale, wherein only two motifemes are used to
convey a full set of four logical terms.   This economy contributes
to our sense that this text has come down to us in its present state
through many retellings, and recopyings.

To present the rectangle then, the two elements on the left-hand
side correspond to the two motifs of the first, or deterioration,
motifeme.   The two on the right represent the paired actions of the
second motifeme, the amelioration.

```
Submit to:  foreign          Submit to:  own
            age      <--------->          youth
            false king  \    /            true king
                          \  /
                           \/
                           /\
                          /  \
Resist:     foreign      /    \  Resist:  own
            age                          youth
            false king                   'true king'
```
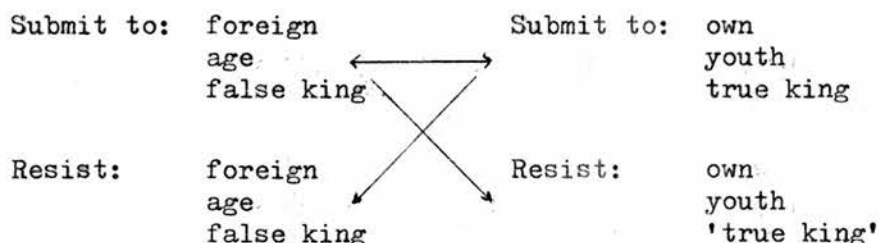
On the left we have the considerations which inform the two groups to
which Gilgamesh appeals concerning the future of Erech.   On the right
are the two responses of Agga to efforts to get him to lift the siege.
This is a structure of meaning, but all it really seems to accomplish
is the affirmation of certain basic values.

I have placed the 'true king' element of the third term of the
square in quotes because at this point the paradigmatic structure
seems to experience a slight hiccup.   As long as Zabar...ga is

presented, in our reading, as the king Gilgamesh it is correct to say
that Agga and his besieging army 'resist the true king'. This is
the logic of the situation as Birhurturri attempts to manipulate it.
But Zabar...ga is not Gilgamesh and Agga does not fall for the ploy.
Thus the 'false king' term should perhaps be more correctly entered
here, though it spoils the strict symmetry of the square. However,
the meanings and values of this tale are so plain that I suspect the
demands of the aesthetic, syntagmatic structure have been allowed to
take precedence, without causing any significant loss of impact on a
paradigmatic level which is relatively transparent to begin with.

Perhaps, too, this slight ambiguity is a result of packing all
four of the elements of the semantic rectangle into just two motifemes,
thus pressing the motif functions into a sort of double duty. The
two motifemes, as mirror images in a rise-and-fall structure, are very
economical in achieving both their narrative and semantic tasks. In
so far as Zabar...ga is acting as proxy for Gilgamesh, he partakes of
the 'true' kingship. Nothing can change, however, the fact that he
is not really the holder of that title. So the uncertainty of focus
in this motif arises from its attempt to fulfil simultaneously the
somewhat differing requirements of both the syntagmatic and paradig-
matic structures. Perhaps the most important point to be made here
is that our ideas about narrative structures, whether syntagmatic or
paradigmatic, can be merely guides when we confront any specific text.
To try and force any particular tale into a preconceived structural
straightjacket does a disservice to both the material and to our
method. These texts are artifacts of human culture and their structures
guide their composition but certainly do not absolutely determine it.

This is a very tightly, even elegantly, structured narrative.
It is also clearly a very late version of the tale. The tablets from

which this translation was made date from the first half of the
second millennium B.C.   But, as Kramer points out in his introduction
to his translation, the events to which they refer are much further
removed in time, 'probably to the first quarter of the third millennium
B.C.' (ANET, 45).   The perfection of the tale's symmetries may well
be partly the result of many recopyings.   It must have retained an
important place in Sumerian literature to have survived so long.   For
one thing it is an important bit of history about the legendary
Gilgamesh.   For another it was the scribes who took the greatest
interest in such matters and, what is more, were taught by means of
the copying and recopying of such texts.   This process would lead
not only to the survival of the materials used but also to their
gradual refinement.   If then this was indeed a 'teaching text',
whether for its historical significance or its compositional
qualities or, as seems most likely, for both reasons, this would help
to explain how copies of these tablets came to be in the library of
their discovery at Nippur.

I have considered the lengthy survival of this text in part
because analysis revealed no particularly deep social or psychological
dilemmas which it mediates.   And such matters must have a bearing on
how we are to define a 'myth'.   This is one of the problems with
which we began this study, and this tale raises some interesting
questions.   Burkert, in his discussion of the qualities of myth which
set it apart from other forms of traditional tale, speaks of myth as
'a traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something
of collective importance'.   He goes on to point out as an initial
indication of such reference the well-known fact that myths, unlike
say fairy tales, utilize proper names (1979, 23).   Proper names

have reference and they contribute to the collective importance
which the tale bears by referring its hearers to such significant
categories as tribe, nation, and ancestors.   Certainly this tale,
as are all of the tales at which we shall look, is very specific in
this matter of naming.   Of course, we cannot know to what precise
uses this tale was put, beyond our speculations about its being a
scholastic history text, which might have further contributed to its
collective importance.   It does not knock heads with any great
metaphysical dilemmas.   But it does serve to validate the history,
and historical significance, of the city-state of Erech, and the
role in that history of the king Gilgamesh.   That is perhaps
sufficient.   This tale has already demonstrated to us the need to
not be too dogmatic in the application of our methods.   It may well
teach us the same lesson as regards our search for definitions.

III. ADAPA

1. <u>The Story</u>

The tale opens by introducing the human protagonist Adapa, whom the god Ea has chosen as his especial favorite and priest of his temple.

> Wide understanding he had perfected for him to
>   disclose the designs of the land.
> To him he had given wisdom; eternal life he had not
>   given him.
> In those days, in those years, the sage from Eridu,
> Ea, created him as the model of men (A, lines 3-6).

Adapa is responsible for much of the important work of the god's temple, both ritual and practical.

> With the bakers of Eridu he does the baking;
> Bread and water for Eridu daily he provides,
> With his clean hand(s) he arranges the (offering)
>   table,
> Without him the table cannot be cleared.
> He steers the ship, he does the prescribed fishing
>   for Eridu (A, lines 11-15).

One day, though, while Adapa is at sea doing his fishing for the temple the south wind comes up suddenly and capsizes his boat. In his anger and frustration Adapa curses the wind and immediately it ceases to blow.

> The south wind b(lew and submerged him),
> (Causing him to go down) to the home (of the fish):
> 'South wind, ...
> I will break thy wing!' Just as he had said (this)
>   with his mouth,
> The wing of the south wind was broken. For seven
>   days
> The south wind blew not upon the land (B, 1.2-7).

At the end of these seven days Anu notices the absence of the wind and asks the cause. His vizier informs him that the matter is of Adapa's doing and the great god demands that Adapa be brought before

him in heaven to account for his actions. Before the mortal sets

off, however, Ea takes him aside to advise him about how he should

act and what he should expect to occur at his extraordinary audience.

The god would have him appear before the heavenly gatekeepers dressed

in mourning. When they question his aspect he is to explain that he

mourns the disappearence of two gods from the earth. As the two

gods he claims to mourn will be these very gatekeepers, he can expect

them, in response to this flattery, to put in a good word for him

with Anu. As Ea explains it:

> '... They will glance at each other
> And will smile. A good word they
> Will speak to Anu, (and) Anu's benign face
> They will cause to be shown thee' (B, 1.25-28).

Ea's other advice is equally explicit; under no circumstances is he

to eat or drink the bread and water which will be offered him for,

says the god, these will be the bread and water of death. The

garment and anointing oil he will be offered, however, he is to

accept. Thus armed Adapa sets off with Anu's messenger to ascend

the 'road to heaven'.

Events at the gate transpire precisely as Ea had foreseen them.

And when Adapa has described to Anu the events surrounding his curse

upon the wind the gatekeepers speak up for him. Anu finds 'his heart

quieted'. But the god is still disturbed that Ea should have shown

this mortal such great favor.

> 'Why did Ea to a worthless human of the heaven
> And of the earth the plan disclose,
> Rendering him distinguished and making a name
>   for him?
> As for us, what shall we do about him?' (B, 1.57-60)

His answer to this rhetorical question is to offer Adapa the bread

and water of life.   He would give the human immortality.   But Adapa,

true to the instructions of his divine protector, declines these things.

The garment and oil are also proffered, and these he accepts.   Anu

is richly amused by this instance of human perversity.

> As Anu looked at him, he laughed at him:
> 'Come now, Adapa! Why didst thou neither eat
>   nor drink?
> Thou shalt not have (eternal) life! Ah, perverse
>   mankind!'
> 'Ea, my master,
> Commanded me: "Thou shalt not eat, thou shalt
>   not drink" '   (B, 1.66-69).

Ea, too, is a target of the god's mirth.

> Anu laughed aloud at the doing of Ea, (saying):
> 'Of the gods of heaven and earth, as many as there
>   be, whoever gave such a command,
> So as to make his own command exceed the command
>   of Anu?'
> As Adapa from the horizon of heaven to the zenith
>   of heaven
> Cast a glance, he saw its awesomeness   (D, lines 4-8).

Adapa, newly robed and anointed but still mortal, is returned

to earth.   He brings disease back with him, however.   This Ninkarrak,

the goddess of healing, is assigned to allay.   And here the text

breaks off (ANET, 101-103).

2. Analysis and Interpretation

One of the most immediate attractions of this tale is the

literary sophistication it displays.   Especially its many small,

but telling, observations on the very human psychology of its

characters.   In fact, one of its most basic premises is that the

gods are like men but of a superior wisdom, and with the added advan-

tage of immortality.   What is implicit throughout the literature is

here — as in only one other case, that of the survivor of The Flood —

made explicit. Divine knowledge never wholly supplants the basic
humanity of the gods.

This human psychology of the divine is a necessary motive force
in all tales of deities. For the obvious reason that there is none
other to refer to. Certainly it informs the God of the Old Testament.
And it perhaps reaches its apogee, logically and literarily, in the
New.

Where this aspect of the divine begins to place itself beyond the
pale of human understanding only faith can intrude. When the Book of
Job, like some of the Mesopotamian wisdom literature, takes as its
meaning the ultimate impossibility of the human comprehension of
meaning it becomes – though its human protagonists keep it alive as
a story – problematic and unsettling.

At least here we can still speculate as to divine motives. Only
Ea's are ambiguous. And this tale makes those of the other gods
apparent in a delightful way. It is almost sly in its brief depiction
of the two gatekeepers succumbing to Adapa's flattery. The glance they
exchange is superb, as is Anu's laughter.

This is not the sort of tale which sketches deity in terms of
received and well-worn epithets. One might say that the life Adapa
fails to gain has been granted instead to the story and its telling.

It is a tale which has not received as much attention from
commentators as some. Perhaps this is because it is apparently so
straightforward. Some also look to it for Biblical parallels and
antecedents. This may go some way toward explaining why so many insist
on seeing Adapa's opportunity for immortality as that of all mankind.
There is nothing in the text to support this. And arguments from
context only reinforce the point.

Speiser, whose translation I am working from here, refers in his brief introduction to 'the motif of man's squandered opportunity for gaining immortality'. He also points out the equation of the Akkadian 'a-da-ap with "man" (hence "Adam"?)' (ANET, 101). Saggs says the tale 'has a reference to the possibility of mankind acquiring immortality' (1962, 407); though he is less clear about the matter in then retelling the myth, using language which could be read either way. Kramer, however, insists throughout his discussions on the loss being not just Adapa's alone but that of all men. Ea 'unwittingly, it seems, deprives Adapa and mankind of the gift they desire most, that of immortality' (1961, 125). But he is conjecturing here, both as to mankind's opportunity and the inclination of Ea's wit.

As I have said, it is perhaps through comparison with the Biblical tale of Adam that there has arisen this widespread propensity to see Adapa's opportunity as pertaining to mankind as a whole. Heidel even takes the myth to be answering the question 'Why must man suffer and die?' (1951, 124) — a question which is applicable to the Bible story, but not to the one at hand. An examination of the text, and of what else we know of Mesopotamian attitudes and beliefs concerning death, immortality and the divine will make this clear. Only Kirk takes the tale as written, stating 'I believe the choice must have simply concerned Adapa himself' (1970, 124).

In this myth immortality is not there to be lost, but rather gained. Adapa's own mortality is stressed at the very beginning of the story 'To him he Ea had given wisdom; eternal life he had not given him' (A, line 4). The tale nowhere says, or even suggests, that the rest of mankind would have shared in Adapa's immortality, had he gained it. Nor does Mesopotamian religious thought seem to have been much troubled by ideas of an original human immortality.

Their steady idea was that mankind was created, in one way or another, by the gods to be their servants on earth.   And these humans, 'the black-headed ones', were created mortal.   As the alewife attempts to explain to Gilgamesh:

> When the gods created mankind,
> Death for mankind they set aside,
> Life in their own hands retaining (ANET, 90).

That the opportunity for eternal life was available to Adapa alone is further supported by the parallels to his situation in that of the hero of the flood stories, the only known instance in the literature of a human being actually being granted immortality. Utnapishtim, as he is called in the 'Epic of Gilgamesh', has learned a 'secret of the great gods'.   So he is made immortal, 'like unto us gods', the implication being that he has become too wise to remain a mere mortal.   And he is sent to live far away 'at the mouth of the rivers', like a god, removed from normal human intercourse, where he cannot expose other mortals to such knowledge as whose reward might be eternal life (ANET, 95).   This is precisely the attitude Anu assumes toward Adapa.

> 'Why did Ea to a worthless human of the heaven
> And of the earth the plan disclose,
> Rendering him distinguished and making a name
>   for him?
> As for us, what shall we do about him?   Bread
>   of life
> Fetch for him and he shall eat (it)' (B. lines 57-61).

Adapa has come too far, seen and learned too much, so that, as with Utnapishtim, Anu decides that, having come this far, he might as well be allowed to take the last step.   The consequent loss, like the wisdom which makes it possible, is Adapa's alone, and not all of mankind's.   It is difficult to understand, actually, knowing what

we do of the gods' purposes in creating the human race, how any
commentator could read into Anu's gesture toward Adapa an offer of
immortality to all of mankind.   So I must agree with Kirk when he
writes that Adapa's was 'a choice between life and death;   but I
conjecture that this was never a serious issue of Akkadian mythical
thought, but rather a folktale theme used here to show up other
facets of the gods' (1970, 125).   Certainly it is a serious issue
to Adapa but, like Gilgamesh, the myth is in this respect an exemplary
tale about the almost total impossibility of any mortal ever
achieving this goal.

Kirk, though correct on this rather misleading point — misleading
in that it tends to initiate a discourse which leads away from, rather
than into, the text itself — has very little else to say about this
myth.   He notes the similarities to portions of the Gilgamesh epic
and considers the parts played by Anu and Ea to be thematically
parallel to those of Zeus and Prometheus in the Greek tale of the
choice between sacrifices.   'Ea resembles Prometheus in falsely
thinking that he can deceive the king of the gods.'   He can only
suggest, though, that the life-death issue is secondary to such by-
play between the gods and to a desire 'to throw light on the powers
and privileges of the priesthood.   Just as the Gilgamesh myth has
as one of its themes the insistence that even a king must suffer death,
so the Adapa myth may emphasize that even the greatest scrupulousness
in carrying out the temple rituals cannot be expected to carry so un-
natural a reward as immortality' (1970, 125).

There is more to be found in this myth, however, than just a
'light-hearted folktale motif' (Kirk 1970, 124), or ruminations on
the inevitability of mortality and the limited potential of priesthood.

A closer look at the relations of its parts reveals a much fuller
discourse on the structure of the divine-human relationship.

The narrative structure of this tale is based upon only two
motifemes, one rather short; the other much longer.   In this we
have another example of how purely compositional, and abstract,
the motifeme level is.   A motifeme is that within which actant and
act combine to achieve our structural definition of a tale: Situation;
Response; Result.   These are the parameters of this 'basic tale',
while the motif functions which supply character and action to the
otherwise empty semantic categories of the motifeme determine the
length and complexity of its contribution to the particular narrative.
They may draw it well out, or compress it into a few terse statements.

Here in the first motifeme of this tale we have an act (confront-
ation, or battle) played out between three actants (Subject, Helper
and Opponent).   There is a Result (the Subject triumphs over his
Opponent) and so the motifeme is closed.   The motifs which realize
it are brief and straightforward.

The second motifeme is based upon the same categories of actants
and acts, but its motifs draw it out at greater length, and even
juggle the actantial roles among different characters.   It is longer
in the telling, but on this lowest and most abstract level the two
are still equivalent as compositional units.   It is because of the
extreme abstraction of this level that a tale is much easier to discuss,
once these broad outlines are delineated, on the motif level.   For here
we can deal in the concrete characters and actions which the narrative
employs.

On the motif level the manifestation of the first motifeme consists
of an Initial Situation, describing Adapa and his relationship with

Ea, and then the motif function of Adapa's confrontation with the South Wind.   Adapa fills the role of Subject and Ea that of Helper, for it is clear that it is through the special relation between the two, and the consequent wisdom the god has imparted to him, that Adapa is able to overcome his Opponent the South Wind.

The realization of the second motifeme utilizes more motif functions, thus spreading the action over a number of partial conclusions and in this way delaying the full and final result of Adapa's confrontation with the great god Anu.   In the first motif sequence Ea again fills the role of Helper as he advises Adapa on how to proceed in his dealings with the other gods.   Then follows the preliminary confrontation between Adapa and the gatekeepers.   A third sequence of motifs relates the main encounter, that between Anu and Adapa.   The tale closes with a recounting and conclusion which we may call a Final Situation, relating how matters stand at the end between man and god.

If we label these motif functions by type (an enterprise which folklorists have long found attractive, if not always, depending on criteria and goals, entirely useful), we may say that the tale proceeds by a series of Tests, with Ea's advice being an Intervention of the Helper.   Using these terms we can outline the basic structure of the narrative on the levels of motif and motifeme thus:

First Motifeme:	Initial Situation;	Ea and Adapa, relation and attributes.
	First Test;	Adapa's confrontation with the South Wind.
Second Motifeme:	Intervention of Helper;	Ea's instructions
	Second Test;	Adapa's encounter with the gatekeepers.
	Third Test;	Adapa's encounter with Anu.
	Final Situation;	Marking and return of Adapa, introduction of disease and its mitigation.

That the structure of the motif level of this particular myth does allow itself to be described in this way provides a helpful impetus to our paradigmatic analysis.

But I want to approach this axis by first looking briefly at the broader semantic relations of the two largest narrative units, the motifemes, as they are embodied on the motif, and texture levels.

The overall semantic structure of this narrative is easily discerned, with or without direct reference to the two motifemes which constitute its most basic narrative structure. The plot may be said to be of a 'rise-and-fall' type. Even so, it is not tragic in the Aristotelian sense. Certainly it has its tragic aspects. But the rise is exceptional and unnatural, the consequent fall only a return to the established and appropriate. Adapa is not laid low by events, but rather returned to his proper place following the shortlived attainment of a position in the gaining of which he has over-reached himself. The first motifeme develops this unnatural state of affairs. Adapa, by means of Ea's beneficence — or even benefice — presumes to position and power. (Though perhaps more properly the presumption is Ea's, as Adapa's motive through all of this is simply the pleasing of his god.) The second motifeme relates the restoration of the divinely decreed status quo. This is a simple two part structure of deterioration-amelioration (see Hendricks 1972; Bremond 1970), except that here the trouble is precipitated by gain, and the ultimate gain — or restoration of the desirable balanced state — is brought about by loss and diminution. Indeed, a most interesting aspect of this myth is the way in which it utilizes a full range of standard folklore structures yet fills them with a whole set of inverted semantic contents. Inverted in the sense that they run counter to the 'standard' folktale movement from loss and

difficulty to happy ending.   Of course, there is no 'proper' clothing
for narrative structures.   This freedom to fill them however is
necessary, both theoretically and practically.   And this is a myth,
not a fairy story.   But this inversion goes straight to the heart of
the message of this text.   It begins with matters turned on their
heads and so must pursue a contrary course to put the balance right.

We can also view this two part movement of the tale as pitting god
against god, in that Ea's efforts to elevate Adapa to a more exalted
place, in the first motifeme, run afoul of Anu and his concern to
maintain the proper arrangement of things human and divine, in the
second.   This aspect of the tale, however, is more complex than simply
that, and in fact the shifting relationships of the gods, one to the
other and each to the man, constitutes one of the pivots around which
the full discourse of the motif and texture levels revolves.

Turning to the specific motif functions themselves, we can begin
to trace this semantic movement in greater detail.   To begin with,
from the point of view of the man there is a clear hierarchical progress-
ion of the outcomes of the three Tests.   However, they do not, as I
have pointed out, progress toward success in the more typical folklore
fashion, but rather away from it.   In the first Test Adapa is success-
ful on his own terms and through his own power.   The second also has a
positive result, but because of the specific advice he receives from Ea.
The third encounter ends in failure and loss.   Reid, in her study of
Kwakiutl myth (1974), also discerns a hierarchical arrangement of
episodes concerning encounters between human and supernatural protag-
onists, but with one obvious difference.   In her material it is always
a weaker human who must progressively acquire power in order to achieve
a satisfactory conclusion; fundamental human weakness is allayed
through a series of encounters with the supernatural.   The progress of

this myth is precisely the opposite: Adapa goes from being powerful, with the help of a god, to being weak and under the protection of the gods. The human being is progressively stripped of power, prominence and self-reliance. This myth is not concerned with the success a man might hope to achieve as he makes his way in a numinous world, but rather with the highly dependent status of man in the cosmic order. The gods might compete among themselves, but man is only a pawn in their games. He cannot truly act but only react, perhaps only accept. And except for his brief outburst against the South Wind, Adapa remains curiously passive throughout the tale - busy but passive. That he initially approaches the status of a god in his wisdom and power is acknowledged by Anu's decision to offer him, 'the human offspring, / Who, lord-like, broke the south wind's wing' (D, lines 12-13), the final step in that direction, immortality. Having missed that opportunity Adapa returns to earth if not weaker than before, for bringing disease with him, then at least fully apprised of the weakness and mortality even a priest must accept as being also human.

We might say that the sin of hubris claims its wages. But is Ea, too, a proper target of laughter? His motives are nowhere explained. Does he intend that Adapa should be denied immortality? The tale claims that he 'knows what pertains to heaven' (B, line 14). And, whatever he does foresee, he foretells everything aright - save the most important moment. Ea was considered to be mankind's best friend among the gods. But if he is trying to protect Adapa here he only succeeds in giving injury. Perhaps there is a theological point being made here concerning the relative status of Ea and Anu. But it is not really made strongly enough to suggest polemic. Priestly politics would not seem to be a primary motivation behind this text. Anu, however, is amused and chastising about what he clearly considers the presumption of the clever

Ea.   His little speech toward the end makes a claim that the tale
nowhere else seriously attempts to refute.

> 'Of the gods of heaven and earth, as many as there be,
>   Who ever gave such a command,
> So as to make his own command exceed the command
>   of Anu?' (D, lines 5-6).

What is more telling, though, is the way in which these relations play
themselves out as relations, structurally.

Consider the choice on the motif level of characters to manifest
the actants provided for by the motifemes.   The primary actant roles
are those of Subject, Helper and Opponent.   But characters, in their
appearance on the motif level, are free to change their actantial roles
in the course of a narrative.   And the way in which they do in this
text is revealing.   The Intervention of the Helper motif predicts a
certain configuration of roles in the tests to come.   But subsequent
motifs only partially bear these predictions out.

Adapa remains in the position of Subject throughout the text.
But whereas Ea had seemed to be consistently assuming the position of
Helper, the unexpected course of the Third Test reveals that midway
through the second motifeme he has actually shifted into the role of
Opponent.   He steers Adapa safely past the heavenly gatekeepers, but
his advice concerning the encounter with Anu, supposedly intended to
avert danger, instead cheats Adapa of one of mankind's fondest desires.
Anu, in a complementary movement, becomes in this final test not
Opponent but Helper, albeit thwarted.   (We might speculate that a
greater good is thereby preserved, but to do so would be to reach
beyond the text and our method.   Anu's laughter best speaks for the
tale itself.)

Thus we find the gods not only choosing up sides for or against

man, but being inconstant in their choices. Or at least so they appear to the categories of man the storyteller. This ambivalence is reiterated at the end of the myth. Here the benighted Adapa is first anointed, then confronted with the meanness of man before the gods. Anu decrees for mankind a life of disease and suffering, and then promises a deity to help allay these. In other words, he insists on the gods' freedom to choose either actantial role, Helper or Opponent, at will.

Ea is the god most concerned for the welfare of mankind. But even he cannot entirely bridge the gulf between the two spheres. Anu, at the head of the pantheon, is a more forbidding figure, much less intimately concerned, but not entirely unsympathetic. These ambivalent attitudes, the gods' relation to man as both allies and enemies, generate a system of meaning within this text. The three Tests and the Final Situation form a semantic rectangle which charts the effect of the exchange of actantial positions on the relationships which concern this tale:

$$\frac{\text{MAN}}{\text{NATURE}} \longleftrightarrow \frac{\text{NATURE}}{\text{MAN}}$$

$$\text{MAN} + \text{GOD} \qquad \text{MAN} - \text{GOD}$$
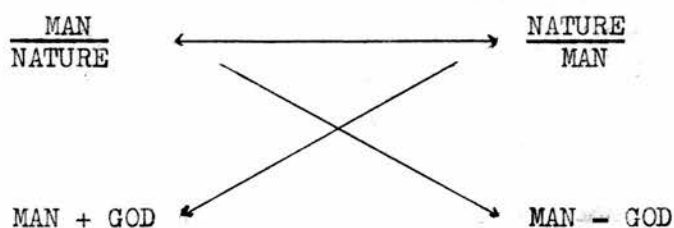
At the outset the human subdues nature and because he possesses 'of the heaven / And of the earth the plan' is 'lord-like': man over nature. In the end, however, man is no longer the victor but the victim, of disease, suffering and mortality, and is totally dependent on the gods for whatever relief they might provide: nature over man. The second and third tests fill the intermediate positions. In the one case, with the god's help and cooperation, Adapa is able to advance, literally, further along the road to heaven: man plus god. This

test is designed along the familiar folktale lines of what Dundes (1964) calls, in his reworking of Propp's system, the function pair Deceit/Deception. Adapa feigns mourning before the gatekeepers. The man, with the help of one god, wins out over others, and coerces their aid as well. But in the last test of all this divine help of Ea's proves to be for nought, and indeed becomes a real hindrance: man less god. The help, in its effect, is opposition. The ultimate aspect of divine identification, immortality, slips through his fingers.

The problem which this myth poses is that of the relationships between man and nature and the gods. It presents all of the possibilities and thus embodies a way of 'thinking about' these relationships. Nature, in terms of its ultimate control, is the domain of the gods. Man may utilize aspects of it, may even, on occasion, seem to subdue it. But in fact, man is quite helpless before it, and here the gods enter into the equation as the mediators (for good or ill) between man and nature. Or rather, because the gods are the embodiment of the different aspects of nature, mankind's relationship with nature is ultimately determined by his relationship to the gods. There is a sort of pessimism which courses through this tale — 'Ah, perverse mankind' — but it is not totally dark. Man can have friends and allies among the gods, his problem is that he cannot always know them. Disease is introduced and simultaneously allayed, neither triumphs absolutely. The gods reserve unto themselves the luxury of capriciousness. At least that is the most that human understanding can seem to discover.

The theology of the god-man relationship presented here is founded on the central Mesopotamian conception of man as created for the service of the gods. Adapa's adventures, and their outcome, stem directly from his obedience to Ea. This service is clearly important, and the gods seem to depend on mankind for it. But it is far from a

relationship of equals. If man serves the gods, why is nature, and by extension the divine, so often hostile to him? There can be no simple answer. In the interplay of the gods themselves, however, can be glimpsed the operation of larger systems with perhaps other, less understood, goals. This tale considers this greater reality in the only terms it knows, sensing in the world around it personality and will. What it cannot understand of this divine world is laid, finally, to a knowledge well beyond that of man. It is the ambivalence of deity which this myth confronts but cannot ultimately solve, and so can only treat as itself a kind of answer. Adapa, though, represents the importance of man as well as his dependence on the gods. He may not fully fathom Anu's laughter, but he has come close enough to hear it.

IV. ENKI AND NINHURSAG

1. The Story

This tale is set in the paradisical land of Dilmun, where it
seems sickness, old age and death are unknown.

> The land Dilmun is pure, the land Dilmun is clean;
> The land Dilmun is clean, the land Dilmun is
>   most bright.
> ....
> The lion kills not,
> The wolf snatches not the lamb,
> Unknown is the kid-devouring wild dog,
> Unknown is the grain-devouring...,
> [Unknown] is the ...widow,
> ....
> The sick-eyed says not 'I am sick-eyed,'
> The sick-headed (says) not 'I am sick-headed,'
> Its old woman (says) not 'I am an old woman,'
> Its old man (says) not 'I am an old man,'
> Unbathed is the maid, no sparkling water is
>   poured in the city,
>
> Who crosses the river utters no....,
> The wailing priest walks not about him,
> The singer utters no wail,
> By the side of the city he (utters) no lament.
> (lines 5, 6, 15-19, 22-30).

Here at the beginning, however, the city is lacking in one thing,

fresh water.   This Enki is asked to provide by the goddess Ninsikilla.

He does so, calling upon the gods of the sun and moon for aid, and in so

doing makes the cultivation of the land possible.

> Utu standing in heaven,
> From the..., the breast of his...,
> From the...of Nanna,
> From the 'mouth whence issues the water of the
>   earth;' brought her sweet water from the earth;
> He brings up the water into her large...,
> Makes her city drink from it the waters of
>   abundance,
> Makes Dilmun (drink from it) the waters of
>   ab(undance),
> Her well of bitter water, verily it is become
>   a well of sweet water,
> Her furrowed fields (and) farms bore her grain,
> Her city, verily it is become the bank-quay house
>   of the land.
> ....

> Enki (before) the wise Nintu, (the mother
>   of the land),
> Causes his phallus to water the dikes,
> Causes his phallus to submerge the reeds,
> Verily causes his phallus to...,
> Thereupon he said, 'Let no one walk in the
>   marshland,'
> Thereupon Enki said: ('Let no one walk in the
>   marshland'),
> He swore by the life of Anu (lines 52-62, 66-72).

Having brought the marshlands into existence, Enki forbids anyone to walk there.   He then impregnates Ninhursag and nine days later a daughter, Ninmu is born.   Ninmu proceeds to take a walk in the marshland.

> Enki in the marshland looks about,
>   looks about,
> He says to his messenger Isimud:
> 'Shall I not kiss the young one, the fair?
> (Shall I not kiss) Ninmu, the fair?'
> His messenger Isimud answers him:
> 'Kiss the young one, the fair,
> (Kiss) Ninmu, the fair,
> For my king I shall blow up a mighty wind,
>   I shall blow up a mighty wind.'
> First he set foot in the boat,
> Then he set it on dry land,
> He embraced her, he kissed her,
> Enki poured the semen into the womb (lines 90-101).

The child of this union, another daughter Ninkurra, takes the same walk and, Enki seeing her, the identical scene is again played out. Ninkurra gives birth to Uttu.   Uttu is taken aside by Ninhursag and advised not to allow Enki to come to her unless he brings an offering of certain fruits and vegetables.   These Enki provides by bringing fresh water to as yet uncultivated parts of the land.   Her conditions met, 'Enki took his joy of Uttu' (line 179).   But on this occasion, rather than another child being born, Ninhursag removes Enki's semen and plants it in the earth.   Eight plants sprout up.

> Enki in the marshland looks about,
>   looks about,
> He says to his messenger Isimud:
> 'Of the plants, their fate...,
> What, pray, is this? What, pray, is this?'
> His messenger Isimud answers him:
> 'My king, the "tree"-plant,' he says to him:
> He cuts it down for him, he eats it (lines 196-202).

This is repeated for all of the eight different plants.

> Of the plants, Enki decreed their fate, knew
>   their 'heart.'
> (Thereupon) Ninhursag cursed Enki's name:
> 'Until he is dead I shall not look upon him
>   with the "eye of life." '
> The Anunnaki sat in the dust,
> (When) up speaks the fox to Enlil:
> 'If I bring Ninhursag before thee, what shall
>   be my reward?'
> Enlil answers the fox:
> 'If thou wilt bring Ninhursag before me,
> In my city I will plant trees (and) fields
>   for thee, verily thy name will be uttered'
>   (lines 117-225).

The text becomes fragmentary here, but Ninhursag does reappear.

> Ninhursag seated Enki [in] her vulva:
> 'My brother, what hurts thee?'
> 'My... hurts me.'
> 'Abu I have caused to be born for thee.'
> 'My brother, what hurts thee?'
> 'My jaw hurts me.'
> 'Nintulla I have caused to be born for thee'
>   (lines 250-256).

So it continues until, according to eight of Enki's afflictions,
eight new gods are born.   The tale closes with the decreeing of the
fates of the new gods, including marriage for three of them, and with
the final line, ' [O Father Enki] , praise!' (ANET, 37-41).

2. Analysis and Interpretation

This tale has elicited a number of different interpretations.
I will begin by discussing those of two authors, Jacobsen and Kirk.

For Jacobsen this is an 'origin myth', which 'endeavors to trace
a causal unity between a great many disparate phenomena and shows their
common origin in a conflict of two natures, male and female'. His
interpretation is an allegorical one based upon natural processes.
The leading roles are played by soil and water: 'constant Mother Earth,
Ninhursaga, and Enki, god of the fickle waters' (1949, 170). The child
of their union is Ninmu (Jacobsen: Ninsar), the goddess of plants.
That Enki does not stay to live with Ninhursag represents the retreating
waters after the yearly inundation. Further, 'as vegetation in the
late spring clusters around the rivers, so Ninsar comes to the river's
edge where Enki is. But Enki sees in the goddess of the plants just
another young girl. He unites with her, but he does not go to live
with her. The goddess of the plants gives birth to a daughter represent-
ing - we would guess - the plant fibers used in the weaving of linen.
Such fibers are obtained by soaking plants in water until the soft
matter rots away and only the tough fibers remain. They are,
therefore, in a sense the child of plants and water' (p. 171). It
should be noted here that the synopsis Jacobsen is giving is apparently
based upon a variant of the text which includes the birth of a fourth
goddess (see Kramer, ANET, 37, n.5). So, still following Jacobsen's
version, a third daughter is born who is the goddess of the dyestuff.
She, in turn, gives birth to Uttu, goddess of weaving. He does not
give us his readings of the Sumerian names of the goddesses of fiber
and dyestuff, but Kramer gives the names of the two goddesses in the
center of the chain of births as Ninmu and Ninkurra and understands
them to mean 'the Lady who brings forth' and 'Lady of the mountain-
land' or 'Lady of the nether world'. Whichever is more correct for
Ninkurra she 'is a deity whose activities seem to be restricted to
stone working' (ANET, 37, n.5). Both agree, however, that the last
daughter to be born, Uttu, is a goddess who has to do with cloth and

clothing.   So the 'causal unity' Jacobsen's allegorical reading is
tracing is one from soil and water through plants and dyestuff and
weaving.   But it is one which depends upon a particular interpretation
of the names involved, and that is far from certain.   Moreover, it is
not carried on to the end of the myth, except to equate Enki's illness
with the summer drought.   As Jacobsen himself admits, 'toward the end
of the myth... the deities born that Enki may be healed have no
intrinsic connexion either with soil, who bears them, or with water.
Their names, however, happen to contain elements which recall the words
for certain parts of the body, those parts of Enki's body which are
healed' (1949, 172).

For Jacobsen, 'in the Mesopotamian universe understanding means
psychological insight' (p.172).   Accordingly, in this myth that insight
concerns 'the deep antithesis which underlies the fruitful interplay of
these forces in nature [earth and water] ; we follow it as it rises to
its climax in an open break threatening to destroy water for ever; and
we end on a note of relief with reconciliation, with restoration of
harmony in the universe.   We also learn, in following the interaction
of these forces, their importance as sources of life: From them come
plants, from them come weaving and clothing, to them are due numerous
potent and beneficial forces in life—numerous minor gods.   An area of
the universe has become intelligible' (pp.172-3).

Without denying the plausibility of parts of Jacobsen's reading,
and remembering that myths do function on a number of different levels —
there is no one-and-only-one valid interpretation - it does have its
weaknesses.   Leaving aside the problem of the various goddesses' names,
perhaps the major flaw in his explanantion of the tale lies in its
incompleteness.   There is much of the tale with which he does not deal.

And in an area which does not admit of absolute right or wrong interpretations one standard by which they can be judged is that of how completely any given reading can account for all the elements of its text.

It is precisely from this point that Kirk sets out 'to propose a different interpretation that takes the whole myth into account'. He agrees that the 'first part is concerned with irrigation in some form' (1970, 94). Then, taking his cue from Kramer's translation that Enki 'causes his phallus to water the dikes, causes his phallus to submerge the reeds' (lines 67-8), he associates the action of irrigation with sexual activity. Thus, though the sequence of impregnations ' might well be simply a dramatic elaboration with some unknown etymological significance', it might also be 'an attempt to represent some new and specific stages in irrigation'. In either event 'the case of Uttu brings us back to that theme: for Enki "filled the uncultivated places with water" (verse 155) in order to grow the cucumbers, grapes and other fruits required by Uttu – in other words he was compelled to extend irrigation further afield, towards the desert'. This is seen as all part of a design on Ninhursag's part 'to extend her own region of fertility'. This Kirk apparently takes to be her purpose in planting Enki's own seed 'at the very edge of the desert'. Enki foils her plan, however, by eating the newly sprouted plants. For this he is punished and becomes sick. 'As a consequence of trying to force irrigation beyond its natural place, and of Enki's over-violent reaction, water perhaps fails, and there is a drought that has to be corrected by action of the great gods. Enki has carried thoughtlessness and unnatural sexual activity too far; in swallowing the eight plants he was swallowing (although perhaps he did not know it) his own offspring' (p.95). Kirk here points out the parallel with the Kronos myth, as well

as with the Hurrian myth of Kumarbi who swallows his father's member
and becomes pregnant with three 'terrible gods'.   As Kramer notes,
but fails to make explicit in his translation, Enki's cure involves
his being seated 'in', and not just 'by', Ninhursag's vagina.   'That
is because he thus becomes implicated through her in the very process
of birth — a natural birth, of the eight gods that eventually heal him,
because from the mother, and as a result (it may be inferred) of the
original, straightforward impregnation of Ninhursag by Enki himself'
(p.96).

Kirk's interpretation understands the myth as an account which
interrelates two topics, irrigation and sexual activity, so as to
produce new insight into each.   On the sexual plane, Kirk describes
the series of encounters Enki has with his daughters and grand-daughters
as 'incestuous' and 'irregular'.   'This irregular use of sex merely
wastes the fertile potentialities of the water-god, and in order to
fulfil his latest incestuous desires he has to agree to water the
uncultivated places'.   Then, turn and turnabout, Ninhursag acts in
a sexually irregular manner by removing and replanting Enki's seed.
But Enki frustrated becomes Enki frustrator by eating the resultant
plants.   This, though, is a further unnatural act in that it puts
Enki in the position of taking on the mother's role toward his own
offspring.   'The whole sequence is one of reversals of natural marital
relations and childbirth: the woman Ninhursag removes seed from the
girl's womb, whereas it should be placed there by a man and then
remain;   Enki the father absorbs his children into himself, whereas the
mother should discharge them out of herself in childbirth'.   Enki
becomes ill because of this situation, and in order to be healed a
further reversal is required: 'he has to undergo a reversal of the
inverted form of childbirth that caused his disease: the plants he had
swallowed are somehow transferred from him, as he crouched within

Ninhursag, to her and are reborn in a regular fashion, this time,
almost as parts of himself'. Thus the tale on this plane involves
a sequence of irregularity opposed by further irregularity, which only
compounds trouble and eventually leads to an impasse which can only be
resolved by 'the drastic reversal of irregular roles and the re-estab-
lishment of normal processes' (p.97).

On the plane of irrigation matters are somewhat less complicated
but still involve the striking of a balance, 'between excessive
direction of water into the main canals and excessive efforts to lead
it into the desert itself' (p.98).

Kirk concludes that, 'it is the pursuing of these two topics
side by side, as it were, that leads to an acceptable attitude towards
both; and implies, to revert to a more genuinely mythical level, that
human fertility and natural fertility (which in Mesopotamia depends on
irrigation and the annual inundation) are strictly interrelated - one
of the key themes of all myth and much ritual' (p.98).

This interpretation contains many aspects which will also appear
in my own, for it apprehends some of the basic oppositions and
relationships at work in the text. It represents a beginning which
can be improved upon, I think, by a more systematic analysis of the
structures of the tale.

My own interpretation of this text begins, as always, with an
analysis of the syntagmatic structure of the narrative. Once the
narrative has been broken down into its constituent elements, the
semantic content of each such unit can then be placed in the relations,
one to the others, which, on the paradigmatic axis, generates meaning
in the text.

The discovery of the motifemes, lying as they do on the deepest level of a tale, is seldom as simple and straightforward as it may sound in theory. If techniques such as embedding are employed the task of course becomes even more difficult. Fortunately for us, in the case of Sumerian and Akkadian literature such complex techniques are generally not found, at least not on this primary level. Most of the structural sophistication they display lies on the motif and texture levels. This in itself must be kept in mind, though, so that elaborations, particularly on the motif plane, such as embedding and trebling, do not disguise the proper limits of the deeper motifemes. The various levels must be kept separate, yet each must be used to help delineate the outlines of the others. And all the while it must be borne in mind that the primary guide to finding out the motifemes is structural. They are the gross constituent units which move the action of the narrative from one state to another.

In the case of 'Enki and Ninhursag' one particular guiding clue emerges on the level of texture from the discovery of the tale's motifemes. This is that the commencement of each motifeme is signalled, texturally, by a verbal event: a request or command. This tale is constructed upon four motifemes.

The opening lines (1-30) are an exposition of the Initial Situation. This term is taken from Propp. As he points out, 'A tale usually begins with some sort of initial situation. The members of a family are enumerated'. This, of course, is precisely what occurs here in the opening lines of this tale which speak of Enki and his wife and the land, Dilmun, in which they live. And, as Propp notes in his own scheme that, 'this situation is not a function' (1968, 25), here in my analysis I do not take it as properly a part of the first motifeme.

That begins, as I pointed out would be the case, with a verbal request; that of Ninskilla to Enki to provide fresh water to the otherwise perfect land of Dilmun (lines 31-40). This first motifeme is very brief and entirely realized by the motifs of the request for water and its provision (lines 31-69).

Once Enki has provided the fresh water and routed it into its appropriate channels and canals he pronounces an interdiction: 'Let no one walk in the marshland' (line 70). This announces the beginning of the second motifeme (lines 70-127). It also commences a typical pattern of folklore motifs which Propp labels Interdiction and Interdiction Violated. This is a simple and effective storytelling device whereby an interdiction against (or command toward) some activity creates the possibility of action in the violation of the command. (The logic behind this device is a source of the structuralist understanding of narrative; any situation or event implies its own contradiction. This is a basic means of generating not only narrative movement, but narrative meaning as well.) In this case it serves as the source of Enki's subsequent liaisons with his daughter and grand-daughters. The further folklore technique of trebling is also employed in this motif sequence to produce the whole series of three such encounters. The motifeme ends, however, before the motif series. It closes with the birth of Uttu.

The motif pattern, while also realizing the acts of the new motifeme, continues the serial structure of its own which was initiated by Enki's interdiction against venturing into the marshland. On the motif level this structure is completed by the third violation of the interdiction by Uttu. Meanwhile, this third term of the motif series is simultaneously employed in setting the third motifeme into motion. On the deepest level the second motifeme was complete with the birth of

Uttu, which is the enabling event for the commencement of the third motifeme. The structure of the motif level is made more aesthetically complete, though, by carrying the Interdiction/Violation pattern over into the next movement. This is an excellent example of the simultaneous separation and interdependence of the different structural levels.

The third motifeme (lines 128-217), begins with Ninhursag's instructions to Uttu. It is realized by the episodes of Enki's extention of cultivation, his dalliance with Uttu, Ninhursag's novel use of his seed and finally Enki's subsequent consumption of the eight plants.

As well as the third instance of the Interdiction/Violation series it employs two motif strings which, though consecutive in occurrence, are parallel in action and content. In the first Enki causes new plants to be by his extension of the cultivated areas. This action leads directly to the impregnation of Uttu. In the second Ninhursag causes new plants to appear by her redirection of Enki's seed and this in turn leads directly to what is, in a sense which will be important to the paradigmatic analysis, the impregnation of Enki. As Uttu takes Enki's seed into herself, Enki takes the new plants into himself. The clue to the unitary nature of this double motif embodiment of a single motifeme lies in the parallel nature of these two motif series. No actual change in state is effected until both sequences are played out.

Ninhursag's pronouncement of the removal of the 'eye of life' from Enki marks the beginning of the fourth and final motifeme (lines 218-278). Enki begins to waste away, an outside agent, the fox, is found to go after Ninhursag and bring her back, and on her return she heals the ailing god.

We now turn to a more thorough analysis of the motifs and texture
which embody these four motifemes – and the Initial Situation – prepara-
tory to the paradigmatic analysis of their semantic relations.

The Initial Situation presents a state of affairs which we should
expect to find somehow transformed or reversed at the close of the tale.
And indeed, this is explicitly the case here. At the outset Dilmun is
a pure land utterly free of disease and death. 'The sick-headed says
not "I am sick-headed". Its old woman says not "I am an old woman" '
(Lines 23-4). The end of the tale presents the birth of eight gods
intended for the healing of the ailments which have come to afflict
Enki. This is not simply an etiological myth, however, for these
duties are particular to these gods in this tale only, and are here
assigned on the basis of wordplay, not their actual roles in the
Sumerian religion (see ANET, 37, n.13; Jacobsen 1949, 172). The other
important fact about the Dilmun presented in the initial situation, that
it has no fresh water, has also been rectified at the close of the tale.

The first motifeme is relatively short and follows a simple Request-
Fulfillment pattern involving two main actants and one act. Its motif
realization is equally straightforward. Ninskilla fills the role of
the one who makes the request, on the behalf of the city as a whole, and
Enki, with some manner of help from the sun-god Utu, complies, providing
the needed fresh water. The uses to which Enki puts this newly acquired
water have clearly to do with irrigation, but it is interesting to note
the language in which these acts on Enki's part are expressed: 'Enki
before the wise Nintu, the mother of the land, / Causes his phallus to
water the dikes, / Causes his phallus to submerge the reeds' (lines 66-
8). The sexual aspect, not surprisingly, will be important to our
reading of the text. Some sort of equivalence is being here expressed
between sexual fertility and the natural fertility of the earth, between

semen and fresh water.   Enki, when he 'makes water', utilizes the
same organ with which he will go on to impregnate the various goddesses.

The second motifeme is realized by the successive impregnations
of Ninhursag, Ninmu, and Ninkurra.   As we have pointed out above, the
motif sequence extends into the subsequent motifeme, but the second
motifeme itself ends with the birth of Uttu.   The motifs are those of
the Interdiction/Interdiction Violated type.   But this folklore
technique is so common, and the role which it plays as a device to
advance the narrative so clear, that there is no necessity to attach
an ethical judgement to its use.   That is to say, that just because
the narrative movement is based upon the violation of an interdiction
there is no inherent reason to assume that the actions are condemnable.
Kirk, when he labels these relations as 'incestuous' and 'irregular'
(1970, 97), is introducing values and standards which the text itself
does nothing to support.   In fact, on the texture level these events
are related wholly without disapproval.   They occur in a perfectly
natural manner, with the willing aid of Enki's messenger and without
any resistance on the part of the young goddesses involved.   Even
Ninhursag, who might be thought to have the most to object to were
there anything irregular about these events, rather than trying to
prevent them actually helps Uttu to obtain better terms for her
compliance.

In the matter of the aid Enki receives from his messenger, Isimud,
not only does he encourage the god but offers also: ' "For my king I
shall blow up a mighty wind, I shall blow up a mighty wind."/ First he
set his foot in the boat,/ Then he set it on dry land'.   If nothing
else these passages, repeated each time the god spies another trespasser
in his marshland, refer again to the land and the water.   They suggest
that all is well regulated, navigable, and that as his sexual liaisons

are normal and healthy, so too is the now fertile land in which they
take place.   Whereas the events embodying the first motifeme
concentrate upon realizing the potential fertility of the earth, those
of the second concern themselves with realizing a similar potential
among its inhabitants.   Water and semen; each brings new life to its
respective receptacle.

In the realization of the third motifeme the progress of both
natural and sexual fertility continues, but now down some certainly
very unusual paths.   Here things begin to go seriously awry.   It
begins with the final function of the Interdiction/Interdiction Violated
series.   Following the instructions given Uttu by Ninhursag, Enki is
obliged to further extend the area of cultivation.   By these means he
attains his immediate end, but subsequent events suggest that this is a
disruption of the fragile balance upon which irrigation farming in a
desert region so much depends.   Actually, Uttu's violation of the
interdiction, which we must assume – though with confidence, for in
spite of a break of ten lines just here in the text the line that
introduced the event in all of its previous occurrences, 'Enki in the
marshland looks about, looks about ' remains, Ninhursag's instructions
presume it, and, of course it is appropriate structurally – only really
serves to set up the main work of the motifeme which is manifested in
the two parallel motif functions which follow.   In the first Enki
extends the arable countryside so as to produce the fruits and vegetables
which will gain him access to Uttu's bed.   In the second Ninhursag
removes the god's seed from the girl to do some planting of her own,
the produce of which Enki eats.   All of these activities present us
with a sense of 'going too far' and, clearly, the sexual roles of the
players involved become thoroughly muddled, are in fact reversed.
Ninhursag takes on the role of the progenitor, and Enki that of the

impregnated. Both natural fertility and sexuality have been pushed beyond their normal limits, upsetting the equilibrium necessary to their continued usefulness.

In the motifs and texture that fill out the final motifeme death, or at least its potential, is introduced. Enki sickens and Ninhursag disappears. The fox is dispatched to find her. Notice here that Enlil promises the fox that: 'If thou wilt bring Ninhursag before me,/ In my city I will plant trees and fields for thee, verily thy name will be uttered' (lines 224-5). The reward is linked to healthy and productive vegetation. The exact manner in which the fox accomplishes his task is unclear; the text is badly fragmented. He appears to make a circuit of the great temple cities. In any event his expedition is successful.

For the healing and restoration of Enki, and by extension of natural fertility, since he is the fructifying god of the waters, he must take an intimate part in the birth of the eight new gods, thus bringing to term the pseudo-pregnancy caused by his ingesting the eight plants. Ninhursag seats Enki 'in her vulva' – according to the strict translation (line 250) – and together they bear one god for each of Enki's ailments. In this way does Enki play out and be relieved of his erroneous role as childbearer, while simultaneously Ninhursag resumes it as her proper place. Finally, we might note that the tale ends with a decreeing of the fates of these new gods and in the cases of three of them they are to be married. Structurally, these few lines are pure texture. But they are important in that they reinforce the idea that sexual relations have now returned to a state of normalcy.

At the end of the myth, then, though death and disease are no longer unknown, both natural and sexual fertility have been re-established

within their proper means and spheres.

We have now begun to see the various relations with which this tale deals beginning to appear. My reading of it is similar to Kirk's. There are some differences, such as I have already pointed out above, but it does find the same basic themes and problems addressed. It can be further and more systematically supported by the type of paradigmatic analysis which this initial breakdown into motifemes, and their respective manifestations, can help to provide. For the relations and juxtapositions of the central themes are anything but haphazard. They at once create and grow out of the very structure of the tale.

It is clear that two principal themes run through this tale in tandem and reinforce one another. One addresses the problem of sustaining the fertility of the earth through the proper procurement and management of fresh water. The other the proper courses of sexual fertility. Although the sexual activities take place between gods, they are, as such, exemplars of human fertility. Each event on one side of the equation is matched by an occurrence on the other, and together they explore the possibilities and boundaries of both.

Natural fertility is initiated by Enki's provision of fresh water. He also initiates the chain of sexual fertility by impregnating his wife, Ninhursag. And just as the new dikes and irrigation canals spread agricultural fertility through the land, so Enki continues its sexual course along the chain of his offspring.

But there are limits to the expansion of this bounty; the vital seed, whether aqueous or sexual, can be spread too thin. Enki extends resources too far when he extends them yet further into the desert to satisfy the demands which Ninhursag has prompted upon Uttu. Then, in separate but related actions, Enki and Ninhursag together cross a

similar boundary in the realm of human relations when they attempt to assume each others' sexual role. The results are disastrous on both fronts, as they are subsumed into the ailing Enki, in that he is the god of fresh water. If he should die, for his sexual transgression, with him will die the fructifying genius of the earth.

The misguided role assumptions must be played out. In the process, however, the proper positions are reasserted. Enki must bring to term his highly improper and debilitating pregnancy, but in doing so he places himself in Ninhursag's vulva, and she is thereby able to perform as both midwife and nominal mother. The damage is finally undone, but not without cost. Fertility, along with an understanding of its possibilities and limits, has come to Dilmun. But so too has the disease and death inherent in fertility, things which it had not known before.

We can map the transformations of this myth onto a semantic rectangle in the following manner:

Initial Situation   Motifeme 4
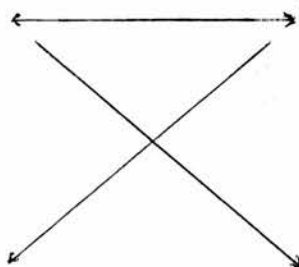Dry   Proper water and cultivation
Pure   ←————————————→   Proper sexual roles and activities
Disease Free   ╲   ╱   Disease and death
                                      ╲   ╱
                                       ╲   ╱
                                        ╲   ╱
                                         ╲ ╱
                                          ╳
                                         ╱ ╲
Motifemes 1 & 2   ╱   ╲   Motifeme 3
Fresh water   ╱   ╲   Excessive water
Cultivation   ↙   ↘   and cultivation

Human fertility and   Excessive sexual activity
Sexual activity   and role reversal

In this instance five narrative units are manifested by the material of four semantic terms. The Initial Situation sets out all of the terms of the myth which we find transformed at its conclusion and thus properly serves as the first element of our rectangle. The first and second motifemes are each concerned with only one of the two

themes, with natural and human fertility respectively. So they are
combined to produce the second term in both of its aspects. Motifemes
three and four are complete semantic units in themselves. The third
deals with excesses both human and natural. Excesses which lead to the
interruption of the activities of both. The fourth restores equili-
brium, but now in a world much different from the one in which the tale
began.

Just as there are limits to agricultural fertility, so are there
limits also to sexual fertility. That the two are related must be
obvious, not only from their shared processes of fertilization and
birth, in soil and woman, but in the direct relation by which the fruits
of one feed those of the other. That cultivation cannot simply be
extended to support the ever increasing burden of an unlimited sexuality,
as Enki attempts to do with Uttu, finds expression, according to the
structural logic of this tale, in the transformation of offspring into
plants upon which Enki 'feeds', becoming himself 'pregnant' in a manner
which endangers his own life. Disease and death, which also serve as
limiting influences on both realms, are thus themselves introduced as
a result of these excesses. Sexual regularity is in this way both
modelled upon and related to the limits which ensure regularity and
fruitfulness in the natural world. The relations and boundaries of
both are discovered by the tale in these primordial events.

One thing that we cannot help but notice when considering the
transformations of this myth is that Dilmun exists in its 'pure' state,
free from disease and death, only before the introduction of fresh
water — what we are sometimes inclined to call 'life-giving' fresh water.
And life-giving it is, in terms of the cultivation of the land. But at
the same time a chain of events is set in motion which draws the land of
Dilmun into the cycle of mortality.

We should not lean upon this point too heavily; the Sumerians were under no delusions concerning the necessity of water to life, and their environment was insistent about remaking the point annually. But the myth does use it in its reflections upon certain fundamental issues.

When we consider the environment of ancient Mesopotamia and the consequent need for careful and diligent irrigation we can see that the idea of fresh water would be to the inhabitants one very heavily freighted with meaning and importance.   Dundes, in one of his essays, considers some of the implications of this very basic premise, that 'life depends on liquid'.   The fact that this liquid must be husbanded and directed in a desert environment provides a ready-made structural principle of thought about this world.   ' "Wet and Dry" as an opposi-tional pair means life and death.   Liquids are living; drying is dying' (1980, 101).   This conclusion is fundamental.   But the myth also examines other possibilities of relationship.

There is something eternal – immortal – about the desert.   This would be what is suggested by the initial 'purety' of the unwatered Dilmun.   Of course, it is ultimately insufficient, amd must lead to the immortality of the sterile: an avoidance of death by avoiding birth.   But it is one side of the coin of which the tale will go on to show us the reverse.   Fresh water nurtures and sustains life, but it is a transitory sort of life in each of its individual manifestations. Only the untouched desert seems to be eternal in and of itself.   The myth nods to this paradox in passing but it is, quite literally, an unfruitful problem to ponder for very long.   Instead, it moves on to consider the ramifications, not of the absence of water, but of its overabundance.   This too presents a danger to the orderly waxing and waning of mortal life; in this instance a fertility run amok, where

sexual roles are confused and new plant life is harvested before its blossom, in pursuit of the immortal 'heart' of the transitory crop.

Structural analysis often reveals this sort of 'trying out' of possible combinations of the elements involved, this pushing to extremes. It is one of Lévi-Strauss' contentions that a purpose of myth is the progressive mediation of fundamental contradictions. A given state of affairs, though less than perfect, is easier to accept once its even less desirable alternatives have been considered. And so it often falls out that the semiotic structure of tales revolves around the principle, as Dundes among others has pointed out, that there is only a 'finite, limited amount of good' and that consequently 'life entails an equilibrium model' (1980, 102). These are the principles which order the semantic movement of 'Enki and Ninhursag', past the twin shoals of too little and too much water (and fertility), leading it finally to the berth, perhaps not entirely uneasy, of a watchful balance. The rising and falling of life, like the fresh water which bears and sustains it, is a cyclical phenomenon. This myth attempts to comprehend that fact. Human life is lived out in the middle ground between the eternal dry sterility of the desert and the swampy morass of a sodden chaos. In Sumerian cosmogony the chaos which precedes the initial establishment of cosmic order is that of Tiamat, the undifferentiated sea.

Man sows, both in the earth and in woman. But the fruits which emerge thereby are impermanent and frail. Earth and the female receive their respective seed. The earth endures; if properly tended, each season bringing forth her new life. And woman too partakes of a certain immortality, in her role as perpetuator of the race. Is this then another impulse behind the serial births of

Enki's descendents – one generation following upon another? Life
may be hard, and difficult to understand. But I would suggest that
it is one purpose of myth to imply that, on some level at least, it
has an order, and perhaps a reasonableness, of its own.

V. ENLIL AND NINLIL

1. The Story

This tale opens in the city of Nippur and, after a brief recounting of some of its better known attributes; the river, quay, harbor, well and canal, introduces three of the deities living there.

> And the young man therein was Enlil;
> And the young maiden therein was Ninlil;
> And the mother therein was Ninshebargunu.

Ninshebargunu cautions her daughter against bathing in the canal where Enlil might see, and desire, her.

> 'In the pure Stream, O Ninlil, in the pure stream,
> O woman, do not bathe!
> O Ninlil, do not climb on to the bank of the canal
> Nunbirdu.
> With his shining eyes will the lord, with his shining
> eyes will he espy thee;
> ....
> Forthwith he will embrace thee, he will kiss thee!'

At least, this is Jacobsen's reading of these lines (1949, 166). Kramer finds just the opposite expressed.   In his version the mother urges Ninlil to bathe, so that the god might find her.   In either event, this bathing is the very thing she does.   And Enlil does see her.   Enlil, rather bluntly, attempts to seduce the goddess.   Kramer's translation and paraphrase continue:

> Enlil speaks to her of intercourse (?), she is
> unwilling,
> 'My vagina is too little, it knows not to copulate,
> My lips are too small, they know not to kiss'.

'Whereupon Enlil calls his vizier, Nusku, and tells him of his desire for the lovely Ninlil.   Nusku brings up a boat, and Enlil rapes Ninlil while sailing on the stream and impregnates her with the moon-god, Sin.   The gods are dismayed by this immoral deed, and although Enlil

is their king, they seize him and banish him from the city to the
nether world' (1963, 146).

> And while Enlil was passing through Kiur
> The fifty great gods
> And the seven gods whose word is decisive
>   caused Enlil to be arrested in Kiur;
> 'Enlil, the ravisher, must leave the town'
>   (Jacobsen 1949, 167).

And so Enlil starts off toward the nether world.   But Ninlil follows.

Not wanting anyone else to take advantage of the goddess as he has
done Enlil, when he meets the city gatekeeper, assumes his place and
likeness.   He admonishes the gatekeeper to reveal nothing to the
goddess, and to keep his distance.

> Enlil calls unto the gatekeeper:
> 'O man of the gate, O man of the bolt,
> O man of the lock, O man of the sacred bolt,
> Thy queen Ninlil is coming.
> If she asks thee about me,
> Do thou not tell her where I am.'
> Enlil called unto the gatekeeper:
> 'O man of the gate, O man of the bolt,
> O man of the lock, O man of the sacred bolt,
> Thy queen Ninlil is coming.
> The maiden so sweet, so beautiful,
> Thou shalt, O man, not embrace, thou shalt,
>   O man, not kiss!
> To Ninlil, so sweet, so beautiful,
> Has Enlil shown favor; he has looked upon her
>   with shining eyes'   (Jacobsen 1949, 167).

Thus Ninlil comes upon who she supposes to be the gatekeeper.   When
she reveals to him that she is carrying Enlil's child, and that they are
destined for the nether world, he becomes distressed and suggests that
together they beget a substitute son to take the moon-god's place.

> Let the precious scion of (my) king go to heaven;
>   let my (own) son go to the nether world.
> Let my (own) son to to the nether world as (changeling for)
>   the precious scion of (my) king   (Jacobsen 1949, 168).

She agrees and a second god is engendered.   The journey continues and

twice more Enlil stops and the same sequence of events takes place;
he impersonates 'the man of the river of the nether world' and then
the river ferryman.   Each time another god is engendered.   All
three, Meslamtaea, Ninazu and one whose name is too damaged to
identify – perhaps Ennugi (Jacobsen 1976, 104) – are gods of the
nether world and brothers to the moon-god Sin.   And here the tale
closes with a hymn of praise to Enlil and Ninlil.

2. Analysis and Interpretation

Jacobsen has described this tale as 'unwholesome' (1949, 168),
while to Kramer it is 'one of the more human and tender of Sumerian
myths' (1961, 96).   Kramer does not attempt to interpret it, however,
saying only that 'This delightful myth...seems to have been evolved
to explain the begetting of the moon-god Nanna as well as that of the
three underworld deities, Nergal, Ninazu, and a third whose name is
illegible' (1944, 43).

Jacobsen, on the other hand, offers two levels of interpretation,
viewing the myth as a nature allegory and as an attempt to understand
the arrangement and processes of the cosmos in terms of the psycholo-
gies of the gods.   The basic premise of Jacobsen and his colleagues
in Before Philosophy (1949) is that ancient man regarded the world
around him not as an 'It' but as a 'Thou' (pp.12-14).   Thus their
myths, which are distinguished from other types of narrative by their
'compelling authority', are no mere entertainments but 'a cloak for
abstract thought' (p.15).   'Enlil, Ninlil, Sin, and all the other
characters in the story are forces in nature.   But, since the myth-
maker sees these forces as "Thou's", as members of a society, his
endeavour is to understand them through psychological analysis of
their character and through their corresponding reaction to the laws
which govern the state of the universe' (p.170).   This particular myth

deals with the origin of the moon and the question of how he comes to have three nether world brothers. Jacobsen's conclusion is that, 'the myth answers in psychological terms. It seeks the cause in Enlil's own nature with its curiously dark and violent strains. It is this element of wildness and violence which makes him break the laws and taboos of society of the world above when he takes Ninlil by force and Sin in engendered' (p.169).

Jacobsen's feeling that this tale cannot 'be considered a pleasant one' (p.168) stems from a rather gallant reaction to the treatment of Ninlil by both Enlil and the storyteller. He acknowledges the danger of imposing one's own moral standards upon another culture and that the tale assumes the shape it does because it 'comes from a society in which woman's honour was an unknown concept' (p.168). Still, it is the neglect of Ninlil as a character which does much to satisfy him that the myth's 'sole concern is with the children she is to bear — with the origin of the moon-god and his three divine brothers' (p.169).

In a later work Jacobsen, while retaining the psychological context, adds to it the suggestion of a more explicit nature allegory.

> More tension between the light and dark sides
> of Enlil's nature shows in the 'Enlil and Ninlil'
> myth....
> Probably this singular tale about the condemnation
> and death of the god is best seen in relation to the
> cult of the dying and reviving gods of fertility:
> Enlil, as the fertile wind of the spring rapes Ninlil,
> the grain — perhaps a mythopoeic interpretation of wind-
> pollination — and dies with the passing of spring, as
> the grain goes underground too in the storage bin (1976,
> 103-4).

This brief discussion of the tale is offered by Jacobsen not as a full interpretation but as part of his examination of the god's character. So it should probably not be seen as superseding his earlier reading. The story does also function as a myth of organization

and the two interpretations can co-exist on their different levels.
This second one does, however, retreat from one of the basic principles
of the earlier book, which explicitly denied to the imagery of myth any
quality of allegory, or so state the Frankforts in their introductory essay
(1949, p.15), though Jacobsen has always retained it as a foundation
for his psychological readings. As regards those I agree with Kirk,
himself agreeing with Kramer, 'that the whole emphasis on the universe
as a "Thou"...is too strong and too simple' (1970, 101). A too
staunch such attitude is inclined to belittle the objectivity of these
peoples. But straight nature allegory is what the Frankforts were
trying to move beyond, and rightly so, as that tends to reduce myth
to description.

In this specific instance, however, the most obvious weakness of
Jacobsen's readings is that they find so little matter in rather a lot
of myth. The events of this story are rather extreme if their purpose
is simple genealogy. On the other hand, if they describe natural
processes what is the purpose of Enlil's engendering three new gods on
his way to the nether world? Jacobsen's two interpretations are an
unacknowledged recognition of the complexity of this myth. A more
satisfactory reading should account for all of its elements, without
introducing implications which the text cannot readily bear.

Enlil never does actually reach the nether world. He never really
dies and so neither is he revived. Yet the intent is there and inter-
pretations are spawned by it. What Enlil's banishment does do is lead
directly to the conception of three new gods, and it is this relatively
neglected part of the myth which attracts Kirk's attention.

Kirk bases his reading on the similarity between this tale and the
'Enki and Ninhursag' myth. In both a god impregnates a goddess who has
ventured into the water or marshland. There follow repeated copulations,

here with the same goddess, in the other tale with successive generations.

And each myth raises the spectre of death for the god, in the form of

illness or banishment to the nether world.   Kirk takes the position

that since the two tales are so similar in the structure of their contents

they must therefore have a common purpose.   There is little use in para-

phrasing him further.   It is an argument most easily discussed if we

allow Kirk to make it himself.

> The use and re-use of narrative motifs (like the
> discovery by some small or unlikely animal of a god
> who has disappeared) is common enough, and the triple
> sequence of impregnations exemplifies a pattern of
> repetition that can be paralleled elsewhere - most
> dramatically by the progressive stripping of the
> goddess Inanna's garments as she passes through the
> gates of the underworld.... Yet the emphasis on the
> excessive youth of the girl or girls, and the
> parallelism of the different episodes, cannot be
> explained on purely narrative grounds.   What, then,
> is likely to be the purpose common to each myth?
> The answer is implicit in my suggested interpretation
> of the Enki myth, where the interweaving of sexual
> regularity and irregularity with success and failure
> in the extension of irrigation (of which Enki was the
> supreme overseer) was found to cast fresh light on
> both.   In the Enlil myth there is no suggestion that
> the god's acts of fertilization are connected specif-
> ically with irrigation;   on the other hand they are
> undeniably concerned with fertility, even if their
> most direct purpose is the production of four particu-
> lar deities.   The core of the two myths is as follows:
> a succession of carnal encounters between a high god
> and a goddess (or series of goddesses), who is really
> too young for this sort of thing, leads to the birth of
> several relatively minor deities and, directly or
> indirectly, to the removal of a major deity to the
> underworld, with damaging effects (so it can be inferred)
> on fertility above.   Therefore it appears that the
> pursuit of fertility can be carried to excess;   if it
> is so carried, it tends to result in infertility.
>   It would be foolish to deny that each myth has other,
> separate aims: the Enki myth to make a special point
> about irrigation and what sort of plants can be grown
> near the desert, the Enlil myth to explain a puzzle in
> the apparently contradictory nature of Enlil's sons.
> Yet the similarity of their central structure suggest an
> underlying meaning of the kind I have proposed (1970, 102-3).

The similarity of the contents of these two myths does indeed

suggest that their meanings will be much alike, for they have chosen

to employ many of the same paradigms. But there are differences as well. And because Kirk relies so heavily on his interpretation of 'Enki and Ninhursag' in his reading of this myth my critique of that interpretation must figure in the consideration of this. The fact is, I suspect that in his eagerness to exploit the very real similarities between the two tales he has read into the first myth some aspects which are actually peculiar to the second.

Kirk's understanding, or at least use of, 'narrative structure' does not extend beyond similarities of content to the more abstract levels of syntax. This is clear from the examples which he uses. In citing as a 'motif' the use of a 'small or unlikely animal' to find a missing god he is actually concentrating as much on texture as motif, in the sense I am using the term. His is the 'narrative motif' of Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk-Literature (1955-58), which uses it to group events as the particular actions of particular characters. This can be a useful tool of paradigmatic analysis and comparison. But it ignores the syntagmatic aspect of the narrative, which can have an ultimate effect on its meaning.

Kirk draws a parallel between the serial impregnations and Inanna's progressive stripping as she enters the underworld. The impregnations certainly do exemplify 'a pattern of repetition' but one which exhibits some basic structural differences from Inanna's ordeal. They can both be described as instances of 'trebling', if we might use that as a generic term for the narrative repetition of a single act regardless of the number of times it is actually repeated. Yet even here we can begin to sense a distinction between these two sets of events. This is a compositional device which can be employed on different syntagmatic levels. The Inanna example, which uses a seven-fold repetition,

tends toward texture elaboration. It heightens a single event, her
passage into the nether world. In the cases of Enki and Enlil the
repeated events take on a greater independence as motifs, each
encounter acquiring its own discreet result and, in the present case,
even so far approaching the motifeme level as to create a real problem
for analysis, which I will consider below. Structuralism concentrates
on differences, and particularly on the differences to be found in
apparently similar phenomena. It would seem, from these examples,
that Mesopotamian narrative convention allows a much greater degree of
elaboration on the texture level while maintaining a strict adherence
to a truly three-part trebling on the motif and motifeme levels. It
is interesting to note in this respect that while both Enki and Enlil
engage in four liaisons there is in each case a distinct separation
made between one and the other three. And here Enlil's subsequent
liaisons do not lead to his banishment, but from it.

This comparison of Kirk's with the Inanna myth is really only an
aside. But it does reveal a tendency toward too ready equation which
leads to a basic flaw in his real comparison. He centers his interpre-
tation on the condemnation levelled on Enlil's relations with a goddess
who is too young for mating. This is certainly true of Enlil's first
encounter with Ninlil in this myth. But beneath the distinct paradig-
matic significance of this event there lies a real narrative necessity.
(Kramer's translation, which cannot escape the sense of rape which the
other gods impart to Enlil's act, nonetheless has Ninlil's own mother
encouraging her to present herself to the god. She encourages the
encounter which on either reading is necessary in order to set the
narrative in motion.) Their further encounters, which on their surface
might seem even more irregular, prove to be actually quite positive,
indeed necessary. Moreoever, there is no reason to impute this sense of
moral impropriety to the impregnations in the Enki myth. The goddesses

there are guilty of venturing where they are not allowed, but this in itself is a common folklore device and nowhere is an issue made of their youth or of the actual legality, or morality, of the subsequent liaisons. The simple fact of the matter is that Kirk bases his interpretations on 'the emphasis on the excessive youth of the girl or girls', but this emphasis is singular and not pervasive. Yet his readings are not thereby entirely invalidated. I think he has caught the major themes but missed somewhat their basic structures. His 'structuralism' consists solely in a comparison of contents, which eventually come to colour one another and thus seem to share traits which are not really inherent to their basic likeness. By referring the two series of impregnations only to one another Kirk misses certain aspects which are unique to each, the resulting paradox being that while he reads too much into Enki's actions he slights the full implication of what Enlil does. The three latter encounters between Enlil and Ninlil serve as more than repeated bad examples, if they are even that at all. I believe I can account for these events more fully anchoring their semantic roles in their syntagmatic context.

The myth falls quite neatly into two halves. The events of the first part all lead directly to Enlil's banishment and those of the rest of the story all stem just as directly from it. It would appear also to be composed of two motifemes, corresponding to these two halves. But this is a conclusion which can only be reached, and defended, after the consideration of some problems presented by the second part.

The first half is a single motifeme, manifested by two interlocking, parallel, and in fact joined, motif sequences. After the exposition of the Initial Situation, describing the city of Nippur and the three main characters, Enlil, Ninlil, and Ninshebargunu, the first motif sequence begins with Ninshebargunu's instructions to her daughter and takes the

common folklore form of Interdiction/Interdiction Violated. Ninlil's mother instructs her not to bathe in the canal, and so of course that is precisely what she proceeds to do. As Ninshebargunu has warned, the god sees her there and failing to seduce her takes her by force, impregnating her with the moon-god Sin.

Kramer has it that Ninlil is not violating an interdiction but acceding to a command. The two cases, however, are structurally equivalent. Propp, who coined the terminology, was also the first to point this out. 'A command often plays the role of an interdiction. If children are urged to go out into the field or into the forest, the fulfilment of this command has the same consequences as does violation of an interdiction not to go into the forest or out into the field' (1968, 27). Here either reading still leads to her encounter with Enlil, though the discrepancy may go some ways toward explaining the opposite reactions of Kramer and Jacobsen to this myth.

The other sequence of motifs takes Enlil as its subject and again the Interdiction/Violation convention as its form. In this instance the actual interdiction against Enlil's action is implied, emerging only in the reaction of the other gods to what Enlil has done.

This is one motifeme manifested by two motif series, and not two embedded motifemes, because it revolves around only one act, filled on the motif level by the ravishing of Ninlil. There are two results because each motif follows on to its own conclusion; Ninlil becomes pregnant and Enlil is banished to the nether world. But this bifurcation is only on the motif level, while the singularity of the motifeme is maintained by their joint participation in the performance of its central act. Their independent motif functions supply the action and motivations which bring them together to realize the moti-feme. And the dual results are necessary to initiate the action of

the rest of the myth, which requires both the newly conceived moon-god
and Enlil's banishment.

I make these points about the first motifeme because of the
problems presented by the compositional structure of the second part
of the myth.   Is this one motifeme manifested by three virtually
identical motifs, or does it consist of three distinct motifemes?
The action of this part is certainly a species of trebling, but it does
not follow the common failure-failure-success pattern.   That form is
always subsumed into a single motifeme, but here we have three discrete,
and successful, results.

Strictly speaking we do have characters and action filling the act
and actant roles of three separate situation-response-result structures.
But I have also said about the motifeme that a further mark of its
closure is the movement of the tale from one state or situation to a
new, revised one.   If this portion of the tale were to end after the
first of these encounters that criterion would certainly have been met.
But with the repetition of encounters we again enter into that greyer
area where syntax and paradigm interact.   Everything in a narrative is
there for a reason and the repetition of these activities suggests that
the role which they fulfil is not completed until they are.   It is the
nature of these particular contents which cause the trebling, usually
confined to the motif, or even texture, level here to reach all of the
way down to the level of the motifemes as well.   We must anticipate
a semantic conclusion to see why this is.

Enlil, in his disguise as the gatekeeper, declares to Ninlil that
the purpose of engendering another god is to provide a substitute for
the moon-god in the nether world.   This is the only manner in which a
being imprisoned in the nether world may be redeemed.   The best-known
examples of this are to be found in the myths of Inanna/Ishtar's descent

to the nether world.   However, in these other instances a single

substitute is sufficient.   (Where Dumuzi and his sister share the role

of substitute for Inanna they do so alternately, thus comprising one

substitute between them.)   Why, here, are three such engendered?   This

myth comes to a conclusion with the creation of three new nether world

gods, and without ever actually seeing Enlil, or Ninlil, who is following

him, disappear into death's realm.   The best explanation of these facts

would be that the three new deities not only serve to redeem Sin but his

two parents as well.   Enlil and Ninlil escape the nether world, along

with Sin, in the course of their arrival.

Viewed this way the three encounters between Ninlil and the

disguised Enlil form not only a single paradigmatic unit, but a single

narrative one as well.   If the task set Enlil in the second part of

the tale is to redeem himself and his family from the nether world then

this task is only fully accomplished when all three substitutions have

been provided for.   If I were concerned here solely with compositional

structures a strict constructionist approach might compel me to label

these three encounters as three independent motifemes.   But my primary

purpose in the syntagmatic analysis is to help delineate paradigmatic

units.   And the entire second half of this tale can be shown to

constitute but one of these.   Approached from this direction the events

of this section can just as legitimately, and perhaps more usefully, be

described in terms of three motif functions embodying a variation of the

trebled structure which substitutes for the usual failure-failure-success

progression one which reads: partial success-partial success-full success.

Actually, I do not think that it is absolutely necessary to make a

definitive choice between these two possible models, as that does not

speak directly to the brief I have given myself here.   An argument can

be made for each, but the arguments in this case become finally a

distraction.   The choice I do make is based primarily upon interpretative usefulness.   All along I have been treating the syntagmatic analysis as preliminary to the paradigmatic, and using semantic markers to help elucidate syntax.   Indeed, it would be virtually impossible to do it otherwise.   The two are co-dependent.   It is possible to do much more detailed analyses of the narrative structures.   But at a certain level of abstraction they only begin to distract from my main purpose, which is the discovery of structures of meaning.   For this end the broader outlines of narrative structure prove to be sufficient.

So I will treat this instance as one motifeme realized by three motif functions, thus placing it in a simple one-to-one relationship with the single motifeme which underlies the first half of the myth. The second part considered as three motifemes would present us with a total of four overall, but there is no particular logic to be discovered by proceeding then to arrange these in a semantic square.   Since there is nothing to be gained by complicating matters I think it best to consider instead the virtues of simplicity.

The Initial Situation of this myth presents the city of Nippur and three of its divine inhabitants 'at the beginning of time' (Jacobsen 1949, 165).   What we find transformed about this state of affairs at the tale's conclusion is the addition of four new deities, one of an astral nature and three belonging to the nether world.   The story ends immediately after Enlil, disguised as the ferryman, impregnates Ninlil for the fourth time, closing with a hymn of praise to the god and goddess.

> Enlil is lord, Enlil is king.
> Enlil's word cannot be altered;
> Enlil's impetuous word cannot be changed.
> Praise be to mother Ninlil,
> Praise! (to) father Enlil   (Jacobsen 1949, 168).

The characterization of Enlil's 'word' as 'impetuous' glosses the

dubious morality of his actions even as they are accepted and credited
with their role in the ordering of this particular aspect of the cosmos.
So the myth does fulfil this purpose of explaining the origins of these
gods and their relationships.   Enlil does what he does, and only results
finally signify.   That is, if this is all that the myth is about.   But
while theogony is one element, can it really be said to fully account
for the narrative as a whole?

The creation of four new gods does not effect that radical a
transformation.   They add to but do not, in any explicit way, essentially
alter the cosmic state.   Yet they remain all that is fully explicit about
the ends of this tale, although much else happens in the course of it
which is potentially of greater moment.   The banishment of Enlil should,
in all likelihood, lead to a much more drastic transformation.   But it is
an element that the myth, while assuming as a means, seems to neglect as
an end.   Of course, we cannot be content to take things on first appear-
ances.   Our goal is to account for as many elements of the tale as
possible;   to explicate underlying thematic currents as well as immediate
surface ends.   New gods are created, but the manner of their conception
is unusual and problematic.   And it is the problems of this story,
such as its moral transgressions and ambiguities, that make it difficult
for us to regard it as simply a hieratic exercise in theogony.   That
Kramer and Jacobsen should form such different perceptions of the tone of
this myth must attest to the presence of some deeper matters here.   The
complications introduced into its telling do not readily square with so
simple and straightforward a goal.

However, while what might at first appear to us as moral issues may
serve as a signal to warn us against settling for too simplistic an
interpretation, they are not, as such, the best hook upon which to hang a
fuller one.   It is interesting in this respect to consider the tale as

presented in Kramer's translation, which has Ninshebargunu arranging to
bring Enlil and Ninlil together.   If moral judgements are made then
Ninshebargunu is implicated as well.   And what are we to make, in either
version, of the subsequent liaisons?   Where do they fit into an ethical
framework?   I think that one of the things we must do first here is put
our own moral judgements aside.   Considerations of morality present the
greatest pitfall in reading this text, as evidenced by Jacobsen and
Kramer falling into it from opposite edges.   It is the commentators who
provide most of the moral assessments, not the text.

The fact of the matter is that the judgements of the text itself
might be better described not as moral but as in some sense legal, or
even simply practical.   According to Jacobsen the meaning of the term
which is applied to Enlil as malefactor, 'which we translate as "ravisher"
is somewhat more general: "one who is under a taboo relating to matters
of sex" ' (1949, 166).   A taboo, whether imposed or inherent, is a
very practical matter.   A thing or act is or becomes taboo because it is
dangerous.   Transgression of the taboo threatens the well-being of the
individual or the community.   This instance combines aspects of taboo
and more mundane illegality.   Strictly speaking, a taboo is self-
enforcing.   It avenges itself, disease and death overtaking its trans-
gressor.   Here, on the one hand, the other gods are said to impose
sentence on Enlil, placing his crime in a legal context.   But at the same
time their act could be construed as simply a ratification of the taboo's
own power.   Their declaration is that he 'must leave the town', and a
journey to the nether world is nothing less than a journey to death.
The task here, though, is not to choose between Enlil as sex criminal
and as transgressor of a taboo.   The two are practically, and in this
context essentially, the same.   That they are dealing with something
the power of which is worthy of taboo will become clear when we consider
the unspoken implications of Enlil's act, which inform the central theme

of this myth.   The immediate point is that these various acts must
be judged individually and, what is most important, according to the
treatment which the text itself gives them.

The myth applies a standard of its own.   If Enlil is guilty of
transgressing a taboo or law in his first encounter with Ninlil he
somehow uses their ensuing liaisons to rectify this situation.   The
underlying meaning of the condemnation of his initial act resides in
the danger which it poses to the cosmic community.   But his subse-
quent acts are also judged in their context and according to their
utility, and are thus not condemned but found praiseworthy, for they
remove this danger.

One way in which the text appears to account for the difference
between the first and subsequent encounters concerns an alteration in
Ninlil's status.   Clearly, before she is raped Ninlil is considered
too young to marry and mate.   But it seems that once the deed is done
she can only be what she could not be before; ex post facto, she is no
longer a maiden but a wife.   She declares as much to the gatekeeper
when she tells him that 'since Enlil is his king, she is his queen and
that she carries Enlil's child, Sin, the moon-god, under her heart'
(Jacobsen 1949, 168).   Indeed, the whole of her new status as wife
and queen is succinctly implied in the simple phrase which concludes
this earlier passage:

> Enlil, (in obedience) to the verdict which was given
> Nunamnir, (in obedience) to the verdict which was given, went.
> and Ninlil followed (p.167).

Even so, it does still seem to trouble the tale that Enlil might
appear to remit his sentence by recommitting his crime.   It could be
that such a consideration accounts for his impersonations, or metamor-
phoses.   Slyly, they resolve a problem.   That they occur suggests that,

indeed, Enlil cannot be seen, specifically, to redeem himself by repeating his crime, even if Ninlil might now be considered his wife. Yet for that very reason, that she has become his, for any others to impregnate her with the necessary substitutes would be an offence against Enlil's honour. The impersonations are a means by which he can have it both ways. He is not Enlil insofar as he does not compound his crime in the eyes of the law; and it is to sight that he is another. At the same time he is Enlil insofar as it preserves his honour as a husband and father. There are other reasons for these events as well, which will be discussed below as aspects of the paradigmatic level.

To begin to place all of these events in their full context we can return to Kirk's interpretation. As I have said above, what I consider to be the flaws in his analysis of the Enki myth are carried over into his consideration of this one. He places rather too much emphasis on the impropriety of all of the acts of sexual congress. Certainly both of these tales deal with what is to be considered proper and improper in this realm. But there are no blanket condemnations.

In 'Enki and Ninhursag' there is no textural basis for considering the god's copulating with the successive generations of his offspring as improper. At least not until the fourth encounter, and here it is his excessive irrigation and then treatment of the plants which spring from his resown seed which are irregular and cause all of the subsequent problems. Indeed, his strictly sexual activities are treated, up to that point, as being perfectly permissible.

In the present myth, of course, Enlil's initial congress with Ninlil is quite explicitly condemned, and with the clear indication that the goddess is too young for such things. However, their ensuing encounters seem to serve only useful and desirable ends and nowhere in the text

are they objected to. It would appear that Kirk has allowed the one

instance of Enlil and Ninlil improperly copulating, crucial though it

may be, to colour his perception of all of the other matings in both

tales.

This objection, however, does not vitiate the basic usefulness of

comparing these two tales. Both are much alike in both content and

immediate surface structure. Both tales involve a single god's

repeated sexual encounters and the threat of his death, or its equiva-

lent, internment in the nether world. The arrangement of these events

though, on both axes, is not so precisely matched as Kirk would have it.

In the Enki myth it is only in the course of the fourth encounter,

and its aftermath, that the danger to the god, and fertility, becomes

manifest. Here, with Enlil, the first coupling leads immediately to

such a situation and the succeeding liaisons are utilized as a means

to rectify it. This second structure is a reversal of the first.

In 'Enki and Ninhursag' the god progresses through a series of matings

which are proper enough in themselves but which culminate in an instance

in which he at last goes too far and upsets the natural balance. In

Enlil's case he oversteps the boundary immediately and the ensuing series

is employed in putting things right. Thus a structual similarity

exists between the two on the syntagmatic level, though it is not one of

strict identity. The corresponding elements are differently arranged.

The order in one is reversed in the other. But there are similarities

of content and implication which indicate that the two myths are dealing

with a common theme. Kirk is on the right track, but his 'structural'

analysis must be modified to better fit the textural facts.

Moreover, there is another comparison which he overlooks, though

he refers to it on another level and in a different aspect. The

whole of the second half of this tale is concerned with providing

substitutes to go to the nether world in place of others who should not,
in the proper cosmic scheme of things, be imprisoned there.   This
theme is reminiscent of the Inanna/Ishtar tales.   And these myths, too,
are concerned with fertility.

The two-part form of this narrative is repeated in its paradigmatic
structure.   The two motifemes assume a basic semantic relation of
Deterioration-Amelioration.   There are essentially two central events,
one in each half.   In the first Enlil takes Ninlil by force and is
banished for it, Ninlil following.   In the second Enlil disguises him-
self and engenders the means of their redemption in the form of three
new nether world gods.

The central problem with which the myth deals resides in the mainly
unvoiced implications of the god's banishment.   Ninlil states it in
terms of preserving the moon-god from underworld imprisonment.   But
what would be the result of Enlil's, and her own, disappearance?

Kirk understands this as a threat to fertility itself, and in this
I agree with him.   The only aspect of fertility which concerns the tale
overtly is the human one of sex and conception (again taking the
anthropomorphic gods as exemplars).   However, the association of the
rape of the young goddess with her bathing in the stream does provide
a symbolic link to the fertility of the rest of the natural world.
Enlil actually takes her while sailing in a boat upon these waters.
This is also another correspondence with the more explicit Enki myth,
where all of the sexual encounters are connected with water and irrigation,
and sexual and natural fertility are very clearly linked.   As for the
fertility aspect of Enlil's character, as Kirk points out: 'Enlil is
not primarily a fertility god, but was sometimes envisaged as carrying
out the same kind of organization of farming and fresh water as Enki
himself' (1970, 102, n.29).   The threat, however, is also to the very

organization of the cosmos, which Enlil has the primary responsibility
for maintaining.

In thematic terms this myth is a condensation, a telescoping, of
the 'Enki and Ninhursag' tale. What was there explored over four
motifemes is here dealt with in two. This condensation accounts for
much of its apparent obscurity. The first three copulations in the
Enki myth are grouped together into one motifeme as an example of the
proper exercise of sexuality, to be compared and contrasted, paradigma-
tically, with other examples of proper and improper activities in both
the sexual and agricultural realms. In 'Enlil and Ninlil' the
structure is simpler. The device of relating the two spheres of
fertility by means of separate but parallel treatments is dispensed
with and only the nub of the problem, the upsetting of fertility's
order and its re-establishment, remains. In the first, Deterioration,
half fertility is threatened by Enlil's improper sexual activities,
which result in his banishment from the world of the living. The
consequences of this great god's disappearance, however, would be dire
indeed, threatening the whole of fertility and cosmic order itself.
This threat is allayed and fertility and order restored, or preserved,
by the ensuing encounters which engender the three substitutes which
ransom Enlil, Ninlil and the moon-god.

This two-part structure of the tale is fairly simple and straight-
forward. But the balancing of its two parts goes right to the heart
of the message they embody: that it is necessary to maintain a subtle
balance in the fragile interplay of the processes of life and death in
the natural world.

Enlil's rape of Ninlil represents the will or impulse to fertility
taken, or followed, to an extreme. (In the same way as was Enki's
extension of irrigation too far out into the desert.) This is not so

much a moral problem as a practical or legal one; legal in that it is
prudent, or even necessary, to make the dangerously impractical illegal.
When this will is carried to an extreme it upsets the fundamental
balance upon which fertility rests.   This reliance on balance arises
from the fact that the positive necessity of fertility, as an impulse
potentially infinite, is constrained, as a practical matter, by the
finite nature of the resources.

What is wrong with Enlil's taking the too young Ninlil is the
very real danger which resides in allowing such activities to proceed
indiscriminately.   The message contained in ordering sexual relations
and setting limits upon them is that to impregnate all women regardless
of age would be like trying to irrigate the whole of the desert.   It
is a restraint upon the will to fertility necessary to retain the
fragile balance between fertility and infertility.   Both are concrete
expressions of the equilibrium model.   The issues here, however, are
less specific than Enki's link with irrigation because Enlil is a god
with overarching responsibility for the organization of the universe
as a whole.   This is his 'life-giving' aspect and role in fertility.

But while Enlil has transgressed the limits in one direction,
actually to have him, and his new family, disappear into the nether world
would allow the balance to slip disastrously far in the other
direction.   Fertility and infertility, life and death, exist together
as real and necessary aspects of the cosmic order.   To spread the
finite resources of fertility too thinly, though, is to risk creating
an opening through which death and infertility might seize an unequal
advantage, and finally dominate.

The spectre of overpopulation probably stands most concretely
somewhere behind any ideas of limiting sexual activity and its relation
to other aspects of fertility.   Here though, it is only the unvoiced

background to a more general and abstract consideration. Conceptions continue, but signify more by their nature than number.

By inverting the structure of the Enki myth, with its steady progress from proper fertility to excess and catastrophe, into one which begins with excess and then works back through yet another three sexual encounters toward a re-establishment of order, Enlil's role as author of events both good and bad is brought to the fore. In a manner of speaking, Ninlil is 'set up' in both halves of the tale; she is only the instrument of Enlil's activities. His is the role that signifies.

In the first part his action transgresses a taboo, but in the second similar actions, though more numerous, are now correct, good and even necessary. The excess or impropriety of his sexual activities turns out to lie not in their quantity but their quality. This might seem to present a logical problem for the fertility aspect of the myth, at least in terms of Kirk's view of it, for the useful and somehow appropriate encounters take place after Enlil's banishment for excess. This is where this tale inverts the Enki myth and is a main reason why they cannot be compared in precisely the way Kirk suggests.

The central event becomes Enlil's banishment to the nether world, which is caused by his transgression of a sexual taboo, but portends in its implications a much more cataclysmic disruption of the cosmic order and all that depends on it, given Enlil's central role in its establishment and maintenance. Thus the first part raises the issue of the limits of sexual relations, and explicitly condemns an instance of excess. But in the second another aspect of sexuality appears as a means of resolving the broader issues stemming from the banishment itself. The use of sex here establishes a contrast with the initial encounter as one of purposeful versus purposeless or extravagant relations.

These further three encounters are thoroughly transformed versions of the first.   Enlil warns the men not to accost the goddess.   This is an inversion of Ninshebargunu's warning to Ninlil herself not to place herself in a position to be seen and 'embraced'.   Both are based on the identical premise, though where the mother had warned that 'the lord, with his shining eyes will espy thee', Enlil forbids the gatekeeper, and the others in their turn, precisely because 'he has looked upon her with shining eyes'.   'He will embrace thee' is replaced by 'Thou shalt... not embrace';   'He will espy thee' by 'he has'.

This transformation of the terms of the encounters signals an alteration in the positions of the characters.   Ninlil now belongs to Enlil, in the sense she herself expresses it when she says to the supposed gatekeeper that since Enlil is his king, she is his queen. Yet she lies with him nevertheless, for the purpose of engendering a substitute for Sin in the nether world.   However, these couplings do have an express purpose in this provision of substitutes.   In this they complete the inversion of the initial, apparently gratuitous, imposition of Enlil upon the goddess.   This matrix of transformations extends all the way to Enlil's identity which, being disguised, only appears to re-enact the very sort of situation that, in fact, he has forbidden and does not actually allow.

This might appear to blur the issue of to whom Ninlil belongs, but these men are only Enlil in disguise and so his honour remains intact. Ninlil has no honour to consider apart from his.   At the same time there might be established some sort of distance between the moon-god and his three nether world brothers.   This does appear to be a consideration, as it is central to the argument the disguised Enlil makes each time to Ninlil: 'Let the precious scion of (my) king go to heaven;   let my (own) son go to the nether world'.   'My own' here is a reference to the owner

of the appearance, not its temporary wearer. I suppose it is possible
that the tenor of these events may also stem, on the texture level, in
part from more mundane considerations of realism: that a woman
travelling alone simply might not be able to expect to proceed safely
and unmolested. Still, Enlil's solution, while preserving his honour,
serves also to distance him, in a somewhat unfocused way, from the acts
and their fruit. So it may represent as well an attempt to integrate
theological issues with the underlying fertility myth. By these
activities he simultaneously preserves his honour, engages his sexual
impulses toward useful ends, and establishes a distinction between the
upper and lower world branches of his family. The fundamental taboo
is reiterated in Enlil's speeches to the men Ninlil will meet, while
proper relations between a man and his wife remain possible, indeed
necessary, and are allowed to go ahead. When he couples with her,
though disguised, he does so as her husband and with a clear and useful
purpose. The balance of fertility is restored and cosmic order pre-
served. This is achieved by the creation of a set of three nether
world gods to balance the new family constellation of Enlil, Ninlil and
Sin. Meanwhile, the underlying logic of this myth as an examination
of the limits of fertility continues to assert itself in the contrast
between purposeful and unrestrained sexuality.

The simplification of the narrative structure of this myth, as
compared to 'Enki and Ninhursag', creates a corresponding condensation
of the paradigmatic, such that it is more diffcult for us to chart this
axis, at least in terms of the explicit semantic components of the tale.

What is lacking in particular is any specific statement of the
Final Situation. This, however, can also be seen as an aspect of the
tale's message. The conditions of a beneficial fertility are not in
any fixed and final state, but require a constant attendance. Moreover,

they rest ultimately in the hands of the gods who, as the tale shows, might as easily upset as maintain them.   The position and expression of the Final Situation is assumed by a paean to Enlil and Ninlil which in praising the god's unalterable word expresses belief in its goodness and the ultimate desire that it should continue in a beneficial way.   Thus the semantic units of the tale do form a logical square, but it is in a sense an open-ended one, or at least one whose permanence, disquietingly, is not forever assured.   The ultimate word, and ground, remains 'impetuous'.

Initial Situation	Final Situation
Fruitful, ordered city; Relations pre-marital: pre-sexual; mother, young maiden, young man	Establishment and validation of integrated order; Relations post-marital: sex with limits; two families: upper/lower life/death

Motifeme 1	Motifeme 2
Undirected, purposeless sexuality; Transgression of taboo	Directed, purposeful sexuality; Reiteration of taboo

On the left, reading down, are the elements of the first, deterioration, part: the Initial Situation with its description of a stable well-ordered city and its inhabitants, and then the events which manifest the first motifeme and disrupt this order.   On the right and reading up appear the ameleorating elements: the manifestations of the second motifeme, which invert those of the first, and the closing hymn which allots to the gods the ultimate responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of fertility and order.

The unrestrained sexuality of the first part threatens to result ultimately in universal infertility and death.   This threat is countered by a directed and useful exercise of fertility which serves as both contrast and restorative.   These relations, purposeful and within a

familial context, re-establish the framework of a prosperous fertility,
embedded within this fertility's own ultimate cycle, in natural terms,
of life and death.   The necessary balance is both expressed and
regained, and is also echoed in theological terms in the balance
between the two new families divided between the upper and lower worlds,
the worlds of life and death.

This last expresses on the divine level the terms upon which human
life is grounded. The bald fact that children are born only to even-
tually die is subsumed by the prosperity to which their lifetimes are
intended.   Thus the sense in which three of the new gods are created to
meet the demands of the nether world sphere of death, but in so doing
are the cause of the prosperity of the upper world family which they
release. By assuming their nether world obligations they free and
maintain the upper world fertility which is the other aspect of the
life-death cycle.   Enlil's two families encapsulate in divine terms
this dual nature of all mortal procreation;   that each generation is
born as a gift of new prosperity, destined however, in its own turn to
die.

The theological strain concerning an ultimate reliance upon the
gods brings us back to Jacobsen's remarks about Enlil's character,
which is indeed another aspect of the myth's theme on a more specific
level.   Enlil, as god of the wind and storm, holds the leading active
position in the Sumerian pantheon, second only to Anu, whose authority
is more passive for being the more ultimate and absolute.   But the
awesome power of Enlil to organize and uphold the order of the cosmos
has its terrible destructive side as revealed in the fury and destruct-
ion of which the Mesopotamian storm is also capable.   It is upon this
dual nature and potential of Enlil, to be both ally and foe, that the
tale constructs its depiction of a fragile world balanced between

fertility and infertility and maintained there by the 'impetuous word'
of the god.

In his organizing aspect Enlil is seen as beneficent, necessary to
prosperity and abundance.   Indeed, nothing can exist without him and
his blessing.   This is the viewpoint of myths such as the 'Creation
of the Hoe' in which he separates heaven and earth, allowing seeds to
grow up, and with the first hoe breaks the earth's crust, through which
sprout up the first men (see Jacobsen 1976, 103; 1946, 137).   But if
he brings prosperity he can also take it away.   This is the burden of
lamentations such as the 'Lament for Ur', (ANET, 455-463), which sees in
the destruction of the city the storm-like wrath of the god.

This tale alludes to both aspects of the god's character.   His
impetuousness at first threatens a wide-ranging disruption.   Yet he
is then capable of taking matters into his own hands and, though
perhaps somewhat subverting the letter of other divine wills, re-
establishing a beneficent order according to his own will and action.

Thus a major impetus of the myth emerges as the glorification of
Enlil.   It is his character to which is allotted all of the action,
even down to assuming the appearance and activity of others.   And in
the end, all situations have merely played into his hands, banishment
included.

It is perhaps the implicit recognition of Enlil's dual nature
which presents the greatest problem to the clear and explicit expression
of the underlying aspects of fertility myth.   It manages to assert
itself, however, in terms of Enlil's double potential, on whose own
balance rests that of fertility.   Compared to 'Enki and Ninhursag'
these expressions of a balanced and useful fertility, and the injunctions
associated with it, remain somewhat buried to immediate sense beneath
the exploits of the god.   It may be too strong, though, to say that

this belies a sense of helplessness.   It may be more positive in its
very expression, in that it is an active attempt to keep the gods well-
disposed through praise.   Still, it leaves us with a residual taste of
the uncertainty obtaining to the precarious balance of life lived in a
difficult climate controlled by wilful deities.

Thus the myth operates thematically on a hierarchy of at least
three levels.   On its immediate surface it recounts the creation of
four deities, the moon-god and three nether world powers.   Their
relationship is in turn rooted in the contrasting aspects of Enlil's
own nature, which at once sets and enforces the cosmic order and is
capable of transgressing and destroying it.   Finally, these forces
also find expression in the precarious nature of all life and fertility,
requiring a balance which remains uncertain from season to season and is
dependent on careful husbandry and attention to the injunctions laid
down by divine decree.   Sexual taboos are grounded here in the divine
will which orders the cosmos.

Enlil's role is virtually the only active one in this narrative,
and though he is condemned by the other great gods for his initial
action he remains, after all, the one deity most responsible for order-
ing the universe, and enforcing that order.   Perhaps this is another
aspect of our initial sense of difficulty and confusion about his
activities in the second half of the tale.   Ultimately, the Sumerians
both recognized and feared, Enlil was a god who could do as he pleased,
as much the storm as the fertile breezes of spring.   The fertility
myth core asserts itself here as much in hope as dogma.   Condemning
the god who makes the rules may be exemplary but also finally futile.
It is not so much abrupt, as Jacobsen puts it, as perhaps only proper
to end this tale with a respectful hymn of praise.

VI. DESCENT TO THE NETHER WORLD

With the tales of Inanna/Ishtar's visit to the nether world we
encounter the familiar problems, but with some interesting variations.
As always with the material we are using here, it is important first
of all to establish as complete, or at least continuous, a text as
possible.   While the method itself, relying as it does on certain
structural rules, may help to identify gaps and incompleteness this
can primarily be only on the deeper, syntagmatic structural levels.
As we move upward toward the surface of the text the question of extra-
polating missing tale elements becomes problematic, as such elements
become more and more a matter for the free discretion of the story-
teller.   Depending upon the length of the gap and the surrounding
material we can at times make informed suggestions.   But unless or
until new material comes to light these must remain for the most part
conjectural.   Because the purpose here is not only to test, by
application, a theory of narrative, but also in so doing to try and
shed some light on ancient Mesopotamian thought, culture and religion,
I have thought it best to avoid undue conjecture and work with the
material as it has come down to us.   In the case of these tales,
however, someone else has already made the suggestions for us.   The
effort having been made, the points it raises are important and
relevant.   And so I will consider, in turn, all available texts of the
myth.

For the story of Inanna/Ishtar's journey to the realm of the dead
we have two ancient texts and one modern recension.   The two surviving
versions of the tale are one Sumerian and the other Akkadian.   The
Akkadian 'Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World' seems to be a complete,
but highly condensed version of what, by the time of its writing, would
certainly have been a very well-known tale.   The survival of two

versions from different eras and the relative terseness of the later
one suggest both that the tale was important and very familiar.

The earlier Sumerian 'Descent of Inanna to the Nether World' is
in good condition as far as it goes, but breaks off before the end.
The discovery of some more of the text, after the first translations and
commentaries had already been made, clearly points up the difficulty of
attempting to interpret fragmentary texts.   The question raised but
left, at least explicitly, unanswered at the very beginning of the tale
concerns Inanna's reason for wanting to journey to the land of the
dead.   Based on what was first known of the Sumerian version, and on
the more complete but also more cryptic Akkadian, it had 'been almost
universally assumed that Inanna's descent to the nether world was for
the purpose of saving Dumuzi (i.e. Tammuz), who was supposedly being
held there against his will' (Kramer ANET, 52, n.1).   The discovery
of new material proved this assumption to be not only wrong, but
dramatically so.   As it turns out, rather than the rescuer of Dumuzi,
Inanna proves to be the very cause of his imprisonment in the underworld.

The version I referred to as modern, (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983),
takes its impetus from the new material about Dumuzi and by adding to
it from other tales and songs (whose characters and action appear to be
related) attempts a complete, smoothly-reading version of the myth.
And it succeeds admirably, with the proviso that whether the Sumerians
would have found this version familiar, or a strangely cobbled together
hash, we cannot possibly say.   It is, however, a version of the tale of
Inanna's descent and resurrection and can be analyzed by our method, if
only to demonstrate that the fundamental structural rules of traditional
narrative apply, no matter who the particular 'singer' may be.   If
this modern version 'works', at least for us, it is because its structures
are complete, and therefore satisfying.   I would even go so far as to

argue that the pieces chosen by Wolkstein and Kramer to round out their tale (and I use the term purposely) were selected because they met structural requirements of which the editors may or may not have been fully aware, but were nonetheless, in their attempt at traditional composition, predisposed to fulfil.

In dealing with this unaccustomed wealth of texts I think it best to begin with the Sumerian version.   It takes precedence in age, and it does exhibit a certain completeness, as far as it goes.   The Wolkstein-Kramer edition can then be set beside it, as it is based on Sumerian materials.   Finally I will consider the Akkadian rendition, which in light of the Sumerian material and its own elliptical brevity appears almost to be a sort of condensed, or memorandum, version of the tale.

A.   Inanna's Descent
to the Nether World

1. The Story

The narrative begins straightaway with Inanna's decision to visit
the nether world.

> From the 'great above' she set her mind toward
>   the 'great below',
> The goddess, from the 'great above', she set her
>   mind towards the 'great below',
> Inanna, from the 'great above', she set her mind
>   towards the 'great below'.
> My lady abandoned heaven, abandoned earth, to the
>   nether world she descended (lines 1-4).

In so doing she abandons her temples in the great cities of Sumer.
She arrays herself in the seven me (translated by Kramer as 'ordinances'),
depicted here as queenly adornments.   Before setting off though, she
leaves her messenger, Ninshubur, with some instructions.   If Inanna has
not returned in three days Ninshubur is to assume the appearance of
mourning and go round to the gods Enlil, Nanna, and Enki and entreat
them for assistance.

Arriving at the gates of the nether world Inanna at first simply,
and arrogantly, demands admittance.

> In the palace of the nether world she spoke evilly:
> 'Open the house, gatekeeper, open the house,
> Open the house, Neti, open the house, all alone I
>   would enter (lines 74-6).

But the gatekeeper requires more and demands to know her name and
purpose.   She tells the gatekeeper who she is.

> 'If thou art Inanna of the place where the sun rises,
> Why pray hast thou come to the land of no return?
> On the road whose traveller returns not, how hath thy
> heart led thee?' (lines 81-3).

Inanna claims to have come to witness the funeral rites of Gugalanna,
husband of Inanna's elder sister Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld.
On the instructions of his own queen the gatekeeper leads Inanna
through the seven gates of the nether world, at each taking from her an
article of her royal outfit so that she comes before the nether world
gods naked and crouching.   At each gate Inanna questions this procedure,
but Neti only answers,

> 'Be silent, Inanna, the ordinances of the nether world
>   are perfect,
> O Inanna do not question the rites of the nether
>   world' (lines 129-30, etc.).

So Inanna comes before the gods of the nether world and Erishkigal,
her sister, naked and 'bowed low....' (line 161).

> They fastened (their) eyes upon her, the eyes of death,
> At their word, the word which tortures the spirit,
> ....,
> The sick 'woman' was turned into a corpse,
> The corpse was hung from a stake (lines 163-7).

Three days and nights pass without the return of the goddess and
Ninshubur sets about his assigned task.   Dressed all in mourning he
raises a hue and cry for the missing Inanna and begins his rounds of the
gods seeking assistance.   First to Enlil: 'Let not the maid Inanna be
put to death in the nether world' (line 182).   But he will not help.
And neither will Nanna.   Both reply:

> 'Inanna has asked for the "great above", has asked
>   for the "great below",
> The ordinances of the nether world, the...ordinances
>   the...ordinances – she has reached their place'
> (lines 189-90; 203-4).

Only Enki responds to the appeal.   From the dirt beneath his fingernail
he fashions two creatures, the kurgarru and the kalaturru – 'two sexless
creatures' (Kramer, ANET, 52) – and provides them with the food and
water of life.   Thus armed they are sent off to the nether world to

revive the goddess. Unfortunately, both Enki's instructions to these
creatures and their subsequent actions - which, in the manner of tradi-
tional narrative (as exemplified once already here) we can assume to be
the same - are lost to the fragmentation of the text. Whatever the
manner of its doing, they gain access to the corpse.

> Sixty times the food of life, sixty times the water
>   of life, they sprinkled upon it,
> Inanna arose (lines 271-2).

But Inanna cannot leave the nether world without providing a
substitute. So she ascends with a host of fearsome demons whose task
it is to secure this replacement. They meet first with the faithful
Ninshubur. But of course after all the messenger has done for her
Inanna cannot possibly allow him to die in her place. Next, they come
upon Shara, city god of Umma. He too is in mourning for the goddess
and again Inanna stays the demons. The same is the case with the
tutelary deity of Badtibira, Latarak. Finally they come upon Inanna's
own young husband Dumuzi who, to the goddess' astonishment and rage,
shows not the least sign of sorrow or mourning. And so it is he whom
Inanna hands over to the demons of the nether world as her substitute
in death. The young god appeals to the sun-god Utu to help him. But
here the text breaks off (ANET, 52-57).

2. Analysis and Interpretation

The basic narrative structure of this tale is not difficult to discern.
What we have of the story comprises just three motifemes. These moti-
femes underlie the three basic movements of the tale - One: Inanna's
descent and death (lines 1-168); Two: the search for assistance and
the revival of the goddess (lines 169-272); and Three: the finding of a
substitute (lines 273-?).

On this abstract motifeme level the movement of the tale is induced, at each crucial juncture, by a Confrontation: Inanna with Ereshkigal; Ereshkigal with Inanna's rescuers; and Inanna with Dumuzi.   On the more specific motif level these Confrontations are outfitted with motif sequences of the Task type.   And in a process of regular elaboration each task becomes progressively more difficult to accomplish.   We can think of the motif composition as having a 'tree' structure.   Each attempt to accomplish a task represents a different 'branch', only one of which leads to success.   And with each task the number of failures increases before success is achieved.

In the first motifeme the task lies in Inanna's gaining admittance to the nether world.   The initial motifs recount her preparations toward this, but the real work begins with her arrival at the gates to the underworld.   (The particular task which Inanna has set herself in going to the nether world at all is not made explicit.   This however is a problem for the paradigmatic analysis. Just now we are only concerned with the actual events presented by the narrative.)   Her first attempt at gaining admittance consists of simply trying to bully her way in. In this she fails.   She then attempts to employ a bit more subtlety, claiming that she has come to help her sister mourn.   This is apparently a ruse, as no mention is ever made of it again.   But in any event it works.   She gains access, though on the nether world's terms, and in the end she is rewarded for her trouble with death.

The motifs which embody the second motifeme are ultimately directed toward the revival of the slain goddess.   But the action takes place in two parts, two motif sequences.   Two tasks must be successfully accomplished before Inanna is reanimated.   In the first sequence Ninshubur must gain the aid of one of the great gods.   In this endeavour he fails twice before finally enlisting Enki's help.   In trying to delineate precisely

the narrative structure of this text a question arises concerning the motif of Inanna's instructions to her messenger, Ninshubur. As a part of this first motif sequence it is a sort of narrative time-bomb, embedded in the motif structure of the first motifeme. When it goes off it becomes the first motif of the second motifeme. At the same time though, it is not conspicuous by its position; it is also at home as a motif in the series which recount Inanna's preparations for her journey. So it does a double duty. It functions twice, in a sense mimicking the Mesopotamian literary convention of which it is a part. Whenever a god directs the actions of another he first foretells, or commands, the events to occur in every detail. Then the event takes place and the speech of the god is realized, and repeated verbatim, in acts. This motif participates in both motif sequences and in so doing reminds us again that these traditional narratives are not so structurally simple, but rather artfully integrated compositions.

The second sequence of motifs details the actual resuscitation of Inanna. Enki fashions the <u>kurgarru</u> and <u>kalaturru</u> and again their actions are first foretold and then played out. Unfortunately, in the translation we are primarily using here (Kramer, ANET), the precise nature of these actions is lost. In Jacobsen's version, (1976, 53-63), the two creatures are described as 'expert mourners' who slip into the nether world 'unnoticed, flying over the doors like flies and twisting like lizards under doorjamb **pivots'** (p.58). They gain access to the corpse by joining Ereshkigal in her habitual mourning, winning her blessing by their sympathy. Ereshkigal is reluctant to grant their request for the corpse, but at last she complies, perhaps in accordance with the rules of hospitality (see Kilmer 1971, 304). Whatever the precise details, Inanna is revived and the motif manifestation of the second motifeme is complete.

The realization of the third motifeme involves the release of Inanna from the nether world, which can only be accomplished by the provision of a substitute. Again, Jacobsen's version is more explicit than that of Kramer.

> Inanna was about to ascend from Hades
> (but) the Anunnaki seized her (saying),
> 'Who of those who ascended from Hades
>   ever did get up scot-free?
> If Inanna is ascending from Hades
> let her give a substitute as substitute for her'
> (1976, 59).

This is the task, and it is plain enough in both. This time, however, Inanna fails three times before a replacement for her is found. This replacement is Dumuzi, who slights her terribly by failing to mourn her disappearance. This single sequence of motifs, elaborated by the trebled failures, realizes the third motifeme of the tale as we have it here. It would appear, from other versions and sources, including the Akkadian, that Dumuzi's sister, Geshtinanna, also plays a role in the final outcome of this tale, and an important one. But as I will be considering other versions in their turn, for now I will deal with this one as it stands.

Clearly this myth is about a disappearing — a dying and rising — god. But what are the sources and implications of this adventure? Jacobsen would have it be a simple metaphor. According to his reading Inanna represents the storehouse which as it empties toward the end of the winter season takes on the desolate aspect of the nether world itself. That Dumuzi must die to revive it refers to the complementary depletion of the sheep herds which provide the meat of reprovision (1976, 63). This metaphor seems sound enough — Inanna has a fertility aspect and is associated with the storehouse, Dumuzi is a shepherd — and there is really no reason to argue with it. Except that it does not seem enough to fully explain the presence, and power, of this myth. It is only the explication

of a metaphor. Jacobsen's interpretation deals with only the surface mechanics of this tale. It tells us very little about its deeper, and actually more immediate, ramifications. That the annual store will eventually be depleted, and sheep must die to replenish it, cannot be news to anyone. As the narrative raiment of further matters, though, it proves to be quite apt. The structure of this tale is so fundamental, and the implications of its contents so universal, that it refers to several levels of both social and personal religious preoccupation.

The narrative structure of this myth is so easily discernible because it is so basic. The tale's sense of completeness, despite the broken-off form in which we have it, derives from the way the basic narrative structure of the motifeme is fully mirrored on the surface level. The structure of the motifeme is an abstraction of that of the 'basic tale', with a beginning, middle, and end (or situation, response, result). The content of this story utilizes the same structure, on its own level, employing a motifeme for each stage of the progression. Its three episodes are the beginning, middle and end of a basic tale which in its turn might be combined with others to form a still longer and more complex narrative. As we shall see it do below.

But what we have here is a complete narrative in itself: Inanna sets off into the nether world and is lost there, she is rescued from death, and she returns to the world above. The general type of this tale, no surprise, is that of the journey, or quest. It recounts a separation from a particular status and way of life, a passage with attendant trials and tribulations, and, eventually, return. This is its form; its specific message is less immediately clear. In describing it as a basic tale, though, the operative term is 'basic', for this is a form central to other cultural expressions as well, and in particular to ritual.

This structure as ritual is that of the rite of passage. Here also are found the three elements to which the stages of Inanna's journey correspond: separation; transition; incorporation. In ritual, as in narrative, this movement is usually expressed in spatial terms. This ritual form is a very general one, however, and can be applied to any number of events on the course of life's way. The contents of this myth do not refer explicitly to any particular such passage. But they do suggest some interesting possibilities.

The broadest social implications of Inanna's passage lie in its fertility aspects. Because Inanna is a fertility goddess and the coming and going of the various gods to and from the nether world can be refered to the alternation of the seasons, this is the aspect of the myth upon which most commentators, like Jacobsen, concentrate. This is, perhaps, its most immediate level of reference. However, its structure and themes, of death and power, suggest other interpretive models as well. These may not be the primary concerns of this manifestation, but traditional transmission is inherently conservative and its structures have the capacity to contain, and retain, a large, multilayered freight of meaning and resonance. The history of the existing versions of this myth is a long one. The history of its lost antecedents is most probably longer still.

A more singular passage is that of shamanistic induction. Not, perhaps, as an actual aspect of Sumerian religion, but certainly as a distinct echo in both the motive and fate of Inanna as she passes through the realm of death.

The initiation of a shaman spans the shifting border between public and private concern. For the initiate it involves death in one spiritual sphere and resurrection in another. The journey itself is unique to the individual, but its ramifications will be felt throughout a wider

area. Its purpose is the acquisition of power. This power is personal but its use is social and effects the commonweal.

Much has been said about the apparently arbitrary nature of Inanna's decision to descend to the nether world, especially since she has lost to a better text the goal of rescuing Dumuzi. But Kramer's translation, 'she set her mind', is based on the transliteration 'she opened her ear' and the fact that the sign for 'ear' is also that for 'wisdom' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983, 156). Knowledge and understanding is power. And Inanna is known to fancy power. She is happy enough, in another tale, to take advantage of a drunken Enki to gain possession of the me. Here the abrupt introduction of her intention, indeed her whole demeanor, betray this appreciation of power and a desire to increase it. This desire would be, for Inanna, reason enough to confront her sister Ereshkigal, who rules a sphere over which Inanna can have no dominion. In the event, however, the only power she gains — if it can be called that, for Inanna herself is a hostage to it — is that of sentencing another to be her substitute in death.

I am not trying to make an argument for shamanistic induction as a facet of Sumerian religion. This myth deals with gods, not men, and the immediate attractions of power here, as so often in the affairs of Mesopotamian deities, appear to be more political than spiritual. This story is about basic cosmic relationships and their ultimate expression in the visible world. The action takes place on an altogether different plane from that of human affairs, though its final resolution effects them profoundly. For it refers once again to the absolute dependence of one upon the other.

The religious speculation here takes place on a level beyond human intervention. But these speculations find that their contents naturally fall into a particular structural mould. Structure and content exert a

mutual attraction.   The quest itself takes this form regardless of

the seeker, or his ultimate purpose.   Inanna, being already a goddess,

is no shaman.   But her personal quest for power effects the entire human,

and divine, community.   It is therefore reminiscent of the shaman's

quest and so is presented in that form.   The whole enterprise of

traditional narrative depends on the constancy of structure beneath

the flux of actual stories told.   This not only enables transmission

from generation to generation but creates a depth of meaning and

reference beyond the immediate contents of any one particular tale.

Power is a theme in this tale and it here retains the structure of its

quest in its more archaic, human form.

While I do not really want to go too deeply into the question of

the origins of the structures upon which narrative is based, we can

begin to see from these remarks how some structures are fundamental to

all manner of cultural activity and to the intellectual apprehension of

certain psychological and religious events.   The journey or quest, as

metaphor and structure, refers to events and activities basic to human

life, such as food-gathering or the hunt, sex, and even death.   This

could explain why we find this structure employed in such a wide range

of contexts.

> The 'sequence of motifemes' meaning here, Propp's
> functions could as well be described as a 'program
> of actions'; the linguistic representative of 'action'
> is the verb.   In fact if we look more closely at
> Propp's sequence, the major part of his 'functions'
> can be conveniently summarized in one verb, 'to get',
> corresponding to the substantive 'the quest.' And
> this three-letter word does imply quite a complicated
> program of actions. ...
>   In fact if we ask where such a structure of sense, such
> a program of actions, is derived from, the answer must
> evidently be: from the reality of life, nay, from
> biology (Burkert 1979, 15).

Burkert here is subsuming virtually the entire sequence of Propp's

functions, that is, virtually the entire tale, to his action pattern

'to get'. This places it on the motif level. My method discovers
the motifeme on an even more abstract structural level than this.
This further abstraction, however, to the terms situation–response–
result, still retains the basic dynamic of 'the quest'.

But if we might relate this most abstract and basic of narrative
structures, the motifeme, to such 'programs of action' we must also
insist, as does Burkert, that 'we are not explaining the tale by some
"original" reference to any objective fact' (p.17). It would
represent more a manner of thinking about these actions than any direct
reproduction of the actions themselves. There can be no tracing the
entire universe of tales back to some 'first' recounting of a prehis-
toric hunt, or of any particular 'types' back to 'original' events.
We are concerned only with structures and perhaps clues as to why
certain simple ones are so basic and widespread, but certainly not with
any 'big–bang theory' of the origin of narrative itself.

Moreover, these speculations would most likely finally involve us
in the attempt to find the starting point of a circle. It is Lévi-
Strauss' suggestion, and even premise, in much of his work that it is
the inherent and unconscious structures of thought which produce these
apparently external structures in our environment and actions. To
quote Burkert again: 'Probably this would be the place to start an
inquiry into the unconscious dynamics of the psyche, which are situated
somewhere between biology and language, and which no doubt are involved
in understanding and retelling tales' (p.17). But whether biology
structures thought or perhaps somehow it is the other way about is not
to the point here, and reaches far beyond my more concrete goals and
capabilities in examining these texts.

I have wanted only to point out how the reduction of so many
activities, and consequently tales, to the simple pattern of 'quest'

is not thereby to over-simplify the problems of narrative structure or find for them a single solution. For it is a starting, not a finishing point of analysis, and it is precisely the elaborations upon such a widespread and basic structure which generate the potentially infinite variety of narratives and meanings.

Having said all of this, the fact remains that the quest or journey in this particular tale is no mere matter of abstract structural dynamics. The pivot of this myth is death itself and no more central journey can confront the human sensibility. Perhaps it was the sudden awareness of the fact of death which was the original impetus for human thought, for the ability, and desire, to order the world; by its implication of meaninglessness, creating the need for meaning. Death as culture-bringer, as culture hero. But culture is an estrangement as well as a boon. This creates a profound ambivalence. What can we find that this tale makes of it?

The quest, when it takes as its manifestation the journey into, and even through, death ventures into the very depths of human psychology, both personal and communal. There are many ways of dying, and of approaching death. This tale gives us at least some cause to begin, au fond, with the most personal: suicide. Suicide can, on some occasions, be granted a religious justification, where dying is considered 'the ultimate "peak experience" of religious madness' (Day 1984, 87). Of course, in this instance Inanna quite explicitly 'abandoned heaven' and though perhaps ill-advised in doing so, she gives no indication of being in the throes of religious ecstasy. (If such a concept can even have meaning in relation to a goddess.) Her sheer wilfulness, however, in abandoning the upper, living world might suggest something like suicide to us, remembering once again that there is no immediately apparent explanation as to why she so resolutely 'set her mind on the

"great below" '.

Inanna is divine and therefore immortal. But this does not preclude the possibility that she might die or, more precisely, be killed. Dying gods are common enough, whatever the motive. There are examples elsewhere in this mythology (Enuma elish being the prime one) and indeed, it is just what does eventually occur here, however temporarily. Moreover, Enlil and Nanna both withhold their aid by declining to interfere with the 'ordinances of the nether world'. In fact, they both point out that 'Inanna has asked for the "great above", has asked for the "great below" '.

But in saying that she has brought this fate upon herself the gods are referring more to her wilfulness and impetuosity, especially regarding things she does not fully understand or properly respect, than to the idea that she might have gone out actively seeking to surrender herself permanently to death; she has gotten what she deserves, if not exactly what she expected. At the same time, her detailed instructions for her own rescue and the Mesopotamians' own concrete conception of the afterlife and its futility also make suicide as a motive seem very unlikely. She is not sacrificing herself to or for anything else. Inanna has nothing to gain by simply willing her own death (nor is it her style). Her intentions, as I have already noted above, are much more pragmatic. She seeks to aggrandize, not diminish or extinguish herself.

Burkert suggests ritual sacrifice as a possible model for what happens to Inanna in this tale. 'The details of the descent, the female successively stripped of her clothing and finally hung from a beam, are suspiciously evocative of a ritual execution, a girl sacrifice' (1979, 139). He draws this parallel in the course of discussing the effect of the goddess' death on fertility in the tale(s). (He considers both

the Akkadian and Sumerian versions to be essentially one and the same
tale.   The Akkadian is actually much more explicit about this fertility
aspect, while only in the earlier text is there a corpse 'hung from a
beam'.)   Taking the Mesopotamian myths of Inanna/Ishtar together as
thematically identical, Burkert compares them to the Hittite myth of
Telepinus.

> The effect of the disappearance of the divinity is
> nearly identical in both versions: the life of all
> men, animals, and plants is arrested, a catastrophe
> which frightens even the gods.   There is, however,
> a special kind of awe associated with the nether
> world and its sinister queen, so that even Inanna's
> ascent becomes quite ambiguous, a return to life,
> yes, but death in turn for Dumuzi (p.139).

This catastrophe, and the gods' reaction to it, are not stated events
in the Sumerian version of the tale, with which I am still solely
concerned here.   So the immediate problem remains the role of death
itself.

For death plays a role in this tale which we can separate from the
motivations of those who encounter it.   It is a role determined by the
motivations of the tale itself.   Inanna's motives are a function of the
plot which, by failing to be more specific about them, causes them to
seem more mysterious and important.   But the myth is more concerned with
Inanna's actual encounter with death, its implications and ramifications,
than with the reasons it comes about in the first place.   Perhaps the
primary motive for Inanna's descent is simply to lead the myth into con-
frontation with the ambiguity which, as Burkert points out, surrounds
her ascent.

If we confine ourselves to the actual contents of this myth we find
that it is mostly concerned with the rights and prerogatives of death,
its queen, and her dark, inhospitable domain.   All of its narrative
elaborations — the seven-fold dressing and undressing of the goddess, the

mourning preparations and acts of her rescuers, the repetitious search for a substitute – serve to emphasize the upholding and fulfilment of these rights (and rites).   'Be silent, Inanna, the ordinances of the nether world are perfect,/O Inanna, do not question the rites of the nether world.'

Inanna is a fertility goddess.   But death is the sister of life and fertility, and though Inanna might try her power, Ereshkigal will always triumph on her own ground.   Inanna may escape but death itself is not thwarted.   The kingdom of death is an ultimate reality.   It is undeniable and therefore must be a somehow inherent and necessary aspect of the cosmos.   Even the gods themselves are not entirely safe from it. It is a realm of their cosmos and ruled over, however ungraciously, by one of their own.   Its underground world balances their more familiar astral one, and its books must always balance as well.   That accounting, though, normally takes place on earth, the middle ground between.

The annual turning of the seasons and their crops is an inescapable reality of an agrarian existence, and an obvious prototype for all temporal motion.   Death is clearly a necessary point on this compass, preparing, and even propelling, each successive cycle.   (This becomes even clearer when Dumuzi's sister, Geshtinanna, is factored into the equation, as she is in the longer version I will be considering next.) The shared fertility of all life, which ensures the immortality of the species despite the extinction of the individual, is man's most immediate and obvious connection with the rest of the natural world, from which he otherwise, with his ability to reason and consciousness of death, feels so estranged.   For all our modern, wilful separation from the natural world it was probably ancient man, living so much more closely to and upon the natural and mysterious world who felt this estrangement most deeply.   Modern men seem driven to deny their uniqueness as far as

possible. The ancients were more concerned to integrate it. If we see in these myths an attempt to imbue the rest of creation with human thought, motivation, and emotion that is because they represent an attempt to bridge that estrangement. Rather than reducing human experience to natural terms, this tale refers natural occurrences to the human cycle of life and death.

Although we know from the actual physical condition of the tablets upon which this tale was found that it is broken and incomplete, I have referred above to a sense of completeness in its syntagmatic narrative structure. Because, however, narratives are built up by combining basic syntactical units to form larger units, which themselves may be variously combined into ever larger wholes, and so on, the idea of completeness on this axis is relative and descriptive only of the compositional mechanics of a tale. Syntagmatically, the growth of a narrative is totally open-ended. It is on the paradigmatic level, where the semantic content lies, that the actual boundaries of a particular narrative are determined. To be truly complete it must display, so to speak, a whole mind in a sound body. The analysis of the paradigmatic structures of this myth can be only as complete as the text itself. And such an analysis does indicate that the full story of Inanna's descent probably does not conclude with the marking for death of Dumuzi.

In this text we discovered three motifemes which, referring to the action of their motif manifestations, we may designate Descent, Rescue and Substitution. It would be too simple, and programatic, to judge this tale incomplete merely because three motifemes seem insufficient to form a full logical square; although this is an aspect of our conclusion. Syntactical units, existing as they do on a number of different levels, do not necessarily form any one-to-one correspondence with semantic ones. The logical relations function on all levels, using not only stated terms

but sometimes implied ones as well. Again it must be reiterated that our purpose is not to fill ready-made structures, but to discover those which are inherent to each particular text.

One useful criterion for completeness which may be applied here is that of the transformation of the Initial Situation. The end of the tale should present a complete and logically satisfactory alteration of the circumstances of its beginning. The action of this tale begins abruptly, with Inanna's decision to descend to the 'great below'. So the Initial Situation, as that which sets the scene according to location and the main characters and their relationships and circumstances, is not fully formed here as a discreet syntactical entity. It does exist, however, as a semantic unit, partly implied and partly embedded in the rapidly developing action of the initial motifs. The location and characters are introduced clearly enough. Inanna, currently of the 'great above', is the main protagonist. Though her nature and position would need no introduction to the tale's contemporary audience, they are clearly referred to in the enumeration of her many temples and her assumption of divine me as ornamentation and badges of rank. Other characters and their relationships - Enlil, Nanna, and Enki - are introduced through the goddess' instructions to her messenger. The actual situation, however, how matters stand at the outset of this tale, and what, therefore, we can expect to find altered at its conclusion, remains more a matter of implication. There is no overt cause or impetus for Inanna's journey, no problem or lack which needs resolving - at least none outside Inanna herself. In fact, the repetitious recounting of Inanna's abandonment of her various temple cities, one after the other, suggests just the opposite, that everything is in perfect order before her journey begins. And she is in full and legitimate possession of her appropriate me.

Having recovered an Initial Situation however, we cannot simply bring it into relation with the three motifemes and discover a semantic rectangle. The structure may potentially be there, but the logic - which is its only justification - fails us. The logical transformation of this Initial Situation remains clearly incomplete. The usual form of such a transformation is that of a reversal or inversion; S becomes -S, usually by stages. A situation or condition at the beginning of a tale becomes its opposite at the end; a lack is liquidated, characters' positions are reversed, and so forth. These are simple examples of the most basic type. Some myths will present this revolution on a truly cosmic scale, and having passed through a whole sequence of intermediate, partial resolutions. Here we would expect to find the ordered cosmos which Inanna abandons on her quest to have assumed at its conclusion a clearly altered but once more stable state.

But what so far has happened here? The death of a sky deity has been redeemed by that of an earth god. Death remains in the ascendant. Such a resolution is incomplete because the initial order of the tale's beginning has not yet been fully recovered or replaced in a new, altered form. The death of Dumuzi is an unanswered diminution and so still another disruptive element. It is only a stage along the way to the establishment of a new order.

This can be seen even more clearly if we consider the motifemes according to the structure of their sexual semantics. Each motifeme is filled by a descent to the nether world, and in each instance the character (or characters) making the descent represents a different gender category: Inanna is female, her two rescuers, the kurgarru and the kalaturru, are sexless, and Dumuzi is a male. Here we can see the outlines of an emerging semantic rectangle. The fourth term is still missing but can be guessed at. It would most likely oppose, and balance,

'sexless' by representing some combination of male and female both.
But this is looking ahead.   The three terms that we have, though, do
point up the paradigmatic incompleteness of this text, as well as the
general direction it might be expected to take form where it breaks off.
And it is clues such as these, whether or not they are fully recognized,
apprehended, and consciously utilized, which provide the impetus and
structural basis for the version of the myth I will consider next.

B. The Descent of Inanna

1. The Text and its Background

Wolkstein and Kramer (1983, 52–89) have put together the longest
and most complete text of this myth.   But here we must immediately
draw back a bit, for it is not necessarily a proper Sumerian text at
all.   It is coherent enough but it is a conflation of many sources.
As the editorial work of Wolkstein and Kramer it represents yet another
generation in the historical transmission of the tale.   As such it is
a perfectly legitimate text for analysis.   But we have to remember
that our conclusions about it may say as much about the editors (and
the present state of Sumerian studies) as about the ancient Sumerians
themselves.   Nevertheless, given the apparently homogeneous contents
of the sources, the laws of traditional transmission should help to
ensure that these modern storytellers are at least still working in
much the same way as the ancients did.

The problem, of course, lies in the fact that the concerns which
motivated the Sumerian composition of this tale, in whatever specific
forms it actually assumed, were culturally innate, whereas the forma-
tive impulses of this modern recension can only proceed from our own
best understanding of what we may believe these concerns to have been,
and that based upon the evidence of remaining original fragments from
scattered sources.   The danger for the reconstruction, and subsequent
elucidation of, the Sumerian structures at work beneath such a recension
lies in a certain necessarily presumptive and prior interpretation of
the available material.   The editors can ultimately only compose
their own best narrative from the materials to hand.

Actually, Wolkstein and Kramer are not the first to have brought
some of these separate texts together for consideration as parts of a

broader whole. Jacobsen has treated a number of them together in his study of Mesopotamian religion (1976), though he does not so much attempt to create a single text as interpret them together as being of a piece in theme and action.

He considers the major factor in their interrelation to be their 'curiously deviant attitude' toward the death of Dumuzi. This 'has found expression in the complex literary composition called the "Descent of Inanna". Here the young wife, instead of lamenting Dumuzi's death, is the instrument of it; she delivers him to the powers of the nether-world to escape herself. Only his sister Geshtinanna remains true to him and she eventually pays for her loyalty with death' (1976, 55). This lonely loyalty of a sister, when all others have apparently abandoned the god, together with a discoverable continuity of action among the texts, is the same impulse which has moved Wolkstein and Kramer to prepare their own edition of the tale.

Wolkstein and Kramer have combined a number of separate compositions in building up their text. They begin with the 'Descent of Inanna', and in fact use this text to bracket their whole version by closing with 'Kramer's tentative translation of the last fifteen lines'. In between they take their material from 'Dumuzi's Dream' (Alster 1972) and a fragmentary story they call 'Dumuzi and Geshtinanna', as well as 'several mourning songs' (1983, 206).

The most certain discontinuity between this text and any Sumerian equivalent must be on the texture level, even the fact of translation aside. For though they have used nothing which does not come from the original Sumerian, Wolkstein and Kramer have integrated and edited their sources so as to render a tale which reads smoothly as an unbroken English text. They have bridged the lacunae and trimmed the repetition. But of course in doing so they have had to impose, to some extent, their

own deeper structures. The position and number of the motifs is a matter of their own informed but independent decision. Their motifeme structure must be that which seemed most appropriate to combining the motifs they had to hand into one coherent tale. In saying this I am not suggesting that they necessarily made these decisions with such criteria consciously in mind, only that the nature of their enterprise demands these kinds of decisions. It is in the very nature of traditional composition. So while we can say that, yes, this narrative seems coherent and all of a piece to us, we can really still say little for certain about the form in which the Sumerians themselves recounted this cycle of tales, if they be even that, to one another. While the subjects here expressed are certainly Sumerian in origin, we cannot know if their structural relations are, and it is these relations which generate the ultimate cultural meanings.

What we have here is a text which presents what the Sumerians said, in the formal structure of what Wolkstein and Kramer think they might have meant. That the editors have produced such a satisfyingly complete narrative suggests one, or both, of two things. There may indeed have been a Sumerian tale, or cycle of tales, which resembled this product of modern scholarship. Beyond the fact that all of these poems exist, and do fit together rather neatly, this is not available to proof. But the fact that we are presented with this text demonstrates once more precisely the way in which traditional storytellers have always composed their narratives, freely choosing from and arranging whatever material is to hand, but always according to certain underlying structural rules. This may not be the Sumerian text, but it is a traditional narrative. In examining it we will at least discover that the structural laws of traditional narrative apply just as much to Wolkstein and Kramer as they did to the original tellers.

a) From the Great Above
   To the Great Below

From the Great Above she opened her ear to the Great Below
From the Great Above the goddess opened her ear to the
   Great Below.
From the Great Above Inanna opened her ear to the Great Below.

My Lady abandoned heaven and earth to descend to the
   underworld.
Inanna abandoned heaven and earth to descend to the
   underworld.
She abandoned her office of holy priestess to descend to
   the underworld (p.52).

This first section, drawn from the same sources as the version in
Ancient Near Eastern Texts, tells the same story.   Inanna has decided
to travel to the nether world.   She dresses and instructs her servant.
Her admission to the underworld involves passing through its seven
gates, giving up an article of her dress or adornment at each.   When
she enters, naked, into the throne room Ereshkigal strikes her down and
her corpse is hung from the wall, 'a piece of rotting meat' (p.60).
When the goddess does not return her servant Ninshubar carries her
lament to the various great gods, Enlil, Nanna, and Enki.   Only Enki is
moved to help the goddess and he fashions the kurgarra and the galatur.
In this version we have Enki's instructions to the rescuers.

'Go to the underworld,
Enter the door like flies.
Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld, is moaning
With the cries of a woman about to give birth.
No linen is spread over her body.
Her breasts are uncovered.
Her hair swirls about her head like leeks.
When she cries, "Oh! Oh! My inside!"
Cry also, "Oh! Oh! Your inside!"
When she cries, "Oh! Oh! My outside!"
Cry also, "Oh! Oh! Your outside!"
The queen will be pleased.
She will offer you a gift.
Ask her only for the corpse that hangs from the
   hook on the wall.
One of you will sprinkle the food of life on it.
The other will sprinkle the water of life.
Inanna will arise' (p.64)

This the kurgarra and galatur do, but they must hold out for the one gift they really want. First Ereshkigal offers 'the water-gift, the river in its fullness', but they turn that down. Then she offers 'the grain-gift, the fields in harvest', and they refuse that also.

> Ereshkigal said:
> 'Speak then! What do you wish?'
>
> They answered :
> 'We wish only the corpse which hangs from the
>   hook on the wall.'
>
> Ereshkigal said:
> 'The corpse belongs to Inanna.'
>
> They said:
> 'Whether it belongs to our queen,
> Whether it belongs to our king,
> That is what we wish.'
>
> The corpse was given to them.
>
> The kurgarra sprinkled the food of life on the corpse.
> The galatur sprinkled the water of life on the corpse.
> Inanna arose... (p.66-67).

But Inanna cannot leave the realm of death without providing a substitute. She ascends accompanied by the demons of the underworld, the galla,

> Who eat no offerings, who drink no libations,
> Who accept no gifts.
> They enjoy no lovemaking.
> They have no sweet children to kiss.
> They tear the wife from the husband's arms,
> They tear the child from the father's knees,
> They steal the bride from her marriage home (p.68).

The first three people they encounter, Ninshubur, Shara, and Lulal, are all in mourning for the disappeared goddess and so important to her that she refuses to let the galla take them. But Dumuzi,

> Dumuzi, the husband of Inanna, was dressed in his
>   shining me-garments.
> He sat on his magnificent throne; (he did not move).
>
> ....

> Inanna fastened on Dumuzi the eye of death.
> She spoke against him the word of wrath.
> She uttered against him the cry of guilt:
>   'Take him! Take Dumuzi away!' (p.71).

Dumuzi appeals to the sun-god Utu, as both the god of justice and his brother-in-law, to help him to escape from the demons.

> The merciful Utu accepted Dumuzi's tears.
> He changed the hands of Dumuzi into snake hands.
> He changed the feet of Dumuzi into snake feet.
> Dumuzi escaped from his demons.
> They could not hold him... (p.73).

b)   The Dream of Dumuzi

The opening of this section finds Dumuzi stumbling across the steppe weeping.

> 'O steppe, set up a wail for me!
> O crabs in the river, mourn for me!
> O frogs in the river, call for me!
> O my mother, Sirtur, weep for me!
> ....
> If she does not know the day I am dead,
> You, O steppe, tell her, tell my mother.
> On the steppe, my mother will shed tears for me.
> On the steppe, my little sister will mourn for me' (p.74).

He lies down to rest and, falling asleep, has a dream.   Awakening, he is terrified by what he has dreamt and calls out for his sister, Geshtinanna, 'who knows the meaning of dreams'.

> 'A dream! My sister, listen to my dream:
> Rushes rise all about me; rushes grow thick about me.
> A single growing reed trembles for me.
> From a double-growing reed, first one, then the other,
>   is removed.
> In a wooded grove, the terror of tall trees rises about me.
> Water is poured over my holy hearth.
> The bottom of my churn drops away.
> My drinking cup falls from its peg.
> My shepherd's crook has disappeared.
> An eagle seizes a lamb from the sheepfold.
> A falcon catches a sparrow on the reed fence.

> My sister, your goats drag their lapis beards in the dust.
> Your sheep scratch the earth with bent feet.
>
> The churn lies silent; no milk is poured.
> The cup lies shattered; Dumuzi is no more.
> **The sheepfold is given to the winds'** (p.p. 75 - 6).

Geshtinanna is not anxious to hear such a dream, but she interprets its meaning for him.   The rushes which rise about the god are the demons pursuing him.   The single reed is their mourning mother, the double-growing reed themselves, brother and sister, 'first one, then the other, will be taken away'.   The tall trees represent the galla, and the images of churn, cup, crook, eagle and falcon refer to the demons' attack upon him.   'The galla will cause everything to wither' (p.77).   The actions of Geshtinanna's goats and sheep represent her own mourning for the fallen god.   She repeats the final three lines to him.   They mean exactly what they say.

Immediately upon hearing this dire interpretation of his vision Dumuzi urges his sister to run to a hilltop and watch for the approaching demons.   This she does, and an unnamed friend of Dumuzi's goes with her.   From atop the hill they spot the galla and warn Dumuzi to hide.   He enjoins them both to tell no one his hiding place.   They make this promise, saying, 'Dumuzi, if we tell your hiding place, / Let your dogs devour us' (p.78).

The galla decide to look first for Dumuzi in the home of his sister. They demand that she tell them where he is, but she will not speak. They offer gifts.   She refuses them.   They attack and torture her, but still she is silent.   So the demons go on to the home of Dumuzi's friend. They offer him the 'water-gift' and the 'grain-gift'.   He accepts them: Dumuzi is hidden in the grass, but he does not know the place.   The galla search for Dumuzi in the grass but cannot find him.   Twice more Dumuzi's friend betrays him in this manner, without giving the precise locations

revealing first that the god is hidden 'among the small plants', then
'among the large plants'.   Still the demons cannot find their prey.
Finally, this friend tells the galla more precisely what they want to
know.   'Dumuzi hid in the ditches of Arali. / Dumuzi fell down in the
ditches of Arali' (p.80).   And it is there that the galla catch him.
Dumuzi, understandably upset by his friend's behavior, blesses any child
of his sister, who protected him, but places a corresponding curse upon
any child of his friend.

The galla bind Dumuzi, and beat him.   He makes an appeal to Utu,
the god of justice.

> 'O Utu, you are my brother-in-law,
> I am the husband of your sister.
> ....
> Change my hands into the hands of a gazelle.
> Change my feet into the feet of a gazelle.
> Let me escape from my demons.
> Let me flee to Kubiresh! ' (p.81).

Dumuzi's plea is granted and he escapes to Kubiresh.   But the
demons follow.   He escapes again and flees to the house of the woman,
Old Belili.   She provides the god with food and water, but when she
leaves the house the galla enter.   Again Dumuzi escapes, this time to
the sheepfold of his sister.   Geshtinanna weeps to discover him there,
'Her grief covered the horizon like a garment' (p.83).   Dumuzi is not
to escape the galla this time.   They strike him down, everything
happens as foretold in his dream and its interpretation.   He is stripped
of his royal trappings.   Naked he must go with the galla.

> The galla seized Dumuzi.
> They surrounded him.
> They bound his hands.   They bound his neck.
>
> The churn was silent.   No milk was poured.
> The cup was shattered.   Dumuzi was no more.
> The sheepfold was given to the winds (p.84).

c) The Return

A lament was raised in the city:
 'My Lady weeps bitterly for her young husband.
 Inanna weeps bitterly for her young husband.
 Woe for her husband! Woe for her young love!
 Woe for her house! Woe for her city!

 . . . .

 Great is the grief of those who mourn for Dumuzi' (p.85).

Now Inanna weeps for her lost husband. He is gone and she can no longer bring him food and drink. His sheepfold is given over to the raven and there is only the wind to play his reed pipe, to sing his sweet songs.

Dumuzi's mother, Sirtur, also mourns her son. He is now captive, unable to wander as he once did, 'so freely on the steppe' (p.86). She goes to the desolate place where Dumuzi lies. She looks upon 'the slain wild bull'.

 'My child, the face is yours.
 The spirit has fled.'

 There is mourning in the house.
 There is grief in the inner chambers. (p.87).

Finally, there is the grief of his sister, Geshtinanna. She too wanders the city, weeping for her brother. Her lament extends to a desire to share his fate.

 'The day that dawns for you will also dawn for me.
 The day that you will see I will also see.

 I would find my brother! I would comfort him!
 I would share his fate! ' (p.88).

Inanna tries to comfort the sister. She would take her to Dumuzi, 'But I do not know the place'.

Then a fly appeared.
The holy fly circled the air above Inanna's head and spoke:
    'If I tell you where Dumuzi is,
    What will you give me?'

Inanna said:
    'If you tell me,
    I will let you frequent the beer-houses and taverns.
    I will let you dwell among the talk of the wise ones.
    I will let you dwell among the songs of the minstrels.'

The fly spoke:
    'Lift your eyes to the edges of the steppe,
    Lift your eyes to Arali.
    There you will find Geshtinanna's brother,
    There you will find the shepherd Dumuzi.'

Inanna and Geshtinanna went to the edges of the steppe.
They found Dumuzi weeping.
Inanna took Dumuzi by the hand and said:
    'You will go to the underworld
    Half the year.
    Your sister, since she has asked,
    Will go the other half.
    On the day you are called,
    That day you will be taken.
    On the day Geshtinanna is called,
    That day you will be set free.'

Inanna placed Dumuzi in the hands of the eternal.

Holy Ereshkigal! Great is your renown!
Holy Ereshkigal! I sing your praises!

(pp.88-9).

2. Wolkstein's Commentary

Kramer writes, in his Preface to Inanna, that after having brought his translations of the original Sumerian texts up to date he turned them over to Wolkstein, 'who proceeded to arrange, combine, and mould their raw contents in a way that would make them alive and meaningful to modern readers' (p.xiii). For my own purposes this should be taken as a caveat that must be kept in mind when trying to understand this restored text in its Sumerian context. It applies also to Wolkstein's own interpretation of the myth. For the question raised, of course, is whether what is meaningful to the modern reader is also what was meaningful to the ancient Sumerians whose 'raw contents' these are, or were.

Wolkstein's commentary on this tale is thorough and generally persuasive.   Nevertheless, her preoccupations are clear and it is important to remember this in light of the fact that as editor of this collation of fragments she is also, in the sense in which the term applies to the transmitter of traditional narrative, the author of this parti-cular tale, or at least version of it.

It is axiomatic to my concept of the traditional tale, and especially myth, that the preoccupations of the storyteller, and by extension his audience (if his tale is to live), will be the prime motive behind his choice of content with which to fill his structural framework. The content, that about which he would speak, obviously enough comes first, and is then arranged by the teller to satisfy the structural requirements of a 'well-told tale'.   If we analyse the narrative structure first that is only because it is the final stage the poet's material goes through as he brings his thought to light.   We are obliged to take his work apart in the direction opposite to that in which he originally assembled it.   As we are dealing here with traditional narrative, and even more specifically, myth, the 'he' of the poet stands in for his society and culture as a whole, which if it keeps a tale alive does so because it not only speaks to it but for it.   The difficult and in some ways perhaps ultimately impossible problem which we confront with this version of an ancient myth is that of separating its modern editor's preoccupations from those of its original hearers.   This is one reason why I am considering it together with other, unreconstructed, versions.

Wolkstein's interpretation concentrates on the psychological aspects of the tale.   She reads it as an account of spiritual growth and healing. She begins with reference to the ritual symbolism of the descent.   'In many traditional societies, initiatory tribal rites are often character-

ized by a symbolic descent into and ascent from the labyrinthian Earth
Mother. These rituals give women and men the experience of being
reborn on a spiritual plane' (p.156). Her reading can also be labelled
feminist in that it concentrates on the tale's being about the integration
of the female psyche. Dumuzi's role consists mainly of his discovery
of his own feminine aspect and the aid that lends to the eventual establish-
ment of a model of male/female parity.

The impulse which directs Inanna to the underworld is a desire for
understanding and knowledge. Inanna may be Queen of Heaven and Earth,
but the nether world remains the unknown to her. What is more, it is
ruled over by her sister, Ereshkigal, and in this lies 'the compelling,
not yet understandable pull of the Great Below for Inanna' (p.157).
Ereshkigal's domain is just the opposite of Inanna's - dark, dry and
wholly uncompassionate - and consequently its ruler is 'unloving,
unloved, abandoned, instinctual, and full of rage, greed, and desperate
loneliness'. Ereshkigal is, in short, 'the other, neglected side of
Inanna'. Thus their confrontation, and Ereshkigal's rage toward her
sister, are born of her sense that 'Inanna's light, glory, and perpetual
movement have, to some extent, been achieved at her expense' (p.158).
So Inanna is stripped of all she has attained in the world above and
declared 'guilty'; her fate, the only one appropriate to the nether world,
is death.

Wolkstein notes that, 'The interplay between Inanna and Ereshkigal is
complex and dynamic' (p.160). It is so complex that it is apparently
difficult to know whether to treat Ereshkigal as a character in her own
right or only as the symbol of the darker aspects of the character of
Inanna. Ereshkigal is 'the prototype of a witch' (p.158), and she has
'certain qualities that are similar to Lilith's. Both are connected to
the night-time aspects of the feminine'. But these aspects are also

only a part of Inanna. 'The powerful Lilith of Inanna's adolescent days had to be sent away so Inanna's life-exploring talents could be developed.' And now Ereshkigal has 'willed Inanna's death; yet she can scarcely bear it, for Inanna is the other side of herself' (p.160).

Wolkstein now elaborates on her ideas about the knowledge which Inanna is pursuing on her quest.

> Although Inanna had seemed to descend without
> cause to the kur, it might now be understood
> that Ereshkigal, or the dark side of Inanna,
> had gone into labor and needed to be reborn.
> It is this labor or 'call' that Inanna had
> heard from the Great Above (p.160).

This is apparently the same labor which is continued in Ereshkigal's actions, her moaning, before the creatures sent by Enki to rescue Inanna. As the goddesses are here understood as both two and the same character, it is Ereshkigal who goes into labor but Inanna who is reborn as she discovers the capacity to 'face what she had neglected and feared'. It is Enki, God of Wisdom (and, Wolkstein adds, 'Healing') who by his intervention enables the final 'spiritual movement' all around, enabling Inanna to be reborn after her confrontation with her dark, hidden side, and Ereshkigal to 'release part of her personal anguish, her despair and anger, which is embodied in the glorious Goddess of Love' (p.160).

Now, however, for Inanna to leave the underworld a substitute must be found, because death keeps its own records and its books must tally, and for another reason as well;

> A part of Inanna must return. A passageway
> has been created from the Great Above, the
> conscious, to the Great Below, the unconscious,
> and it must be kept open. Inanna must not
> forget her neglected, abandoned older 'sister'
> - that part of herself that is Ereshkigal (p.161).

In her reading of Inanna's choice of Dumuzi to be her substitute

we have explicity expressed Wolkstein's perception of this tale as the
account of Inanna's 'midlife crisis';

> When Inanna's inner ear opened and she departed
> from Uruk, she was in midlife, married, with two
> children.   Through her instructions to Ninshubur,
> Inanna made careful provisions so that she would
> return.   However, during her absence Dumuzi had
> been following a completely different journey.
> Inanna had turned from earthly passion and achieve-
> ment to the Unknown; Dumuzi had turned from earthly
> passion to earthly achievement.   Once shepherd, now
> king, kingship has become his path.   He has grown
> so attached to and identified with his high position
> that he neither weeps for his 'lost' wife nor runs
> to greet her when she returns, as do her sons and
> Ninshubur (p.162).

Then she presents her own little tale within the tale, a story of
marital discord, of a couple who have grown apart.   She writes for the
pair a more explicit script because she feels that

> To understand this crucial and brutal encounter,
> it is worth hypothesizing on both of their
> thoughts:
>   Dumuzi: I ruled the kingdom, kept order while
> she adventured into chaos. Now she wants to reclaim
> her authority on earth. Her unsettling journey and
> demons bring turmoil into the kingdom. They are her
> concern, not mine. I must continue to carry out my
> all-consuming task of governing the people and
> state of Sumer.
>   Inanna: I placed him on the throne, gave him his
> position. I loved him and he left me to attend to
> affairs of state. While I went to deal with matters
> affecting my deepest soul, he used my powers to make
> himself more important. Once I was his whole world;
> now he refuses to descend from his throne to help me (p.162).

Wolkstein's commentary is not unreasonable, but it is as much an
elaboration as an elucidation of this encounter.   It reveals as much
context brought to this text as read out of it.   I cannot escape the
feeling that this poor couple is being dragged almost bodily, or at
least mentally and emotionally, into the latter half of the twentieth
century.   Wolkstein admits as much when she refers to 'the specific
personal grievances between husband and wife that allow us to identify

with the story' (p.162).   As a modern storyteller with an audience to
reach such moments of identification are obviously uppermost in her mind
when she considers her material.

The tale, presented to the reader on his own terms, is well able
to bear this interpretation.   But taking the myth as a whole, and as a
myth, these personal motivations are not the primary emphasis of this
scene.   They are used here to explain the redemption of Inanna's life
by the reciprocal forfeiture of Dumuzi's, but the central point is
Dumuzi's death itself, and not the indifference and hurt which are used
as the best available device to bring it about and give it credibility
on the texture level.   In all fairness, this does not go entirely
unrecognized by Wolkstein.   The complete paragraph, from which I quoted
the phrase above, reads:

> Whatever may have been the specific personal
> grievances between husband and wife that allow
> us to identify with the story, the greater issue
> is already determined. Someone must go to the
> underworld to replace Inanna. And the husband
> of Inanna is the perfect substitute, for he is
> also the King of Sumer (p.162).

There are other reasons as well why Dumuzi must meet the fate he does.
And though Wolkstein calls it the 'greater issue' she does not actually
treat it as such.   Instead she returns always to the immediate and
personal.   'Inanna's curse topples Dumuzi from his fixed position and
forces him to face the dark, demanding aspects of his wife, as well as
the uncontrollable, inexplicable, irrational mystery of death and the
kingdom of Ereshkigal'.   The god is headed on 'his own journey of trans-
formation' (p.163).

In the main I disagree with Wolkstein over matters of emphasis and
context.   I think our purposes differ to some extent.   She is making a
detailed reading of the tale's immediate surface, trying to find a life

for it as literature today, as a psychological study of character and the relations between men and women. I think, however, that in its original context there is a good deal more beneath this surface, and that Dumuzi dies for larger issues than simply his own private spiritual growth, however much that might eventually help **him** to get on better with his wife. These personal confrontations between the gods are good storytelling. But this is a myth and not a Bildungsroman. No tale can stand without credible motivations and I would not deny that the psychology of this tale is acutely rendered. These are deities, however, and though they act like men their personal confrontations have cosmic repercussions.

In 'The Dream of Dumuzi' Wolkstein finds a similar problem facing the condemned god as confronted Inanna in the first section. Just as Inanna was compelled to face the unexplored, dark side of her femininity, so must Dumuzi discover aspects of himself he has so far neglected. But Dumuzi's missing qualities are also seen as feminine ones. Though he possesses the physical and political tools of kingship he lacks 'understanding, compassion, devotion'. For help 'he turns to the feminine wisdom of his younger sister' (p.164).

Geshtinanna interprets the god's dream. It foretells, step by step, the rebellion and loss of all that has thus far sustained him in his position and life.

> Dumuzi's dream divides into five sections. In the
> first section, the larger natural world, symbolized
> by the rushes, reeds, and trees, turns against him.
> In the second section, the tools of Dumuzi's profession
> and manhood — his hearth, churn, drinking cup, and
> shepherd's crook — are taken away and destroyed.
> In the third section, Dumuzi's life instinct — the
> lamb and the sparrow — has been crushed. Dumuzi
> is no longer welcome on earth. He has lost his live-
> lihood. His feet cannot move, nor can his spirit
> (in the form of the sparrow) ascend. All that is
> left to him is the mourning and grief of his sister.
> Just as Ninshubur, at Inanna's request, wept for

> Inanna and saved her life, so it is Geshtinanna
> who is to take up Dumuzi's spirit and not let it
> die (p.164, Wolkstein's emphasis).

The emphasis upon Inanna's role in her own rescue is not elaborated upon. But just as Inanna had to turn to another for her salvation, so must Dumuzi depend upon Geshtinanna. Apparently Wolkstein is anticipating conclusions she will reach later on concerning the role of love in these spiritual journeys, and the impossibility of making them alone, without the help of others.

In fact, this whole section of Wolkstein's commentary leans upon emphases which are not fully explained. Here are her remarks upon the next part of the dream:

> In the fourth section, the memory of Dumuzi
> is safeguarded in the immortal aspect of Geshtinanna's
> animals. The one detail portending hope for Dumuzi
> is the <u>lapis</u> beards of Geshtinanna's goats. Just
> as the grief of the animals for their lost shepherd
> is to be permanent, so too the sister's grief is to
> go beyond the momentary; Geshtinanna, in her
> enduring vigil, will save Dumuzi's life (p.164 Wolkstein's
> emphasis).

In the text Geshtinanna does interpret her animals' actions as a reference to her own mourning for the doomed god. But their 'immortal aspect' is less clear. Presumably Wolkstein reads the permanence of this mourning out of the simple permanence of lapis lazuli itself; perhaps again anticipating the story's conclusion, which does establish an eternal cycle of death, mourning and rebirth.

This section of the tale recounts Dumuzi's capture and death, but its most important actor seems to be Geshtinanna who, in interpreting the god's dream and confronting its implications, prepares to close the so far open-ended progression death, recrimination, and substitute death. Dumuzi, who cared so little for his own wife, curses the child of the friend who betrayed him. 'It is the compassionate Geshtinanna who puts

an end to the perpetuation of rejections and curses, pain and anger.
Dumuzi turns to his sister, and she bravely and adamantly befriends
him' (p.164). But Dumuzi must die before the end is played out. His
attempts to escape are ultimately bootless and he returns to the sheep-
fold. 'The sheepfold or "womb" is the Great Earth Mother, who gives
birth and takes back the dead. Much as Inanna had been forced to do
when entering the underworld, Dumuzi, too, is divested of his kingship,
his shepherdship, his achievement, and his virility. The most impercep-
tible of things, Dumuzi's dream, has now come to pass' (p.165).

In her commentary on the tale's third part, 'The Return', Wolkstein's
reading reaches its final integration and a conclusion: 'Love transcends
life' (p.165). Along the way, though, she manages to be at once acute
and misleading.

Inanna, having achieved her immediate personal goals, discovers
that she has destroyed the happiness she had enjoyed with her husband
Dumuzi. His mother and sister grieve as well and this grief that all
three share, and in particular the compassion that Geshtinanna expresses
for her brother in the midst of it, stirs Inanna 'from her state of
isolation and self-pity' (p.166). Through the example of Geshtinanna,
Inanna is now able to reconcile her new 'dark, ruthless powers' (p.165),
with the happier, if less complete, life she knew before her fateful
journey.

> In her youth, Inanna's contact with her earthly
> brother, Gilgamesh, propelled her into life, activity,
> and achievement. Later, her journey to the under-
> world connected her with the buried, rejected parts
> of herself. Now it is the presence of her earthly
> sister, Geshtinanna, that completes Inanna's journey
> on earth. Through Geshtinanna, Inanna is reconnected
> to Dumuzi, to an other, and so to all of life (p.167,
> Wolkstein's emphasis).

This is the crux of Wolkstein's sense of this tale as a model of

healing and the achievement of psychological wholeness, especially as it concerns relations between the sexes.

This spiritual growth has political implications as well, as Inanna has here established a program for instilling the proper qualities in the king. 'Dumuzi, King of Sumer, is to live in a perpetual state of initiation. The spiritual awakening of man, according to Inanna's proclamation, is to be required of the king' (p.168). But Wolkstein's commentary is most clearly informed by what is modernly styled 'sexual politics'. One of her major conclusions, is that:

> The king who enters the underworld once a year will emerge every six months renewed in feminine wisdom and inner strength to take over the leadership and vitality of the nation. Moreover, by alternating the descent between sister and brother, feminine and masculine, the women and men of Sumer (at least in ritual) share in the necessary journey into and out of the mountain.
>
> Inanna's establishing of the annual ritual of descent and ascent offers a model of parity to the female-male relationship (p.168).

The political inconvenience of apparently leaving the kingdom utterly ungoverned half the year, even so it might be better led the other half, is not considered. But it is the 'model of parity' which is really important to Wolkstein here, and not the actual government of Sumer.

Of course it is Geshtinanna the sister, not Inanna the lover, who must henceforth also disappear annually. Inanna, having once confronted her demons, is spared the repeated ordeal. She suffers separation from Dumuzi, but never again the descent itself. This discontinuity in the parity of their relations is answered by recalling that Ereshkigal is the 'dark' sister of Inanna. Dumuzi will forever shuttle between the two sides of one character or psyche. 'Since Dumuzi is married to the composite goddess Inanna-Ereshkigal, he is to experience all of the woman' (p.168). Dumuzi is not married to Ereshkigal; she already has a husband

of her own. But this is only another instance of the underworld queen

sacrificing her individuality to Wolkstein's greater spiritual scheme.

She insists too much, I think, on the identity of the 'sisters', when

they are really like Gilgamesh and Enkidu; contrasting and complemen-

tary, but distinct, personalities. At the same time Wolkstein is

neglecting and diminishing the role of Geshtinanna.

Where Wolkstein most reveals a preoccupation with certain themes

is in her muddled understanding of Dumuzi. Is he here god or man?

Ironically, it is just when her interpretation becomes most structural

that her failure to clearly resolve this point, or more precisely to

resist recasting it for her own purposes, becomes most significant.

Eventually her structures, interesting as they are, are rendered suspect

because their terms are derived, at least in part, from her conclusions

rather than the other way about.

Wolkstein utilizes two sets of structural relations in her analysis

here. The first is comprised of the two brother-sister pairs: Inanna

and Utu, and Dumuzi and Geshtinanna.

> Throughout the Cycle of Inanna there has been
> an intense relationship between the heavenly sister
> and brother, Inanna and Utu, as well as between the
> earthly sister and brother, Geshtinanna and Dumuzi.
> Both brothers acted as sexual initiators for their
> sisters; both sisters relied upon and supported
> their brothers. In heaven, the sky gods, Utu and
> Inanna, complement each other; Utu, the Sun God,
> rules the sky by day, Inanna, the Morning Star and
> Evening Star (known to us as the planet Venus),
> rules the sky at dawn and twilight. On earth,
> Dumuzi and Geshtinanna share the yearly planting
> cycle (p.166).

The second centers on Inanna and Dumuzi and their respective roles.

The movement of this relation is that of the tale itself and by bringing

the full four-party figure into play allows for its final resolution.

> After the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi there
> is a reversal of roles. The immortal Queen of Heaven
> <u>descends</u> into the earth and dies; while the mortal
> Dumuzi <u>ascends</u> his throne, striving, much like a sky
> deity for greater power and glory. This reversal
> is then turned about when Inanna condemns Dumuzi
> to enter the underworld. Because of this reversal
> the humbled earthly brother and sister seek help
> from the sky deities. Dumuzi appeals to Utu to
> save him from the demons and Geshtinanna appeals
> to Inanna to find her brother. The cross-tie of
> marriage between Inanna and Dumuzi provides the
> link that opens up new relationships between brother
> and brother and sister and sister (p.166, Wolkstein's
> emphasis).

Wolkstein might seem here to be in the process of delineating a semantic

rectangle, but she is not inclined that way. What she has done though

is perhaps salt the mine, so to speak, with her characterization of

Dumuzi as mortal.

She relies heavily on the 'heavenly/earthly' distinction between the

brother-sister pairs. This is both useful and correct. But she also

extends the 'earthly' attributes of Dumuzi and Geshtinanna to include

mortality. This does serve to reinforce the distinction she is

drawing between 'the fixed, wilful, judgemental aspects of the sky deities

[and] the ever-changing, emotional aspects of earthly mortals'. Dumuzi

is treated here as a mortal being who achieves deification and immortality

through Inanna: she 'blesses Dumuzi and Geshtinanna with both eternal

life and death' (p.167). In fact, though, it is only death which Inanna

decrees for Dumuzi. She then makes this destiny easier to bear – and

more useful to the cosmos as a whole – by sharing it out between brother

and sister. Inanna, upon entering the nether world, is killed just as

much as Dumuzi will be, yet her divinity and immortality are never

brought into question. Wolkstein herself lists Dumuzi and Geshtinanna

as deities, the offspring of Enki and Sirtur, in her chart of 'Inanna's

Family Tree' (pp.x, xi). She also recognizes their fructifying genius:

'Geshtinanna, "rootstock of the grapevine", reigns over the wine whose

grapes are harvested from the Sumerian earth each autumn: while Dumuzi, in his aspect of Damu, the power in the growing grain, reigns over the beer, whose barley grows in the earth the other six months of the year, to be harvested in the spring'(p.168). This is their true 'earthly aspect', as the governing deities of earthly seasons and crops.

Actually, none of the terms of this distinction, as Wolkstein makes it, stand up to examination. It is not correct to contrast Inanna's wilfulness, pronounced as it may be, with the 'everchanging, emotional aspects' of the earthly pair. What is Inanna's sentencing of Dumuzi if not an emotional outburst? And her judgements certainly are not 'fixed'. She changes her mind soon enough about her action, and again on emotional grounds. Such turnabouts are actually a fundamental aspect of her character.

What Wolkstein is seeking to support here is her conclusion about the establishment of a 'model of female-male parity'. She is trying to more sharply enhance the differences which must be reconciled between Dumuzi and Inanna. But after the difference of sex itself the primary distinction between the gods, and their sibling pairs, is the original one. One is of the earth and the other of the sky. Wolkstein's interpretation of this myth, in some respects, seems to stem from an impression that mankind, mired in a modern cul-de-sac of secular materialism, has lost sight of that 'deeper, more eternal soul-place' (p.136), which she clearly considers more familiar to the ancients. It does indeed speak to us of spiritual matters, but we must take care to consider it only in terms of what it actually says.

This enters again the problem of context. An equally good argument can be made though for this myth being about eminently practical matters: seasons, crops and the organization of the cosmos. This is the position Jacobsen takes in his interpretation of the tale.

Jacobsen also deals with this myth in terms of the relationships
between its characters, but he sees these in terms of their divine
attributes and not their sexual roles.   As I have pointed out above,
Jacobsen uses these established attributes to explain the myth as a
literary metaphor for the cyclical changing of the seasons (1976, 62-3).
Inanna represents the storehouse and her descent the dwindling of the
store over the course of the winter season.   Her revival is brought
abaut by Enki who, as god of the fresh waters, provides for the
replenishment of the pastures and watering places.   Dumuzi, as shepherd,
also provides for this replenishment by way of his herds.   Their
slaughter is his own, complementary death.

Jacobsen views the totality of this tale as being 'composed of no
less than three separate myths, each dealing with a dying and reviving
deity, which are combined so that the revival of one deity is the cause
of, or coincides with, the death of another'.   He arrives at this
conclusion in order to explain how it comes about that Dumuzi plays two
different metaphoric roles, one as the substitute for Inanna in the
netherworld, and then another as Geshtinanna's annual alternate in
death.   In this second relationship the metaphor turns on Dumuzi's aspect
as the god of grain, which is brewed and stored as beer.   Geshtinanna
'is the power in the grape and in the wine made from it'.   Each knows
a different season, however, the grain being harvested in the spring
and the grape in the autumn.   The harvest is a form of death and fermen-
tation and storage is equated with a sojourn in the netherworld.

> It is this difference in the time of death and
> descent that the myth takes as its theme to
> explain in terms of timeless happenings in illo
> tempora.   When Dumuzi of the beer disappears
> underground in the spring or early summer, his
> sister, the wine goddess, seeks him disconsolately
> until, by autumn, she herself descends into the
> earth and finds him there in the netherworld.
> The myth further explains how this difference in
> the time of living and growing above ground

became permanent through divine fate: Inanna
determined as their fate that they were to
alternate substituting for her in the nether-
world (p.62).

I will seek to integrate all of these aspects, of seasons and
love, life and death, into my own interpretation of the tale, according
to the presentation of its various terms by the text itself.

3. Analysis and Interpretation

The first part of this tale follows Kramer's original presentation
of the myth, from Inanna's descent to her condemnation of Dumuzi, the
syntax of which I have already described. It is based upon three
motifemes which, according to the main action of their motif manifes-
tations, can be labelled Descent, Rescue and Substitution. The two
additional parts introduced in this version are comprised of only one
motifeme each, making a total of five for the tale as a whole. The
motif structure of the middle section, however, is much more elaborate
than that of the last.

Though the basic movement of 'The Dream of Dumuzi' is simply from
the god's condemnation to his capture, this process becomes fairly
complicated on the motif level. The section's overall structure is
based upon the Foretold/Realized convention. The interpretation of
Dumuzi's dream by his sister, Geshtinanna, is the foretelling of events
which are then mostly played out in actuality in the rest of the motifeme.
(I say mostly because some of the dream, which takes Dumuzi's dying as a
given throughout, refers to events which will occur only after his death,
specifically his mother's mourning and his sister's eventual sharing of
his fate. These, like Geshtinanna's reluctance to interpret the dream
in the first place, are primarily elaborations of the texture.) The
closing lines of the entire 'Dream of Dumuzi' section, how rendered in
the past tense, are the same as those with which the dream itself ends.

This repetition is a signal on the texture level that all of the motif
activity of this part of the tale has gone to fulfil but one motifeme.
For all of the escapes and reversals involved in the god's capture the
galla do finally claim their victim and this is the one result of abiding
consequence which marks all of the foregoing as the elaborate motif
manifestation of a single motifeme.

The first, foretelling, part of the motif realization is relatively
simple, consisting of a straightforward pair of motifs. Dumuzi,
stricken at the thought of the fate Inanna has fixed on him, exhausts
himself in fugitive lamentation and, sleeping, dreams. But the dream
only feeds his fears. In the second motif Geshtinanna, to whom he has
brought his dream for interpretation, can only conclude that his death
is inescapable. (Though it also contains a passing reference to this
fate's eventual amelioration: 'The double-growing reed, from which one,
then the other, is removed, Dumuzi, / Is you and I; first one, then
the other, will be taken away'.) This confirmation of his worst fears,
however, only drives Dumuzi to ever greater lengths in his attempt to
avoid the inevitable. This becomes the basis for the much longer and
more elaborate realization part of the motif structure.

Here we once again encounter the typical motif pattern of repeated
failures leading finally to success, except that these terms, 'success'
and 'failure', are reversed. Dumuzi's repeated successes in eluding
the demons finally culminate in the failure of his capture and death,
and so in this instance it is the antagonists who win out. But the
structure is not concerned with the semantic terms which fill it and so
this example is only exceptional on the semantic level. These catego-
ries of 'success' and 'failure' are values assigned by the verbal
manifestation. The structure itself remains the same: a sequence of
actions with the same result until in a final instance that result is

reversed.

The realization of Dumuzi's capture is filled by three of these motif sequences. And the success/failure structure is the pattern for this whole series as well as for its individual parts. In this overall pattern it takes on a progressive aspect. First he cannot be found at all, then he is discovered but escapes, finally he is found, cornered, and killed.

In the first motif Geshtinanna simply refuses to reveal her brother's whereabouts. The galla try various methods to break her silence, moving from bribery to threats to actual torture, but none succeed. The success/failure pattern is set up but it is not fully realized. Because no new result ever comes of these different attempts to break the girl the elaboration here takes place primarily on the texture level while the motif itself remains the simple one of her refusal to comply.

> The small galla said to the large galla:
>   'Who since the beginning of time
>   Has ever known a sister to reveal a brother's
>   hiding place?
>   Come, let us look for Dumuzi in the home of
>   his friend' (p.80).

In the second sequence the so-called friend betrays Dumuzi but the demons' search is hindered three times by the friend's inability, or refusal, to be specific enough about the god's hiding place. He would have the rewards the galla offer yet still maintain this pretense of protecting Dumuzi. The galla search in the grass, in the small plants, and in the large plants, all without success. Finally the friend directs them to the ditches of Arali where they at last discover their prey. His treachery, though, calls down Dumuzi's curse.

> Dumuzi turned pale and wept.
> He cried out:

> 'My sister saved my life
> My friend caused my death.
> If my sister's child wanders in the street,
> Let the child be protected – let the child be
> blessed.
> If my friend's child wanders in the street,
> Let the child be lost – let the child be cursed' (p.81).

Having been protected by his sister and betrayed by his friend
Dumuzi turns now to Utu, god of justice and brother of the wife who has
condemned him. With Utu's help another series of escapes begins. Once,
twice, for a third time again, 'Dumuzi escaped from his demons'. He
flees then to the sheepfold of his sister Geshtinanna. But there, as
foretold, he is surrounded for the final time. The galla descend upon
him in all their terrible fury. Geshtinanna can only weep.

> The galla seized Dumuzi.
> They surrounded him.
> They bound his hands. They bound his neck.
> The churn was silent. No milk was poured.
> The cup was shattered. Dumuzi was no more.
> The sheepfold was given to the winds (p.84).

The contents of this one motifeme go to some lengths to recount the
capture and death of Dumuzi. Yet, as far as matters at their most
practical stand, in the basic narrative movement, this represents no
real advance over the situation at the close of the preceeding motifeme.
Inanna has condemned the god and no one can then hope to escape the galla,
his galla. In the semantic context both motifemes refer to this one
event. On the most basic semantic level this second motifeme is only
an elaboration on the first, but a great deal of verbal energy is
expended, nonetheless, in producing it. There are a couple of reasons
why this should be so. For one, it provides us with some confirmation of
Jacobsen's contention that this longer form of the myth is a conflation
of two or more originally separate tales. 'The Dream of Dumuzi' could
stand alone as a separate tale, in fact does so as a source. (Wolkstein
acknowledges all of her various sources for this version of the myth.

It is the question of whether such editorial work is solely an activity of modern scholars or was also engaged in by the Sumerians themselves which we cannot answer, at least by any physical evidence.) Secondly, as a story-within-a-story it has its own little cautionary, if ultimately pessimistic, tale to tell, while at the same time enriching its larger context and preparing the way for the events which are to follow.

As a small tale unto itself 'The Dream of Dumuzi' considers the categories of sister (or relative), friend, and deity, their reliability and limits, in a certain, in this case particularly desperate, situation. This context would explain the abrupt introduction of Dumuzi's friend into the tale. The conclusions drawn, though, are predictable, if not a little wishful. Let us say they are conventional, except perhaps in the case of the deity, where limits are tested but then reaffirmed. Dumuzi, in his hour of extreme need, turns to each in turn. The sister is incorruptible – this virtue is then left to await its moment in the larger context of the tale. The friend, though having sworn unflagging allegiance, is quick to accept the price of betrayal. He may try for a time to have it both ways, accepting his blood-money while sending Dumuzi's pursuers down cold, dead-ending trails. But in the end, this tale asserts, water is indeed thinner than blood. At last Dumuzi calls on Utu, the god of justice. Utu is willing, but he proves to be no match to powers, and a decree and order, which are greater than them all. The god of justice is willing but he cannot overturn what is just in its own right. Dumuzi belongs to his galla, and Utu cannot operate outside of this cosmic order of which he is only a part. This little story affirms the earthly bonds of blood over friendship, but also cosmic bonds over all. The nether world claims Dumuzi as a prior right. This is a tale both idealistic and cynical as it presents respectively the sister and the friend. Ultimately, though, it is pessimistic, or perhaps merely practical, in its reassertion of the absolute status of

the cosmic order. There is a level of this order to which even the gods themselves must adhere. This conclusion returns us again to the story of Inanna, whose descent to the underworld was also a challenge to the cosmic status quo.

This part of the tale retains a sense of its original autonomy, but it is by no means superfluous to the rest of the myth here presented as a whole. In introducing Dumuzi's sister, Geshtinanna, it sets the stage for the final act which follows. Geshtinanna, in interpreting Dumuzi's dream, has caught a glimpse of this future; 'The double-growing reed,... /Is you and I; first one, then the other, will be taken away' (p.76). And in resisting the demons' blandishments, and tortures, she proves her worthiness, her desire and ability to take on a share of her brother's burden. For it is the desire to do so, more than anything else, which will enable her to assume part of this burden. What is more, all of the sheer effort which goes into the capture of Dumuzi, what with his escaping again and again, creates a sense of the unlikelihood, or even impossibility, of this ever being his one and final end. By means of all of the reprieves which the tale places in the path of his eventual demise it acknowledges the inevitability of it while at the same time preparing the way for his own particular form of resurrection.

After the great expense of narrative energy which goes into the capture of Dumuzi the tale, on the syntagmatic level, relaxes a bit. The motif structure of the motifeme which underlies 'The Return' is quite straightforword. The grief of the three women in the missing god's life, Inanna his wife, Sirtur his mother, and his sister Geshtinanna, is directed toward discovering his fate. Inanna's lament, which opens the section, has an introductory quality which suggests once again the originally separate status of these parts. The first motif has Sirtur

searching for, and finding, her son's lifeless body.   'My child, the

face is yours. / The spirit has fled' (p.87).   In the next motif Inanna,

touched by the depth of Geshtinanna's grief, would take her to her

brother but does not know where to look.   So embedded in this motif

is the motif of the fly.   The fly offers to reveal the dead god's

whereabouts in exchange for a boon of his own from Inanna.   The goddess

grants him access to the taverns, and the talk and song therein, and for

this the fly leads the grieving pair to the edges of the steppe where

Dumuzi, still animated enough to weep, may be found.   Inanna, having

undertaken this search out of compassion for Geshtinanna, now decrees

that henceforth brother and sister shall share Dumuzi's fate.

> Inanna took Dumuzi by the hand and said:
> 'You will go to the underworld
> Half the year.
> Your sister, since she had asked,
> Will go the other half' (p.89).

The tale ends with two lines of praise for Ereshkigal.

The fly's motif is of some interest, for this ubiquitous little

insect also appears, though more peripherally, elsewhere in this narrative.

Inanna's rescuers, the kurgarra and galatur, were able to enter the

nether world because, 'like flies, they slipped through the cracks of

the gates' (p.64).   Later Inanna, weeping for her dead husband, cries

out to 'O, you flies of the steppe' (p.86), the apparent sense of her

lament being that the flies' gathering on the corpse is now his only

shroud, since she has had no chance to provide him with a proper one.

Now it is a fly which offers to lead Inanna and Geshtinanna to Dumuzi's

body.   Here the fly's help might at first seem rather redundant.   Sirtur,

Dumuzi's mother, has already found the corpse, but then the fly is intro-

duced to find it again.   Actually though, for the purposes of this tale it

is the Mother who is least necessary.   She does nothing to advance the

story and has no communication at all with either Inanna or Geshtinanna,

who are the actual instruments of both Dumuzi's plight and his deliverance. Sirtur's role is confined to mourning for her son. She is more symbol than character, as if, even though she is given no more to do than this, she cannot, as Mother, be in good conscience left entirely out of a tale about the death of her child.

On the other hand, the fly's association with carrion makes it a natural means of finding the dead god. It is also an ideal mediator between the various realms of this myth. Flies are always to be found among the quick, yet they are irresistibly attracted to the dead. Thus the fly is associated with both earth and the underworld, while its capacity for flight suggests that it might extend its reach to the heavens as well. Here it brings all three together, leading Inanna and Geshtinanna, representatives of heaven and the earth, to Dumuzi, newest denizen of the nether world, in preparation for the myth's final resolution. At the same time an opportunity is exploited, since Inanna is decreeing fates anyway, to explain how the fly comes to be so ubiquitous not just about the rubbish but in 'the beer-houses and taverns' as well. It seems generally a nuisance without any obvious purpose, but it rendered help when help was needed and for this Inanna grants that it be allowed to 'dwell among the talk of the wise ones' and 'among the songs of the minstrels' (p.88). In this way the fly acquires some justification for its existence, and some respite from its other more noisome haunts.
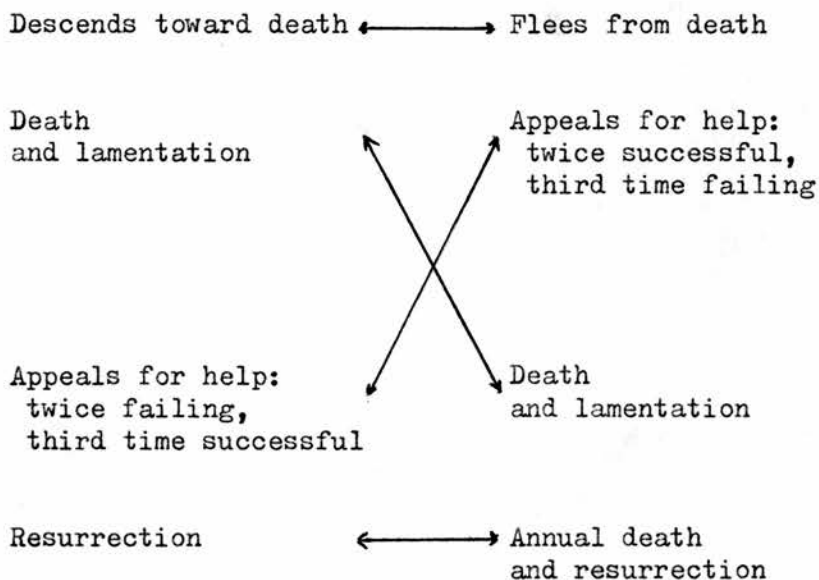
We always find, in considering the syntagmatic structure of a narrative, that as our analysis moves from motifemes to motifs toward texture we are, naturally enough, encountering more and more the tale's paradigmatic aspects. After all, it is only by the shapes of the specific contents that we can identify their underlying structures. But before stepping off fully onto the paradigmatic axis, let us consider the overall syntagmatic structuring of the myth's contents.

Because there are three primary sources for this version
of the tale it is presented here in three parts. Disregarding
these editorial divisions however, the narrative as a whole
most naturally divides itself into two main parts or halves. One
takes Inanna for its protagonist, and the other Dumuzi. Moreover,
in many ways these halves repeat or reflect each other. In
certain aspects of their structure and content they are mirror
images.

In the first part Inanna sets out toward death and, finding
it, must be rescued. This endeavour is twice frustrated but then
finally successful. The action of this half moves back and
forth between heaven and the nether world. Then, when Inanna
returns from death she emerges on earth. This is where the rest
of the tale tales place. Inanna's need to find a substitute in
death introduces Dumuzi into the tale as the protagonist of its
second half. Dumuzi in this part sets out to flee from death.
In this he is twice successful, before finally he fails.

The different, opposing, goals invert somewhat the order of
action, but otherwise as similar enterprises they adopt the same
structures and the complementary contents of the two parts are
in this way brought together to create a whole. We can illustrate
the relationships of these contents and their structuring in a
simple diagram:

Protagonist: Inanna   Dumuzi

Descends toward death ⟷ Flees from death

Death
and lamentation   Appeals for help:
                                twice successful,
                                third time failing

Appeals for help:
  twice failing,
  third time successful   Death
                            and lamentation

Resurrection   ⟷   Annual death
                               and resurrection

Scene: Heaven and   Earth
                 the nether world

There are further correspondences as well on the motif and especially texture levels. For example, the fly finds Dumuzi, and it is as flies that rescuers reach Inanna in the nether world. The gifts offered these rescuers to distract them from their real goal, the water-and-grain-gifts, are the same offered Geshtinanna to betray her brother. These are the sort of conventional attributes that the two parts both summon up, being similar quests, though in opposite directions. What joins the two halves together is the

semantic identity of the last motifeme of the first part with
the first motifeme of the second.   They present both sides
of the same act, each from one character's point of view.
First Inanna's choice of Dumuzi as her substitute and then
Dumuzi's recognition, in his dream,of the implications of that
choice.

Much of this structure and content is very like that of
the Epic of Gilgamesh.   Gilgamesh actively courts death
throughout the epic's first half and then, having actually wit-
nessed it in the instance of Enkidu, sets out instead, in the
second part, to avoid death at any cost.   Here, of course,
it is some form of immortality which Gilgamesh seeks in both of
his quests.   But the carefully balanced structure of the
narrative is the same.

This would seem to be a form quite naturally assumed by
meditations on death, which adopt attitudes ranging from
excessive arrogance to various degrees of fear and even coward-
ice, from optimism to pessimism, in trying to think as much as
they can about the one subject most would prefer to think little
or nothing about at all.

The two halves of this narrative present basic semantic opposi-
tions between characters and their actions and fates from which we can
begin to draw out a fuller pattern of paradigmatic relations.   The

tale is built upon five motifemes. At the juncture of its two halves, however, two of these motifemes combine, on the paradigmatic level, to create a single semantic unit. This leaves us with four main paradigmatic units. There are: Inanna's descent and death; her rescue; the choosing of Dumuzi as substitute and his death; and the search for Dumuzi resulting in Inanna's final decree that Geshtinanna shall share his fate. The relations of the paradigmatic axis function on a number of levels, or fronts. These include sex or gender, heaven and earth and the underworld, and love and loyalty, all of which are integrated into the prevailing themes of life, death and fertility.

Inanna's descent and death involves Inanna and Ereshkigal, the queens of heaven and the nether world, in what is primarily a political dispute, a struggle for power, although the fact that they are also sisters lends it an emotional aspect as well. Inanna's motives are self-serving, directed toward an aggrandizement of her power and they entail the abandonment of all that she rightfully, and appropriately, rules already. The detailed enumeration of the offices and temples she is abandoning limns a stable and fruitful order prevailing before she turns her mind to a realm beyond her rule. She leaves behind this stability of heaven and her earthly domains, only to be put to death in the nether world.

The next part opens with mourning for the goddess' disappearance. A city's abandonment by its tutelary deity leaves it without divine protection from its enemies, and is tantamount to clearing the way for its destruction. This is the burden of numerous Mesopotamian laments for fallen cities. And what is more, as the goddess of fertility Inanna's loss implies the loss of fertility itself. Two of the great gods, mindful of the power of life-taking Ereshkigal and recognizing the nether world as a realm with its own rules, equal to and balanced with the life-

giving heavens, consider Inanna as lost to her self-willed fate. But a more compassionate Enki does come to her rescue, by means of the two sexless creatures who, substituting empathy for the arrogant confrontation of Inanna's assault, are able to negotiate her revival. But a price must still be paid.

This price is chosen and paid, in the contents of the third and fourth motifemes, with the death of Dumuzi. He is chosen, over other possible substitutes, for his failure to mourn his missing wife; a failure of love and another abandonment. And he in his turn will be betrayed by his friend. His disappearance, though, presents new difficulties. Fertility has not been fully restored by the simple release of Inanna. As the various sources and characters of this text come together here at its fulcrum we can see the continued disruption of fertility in three of the different aspects of Dumuzi: as male, as the shepherd god, and as the god of grain.

Dumuzi's sister, Geshtinanna, is the goddess of the vine and as she comes to the fore in the last part of the myth it is Dumuzi's aspect as grain god which comes to dominate in his relation to fertility. It is Geshtinanna's unwavering love and compassion for her brother which rescues him from eternal and permanent incarceration in the nether world. All manner of familial bond, parent, wife and sibling, is reasserted here. And fertility is re-established in an annual cycle of life and death.

The nether world is a constant throughout this myth, it is the awful given with which it struggles. In the first half, though, it is the queen of heaven who confronts it, while in the second the conflict is taken to a god and goddess of the earth.

Inanna's descent from heaven to the underworld is a challenge to the parity, and separation, of these two realms. Once isolated in the enemy

camp she is the loser in this confrontation. The divide across which
Inanna sought to extend the power of life threatens to be bridged,
instead, by the spectre of death. With the help of Enki Inanna is
revived. But the initial triumph of Ereshkigal cannot be fully undone,
the finality of her victories is their hallmark and this must be respected
in some form. So the action moves to earth where it now becomes Dumuzi's
fate to be given into the hands of the nether world. He appeals to the
sun god Utu, but the laws are fixed and the heavenly god of justice
cannot successfully intervene where the legitimate rights of the under-
world apply. Dumuzi's redemption, and it is only a partial one, is
brought about by the self-sacrifice of another earth deity, his sister
Geshtinanna.

All of this only reflects the actual constitution of the cosmos.
The gods of heaven and the nether world are in a balanced relation to
one another, each in their own domain. Inanna's impetuosity disturbs
this balance, but does not finally upset it. The actual meeting point
of the two realms is in between, on the earth. Dumuzi and Geshtinanna,
as the geniuses of the life in crops, stand in for all that is mortal,
and establish the cycle of life and death which is the lot of earth and
its creatures in the cosmos, serving first one set of deities and then
the other. The two halves of the tale exemplify this relation in
spatial terms. The conflict which Inanna provokes between heaven and
the nether world in the first half is mediated in the second on earth.
In the process it becomes another example of how human life and liveli-
hood exist at the whim of the gods and are available to them to use in
resolving their cosmic conflicts.

Love and friendship, and the loyalty they entail, are the mainsprings
which drive virtually all of the action in this tale. All of the crises
and their resolutions are precipitated by fealty or its repudiation. It

is an ideal device for generating narrative elaboration, providing
both motive and instruction.   So this tale uses it everywhere to insti-
gate the action and thus becomes a broad consideration of the types,
qualities and possibilities of love, and of its relation to living and
dying.

Inanna immediately establishes this theme in its negative aspect
by abandoning all for which she is responsible.   She does so in order
to mount an attack upon her own sister.   The cost to her of this
unnatural conduct is high, but she is rescued by the loyalty of her
messenger Ninshubur and the concern of the god Enki.   Indeed, it is the
empathy shown by the kurgarra and galatur for Ereshkigal which moves the
underworld queen to grant them the gift which proves to be Inanna's life.
When Inanna emerges from the nether world it is the active devotion of
Shara and Lulal – portrayed in this version as filial love, for
Wolkstein casts them as the actual sons of Inanna, and not just tutelary
deities – which saves them from the galla.   And it is the equally active
absence of love and mourning on Dumuzi's part which dooms him to be
Inanna's choice as substitute in death.   Dumuzi's own redemption is
founded firmly on the love of his sister.   His so-called friend betrays
him and Utu, though willing, is unable to save him.   But the unwavering
devotion of Geshtinanna both before and after his death, together with
the reawakening of Inanna's own deeper feelings for her husband,
provide both reason and opportunity for Inanna to mitigate Dumuzi's fate
by allowing his sister to share it with him.

The tale is set in motion by abandonment and all of the dangers,
difficulties and crises which result from this are eventually resolved,
as far as possible, by an absolute refusal to abandon.   Each task, large
or small, set along the way succeeds or fails according to this standard.
Each of the four paradigmatic units is centered upon such an event and

the tale as a whole presents a doubled movement from abandonment to fidelity. The situation at the beginning is transformed at the end; Inanna's affront to her sister is eventually rectified by Geshtinanna's devotion to her brother. These familial models are matched, in the middle two sections, by examples of the help and betrayal of friends.

The myth uses these oppositional pairs to establish an homology: Life: Death:: Love: Indifference. What is death but abandonment of and by this world? The forgotten, though they breathe still, are as good as dead. There is even an immortality which resides in remembrance. Our knowledge of these characters, through the survival of this text as a physical memory, attests to that. (The very immortality of these gods depends upon their having someone to worship them. And yet, by the very act of studying these texts do I not impart a certain life to a 'dead' religion?)

The reality of death cannot be avoided. But love supports life and out of love comes new life, in an endless cycle, a cycle in which death is a part but not a closure, rather an ending and a beginning both. The harvesting of one crop prepares the emergence of another. It is a cycle, though, that requires energy to remain in motion. Love is the engine of this tale because this tale takes love to be the engine of life itself. Just as diligent irrigation of the fields revives the crops, year after year, so must a similar irrigation be devoted to the mainten- ance of all life. Love nurtures creatures as water does crops, in an eternal circle of life and death and life.

Sexual relations are not an explicit concern of this myth. They are tangential to its themes of love and fertility. There is, however, a sexual aspect to its semantic structure which concentrates not on acts but genders. Each of the four sections recounts an encounter with the nether world and each involves a different gender category: Inanna —
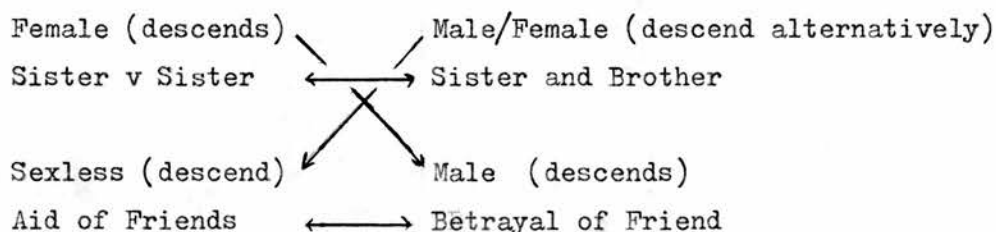
female; the kurgarra and galatur - sexless; Dumuzi - male; and finally, closing the square, Dumuzi and Geshtinanna - male and female, alternately. This structure, utilising all the aspects of sexuality and its lack, forms the basis for the myth's meditation on how fertility comes to be reconciled with death in a manner which respects the requirements and dominions of both.

In sexual terms, the female is actualized fertility, it is she who gives birth, while the male is the potential for fertility, its initiator and necessary adjunct. This holds true in agriculture as well, where the earth itself is considered to be female and the fructifying waters male. If at the beginning of this myth fertility is absolute, in the regions above the infertile deadness of the nether world, then Inanna's disappearance from those regions threatens the end of this fertility. It is Enki who recognizes this and masterminds her release, for not only is he renowned for his wisdom and cleverness, he is also the god of fresh water. The two sexless creatures are the appropriate ones to actually rescue the goddess, for their ability to relate to Ereshkigal. They represent a point of contact between the two worlds, their barrenness an instance of death in life. And since they cannot participate in fertility they cannot further threaten it by engaging death. Their task is to recover its missing principle. But the choice of Dumuzi to replace Inanna in the nether world does not restore the initial equilibrium nor does it end the threat to fertility. It simply reverses the terms of the dilemma. The continued disruption of fertility is clear if considered in terms of the hieros gamos (see Jacobsen 1976, 32-47; Kramer 1969). The sacred marriage between king and goddess refers specifically to Inanna and Dumuzi and to the necessary roles of both male and female in the continuance of all fertility. The permanent loss of Dumuzi would mean the loss of one half of this vital impulse. If fertility must now incorporate death it must do so in a manner which

recognizes the equal contributions of both male and female to life.
The resolution decided upon, that Geshtinanna and Dumuzi shall alternate
sojourns in the nether world, not only accounts for the different
seasons of different crops, but also mirrors, though somewhat less
precisely, the separate 'seasons' of the contributions of male and
female - impregnation and birth - to the generation of new life.

There is a simple semantic rectangle we can draw using some of the
relations which emerge from the concrete actions of the tale.

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Female (descends)           Male/Female (descend alternatively)
Sister v Sister      ←——→   Sister and Brother

Sexless (descend)           Male  (descends)
Aid of Friends       ←——→   Betrayal of Friend
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This describes the progress of the tale, but it does not immediately
reveal the main themes with which it grapples.   It is only the surface
manifestation of the working out of these themes.

The rectangle which traces the movement of the major themes — life,
death, and fertility — arranges its pieces slightly differently,
because it takes as its starting place the situation prevailing at the
commencement of the myth.   It is this state which is transformed at the
end with the establishment of seasonal fertility.   The tale itself is
all crisis and resolution, the history of a cosmos in change, in transit
to its present state.   The original state is what these crises disrupt,
and ultimately alter.   We get a sense of initial order from the
description of Inanna's preparations for her descent to the nether world.
It is a stable cosmic order she is abandoning, but one that she wants
changed for her own greater glory.   What this order involves we must
imply from the events of the tale and the nature of the new order esta-
blished at its end, a new order of cyclical fertility based on the anxious

balance between life and death.   Inanna's descent breaches the barrier
between absolutes.   The initial situation is one of absolute separation
between the cosmic realms of life and death, fertility and infertility.
Inanna would have it all in her own power, but this is impossible.
That this is so can be seen in her death.   Enlil and Nanna consider it
useless to try and save her because they continue to feel constrained
by the original rules of the separate realms.   But Enki recognizes
that now that Inanna has breached that order, and threatened more than
just herself, something will have to give.

The first two motifemes recount the initial disruption of the
original state and its effects.   Death intrudes into the realm of the
living, both in Inanna's demise and the release of the galla upon the
earth to hunt for her substitute.   With death, of course, comes
infertility.   In the next motifeme the circumstances of Dumuzi's
capture represent an attempt, though unsuccessful, to avoid death and
perhaps re-establish the separation between realms.   His many escapes
are a concrete expression of life trying to reassert itself against
death.   A resolution is only achieved with the realization that the
original absolute separation of realms is now lost forever and must be
replaced with a functional equilibrium which respects the dominion of
both.

This myth is about the fracturing of the fundamental life-death
dichotomy into its observable patterns in the world.   In illo tempore
these apparently incompatible opposites were merely separate domains,
the great above and the great below, each with its own immortal gods.
But this changes.   And once the two realms have come, violently, into
contact they must somehow be integrated.   This integration is brought
about by the alternating death and resurrection of Dumuzi and Geshtinanna.
The competing demands of life and death are reconciled and fertility

preserved and established on a basis which combines them, in the cycle
of the seasons, the crops, and of all earthly life, year in and year
out - the gods willing - forever.

C. Descent of Ishtar
to the Nether World

1. <u>The Story</u>

> To the Land of no Return, the realm of [Ereshkigal],
> Ishtar, the daughter of Sin, [set] her mind.
> Yea, the daughter of Sin set [her] mind
> To the dark house, the abode of Irkal [la],
> To the house which none leave who have entered it,
> To the road from which there is no way back,
> To the house wherein the entrants are bereft of li[ght],
> Where dust is their fare and clay their food,
> (Where) they see no light, residing in darkness,
> (Where) they are clothed like birds, with wings
>   for garments,
> (And where) over door and bolt is spread dust.
> When Ishtar reached the gate of the Land of no Return,
> She said (these) words to the gatekeeper:
> 'O gatekeeper, open thy gate,
> Open thy gate that I may enter!
> If thou openest not the gate so that I cannot enter,
> I will smash the door, I will shatter the bolt,
> I will smash the doorpost, I will move the doors,
> I will raise up the dead, eating the living,
> So the dead will outnumber the living' (lines 1-20).

The gatekeeper stays Ishtar from carrying out her threat, telling her that he will go and announce her to Queen Ereshkigal. When Ereshkigal learns who is demanding entrance at her gate she becomes very upset. She asks herself, 'What drove her heart to me? What impelled her spirit hither?' (line 31), but she instructs the gatekeeper to open the gate and admit her 'in accordance with the ancient rules' (line 38). There are actually seven doors to the nether world and as Ishtar passes through each she is stripped of some part of what she is wearing. First the gatekeeper takes from her her great crown, then the pendants on her ears, the chains around her neck, the ornaments on her breast, the girdle of birthstones on her hips, the clasps round her hands and feet, and finally the breechcloth round her body. Each time Ishtar asks the gatekeeper why he does this, but he only answers 'Enter, my lady, thus are the rules of the Mistress of the Nether World' (line 45, etc.).

As soon as Ishtar had descended to the Land of no
   Return,
Ershkigal saw her and burst out at her presence.
Ishtar, unreflecting, flew at her.
Ershkigal opened her mouth to speak,
Saying (these) words to Namtar, her vizier:
'Go, Namtar, lock [her] up [in] my [palace]!
Release against her, [against] Ishtar, the sixty mis[eries]:
Misery of the eyes [against] her [eyes],
Misery of the sides ag[ainst] her [sides],
Misery of the heart ag [ainst her heart],
Misery of the feet ag[ainst] her [feet],
Misery of the head ag[ainst her head]-
Against every part of her, against [her whole body]!'
After Lady Ishtar [had descended to the nether world],
The bull springs not upon the cow, [the ass impregnates
   not the jenny],
In the street [the man impregnates not] the maiden (lines 63-78).

When Ishtar fails to return from the nether world Papsukkal, the

vizier of the great gods, dresses himself in mourning and tearfully

spreads the word of the goddess' disappearence and the consequent

failure of fertility.   Ea creates Asushunamir, a eunuch, and sends him

to the nether world.

Forth went Papsukkal before Sin his father,
   weeping,
[His] tears flowing before Ea, the king:
'Ishtar has gone down to the nether world,
   She has not come up.
Since Ishtar has gone down to the Land of no
   Return,
The bull springs not upon the cow, the ass
   impregnates not the jenny,
In the street the man impregnates not the maiden.
The man lies down in his (own) chamber,
The maiden lies down on her side.'
Ea in his wise heart conceived an image,
And created Asushunamir, a eunuch:
'Up, Asushunamir, set thy face to the gate of the Land
   of no Return;
The seven gates of the Land of no Return shall be opened
   for thee.
Ereshkigal shall see thee and rejoice at they presence.
When her heart has calmed, her mood is happy,
Let her utter the oath of the great gods.
(Then) lift up thy head, paying mind to the life-water
   bag:
'Pray, Lady, let them give me the life-water bag
   That water therefrom I may drink.'
As soon as Ereshkigal heard this,
She smote her thigh, bit her finger:
'Thou didst request of me a thing that should not be
   requested.

> Come, Asushunamir, I will curse thee with a mighty
>   curse!' (reverse, lines 3-23).

Ereshkigal tells Asushunamir that henceforth he will live in the streets,
eating and drinking from the gutters and sewers, 'The besotted and
thirsty shall smite thy cheek!' (line 28). She then orders Namtar
to assemble the Anunnaki on their thrones of gold and to 'Sprinkle
Ishtar with the water of life and take her from my presence!' (line 34).
Namtar does as he is directed and the revived Ishtar is led out through
the gates of the nether world, having returned to her at each the
ornament taken from her on her journey in.

> 'If she does not give thee her ransom price, bring
>   her back.
> As for Tammuz, the lover of her youth,
> Wash him with pure water, anoint him with sweet oil;
> Clothe him with a red garment, let him play on a flute
>   of lapis.
> Let courtesans turn [his] mood.'
> [When] Belili was string[ing] her jewelry,
> [And her] lap was filled with 'eye-stones,'
> On hearing the sound of her brother, Belili struck
>   the jewelry on [...]
> So that the 'eye-stones' filled [...]....
> 'My only brother, bring no harm to me!
> On the day when Tammuz comes up to me,
>   When with him the lapis flute (and) the carnalian
>   ring come up to me,
> When with him the wailing men and the wailing women
>   come up to me,
> May the dead rise and smell the incense' (lines 46-58).

Here the tale ends (ANET, 106-109).

2. Analysis and Interpretation

This tale is very similar to its Sumerian antecedent, but there are
also significant differences. Ishtar's purpose is the same, she has
'set her mind' (literally 'ear') on entering the nether world, to test
her power against that of her sister, Ereshkigal, and the circumstances
of her entrance still involve the stripping from her of her insignia and
clothing. There follows her death and then rescue with the help of Ea.

Her return from the underworld again has its price in ransom.   In this
version, however, Ishtar wears a much more hostile mien than did Inanna
in the Sumerian tale; where there she was simply arrogant, here she is
openly threatening.   This story is specific in detailing the effects
of her disappearence on fertility, both animal and human.   Also, this
version has little of the elaboration which was a major feature of the
Sumerian.   Tasks are not trebled by preliminary failures.   Ishtar's
preparations for her journey are dropped.   Papsukkal, the vizier,
acts not according to detailed instructions but in response to events.
In Ea's instructions to Asushunamir the Foretold/Realized convention is
so condensed as to virtually disappear.   Midway through the giving of
it the instruction becomes the deed.   What elaboration there is is in
the texture and a mark of the shifted emphases.   Where the Sumerian
concentrated on the upper world that Inanna was abandoning, here it is
the nether world which is carefully described, as are the miseries
inflicted upon the goddess and the effect of her disappearance on
fertility.   The Sumerian and Akkadian versions tell basically the same
story, up to the return of Inanna/Ishtar from the nether world, but they
are not simply the same tale in different languages.

A major difficulty confronting us in this version is, of course,
the abrupt obscurity of its ending.   Tammuz and his sister appear, but
only briefly and the parts they play are far from clear.   It may be
that, their fate being so well known and understood, this short,
elliptical reference to them was in this instance sufficient to recall
it and so close the tale.   Whatever the meaning of these closing lines,
the relative importance of Tammuz seems much diminished.   This myth
concentrates its attention upon Ishtar and Ereshkigal, the queens of
heaven and the underworld, sisters and rivals.

The narrative structure of this version of the tale, eschewing as

it does most opportunities for elaboration, is comparatively simple
and straightforward.   The body of the tale is built upon two motifemes:
Ishtar's descent and death, and her rescue and return.   The structural
function of the last twelve lines, which introduce Tammuz and Belili,
presents something of a problem.   The scene shifts from Ishtar's
resurrection to that of Tammuz and given what we know from the Sumerian
tale the most obvious conclusion is that this is a reference to the
substitution of Tammuz for Ishtar in the nether world.   But is this,
then, a third motifeme, as the choice of Dummuzi was in the Sumerian?

Most commentators tend to separate these closing lines from the
rest of the myth, seeing in them an indication of a ritual context
for the text.   'The Akkadian myth of Ishtar's descent into the
underworld has a concluding passage concerned with ritual commemoration
of the resurrection of Tammuz' (Brandon 1970, 600).   An even more
specific suggestion is that, 'The Mesopotamian text was once probably
part of a seasonal fertility rite, and the final invocation may have
been used to provoke the potency of the dead in fertility' (Gray 1982,
37).   Another, who calls these lines 'apparently disconnected frag-
ments' agrees that 'this passage clearly refers to the yearly mourning
and lament for the death of the god'.   About Belili's speech, however,
he says only, 'however obscure these lines are, they must definitely
refer to the return of the god to life.   But that is the limit of our
knowledge' (Ringgren 1973, 67).   Gurney considers it a clear allusion
to the rising of Tammuz from the nether world, but discounts its
integrity; 'the whole passage is obviously a late addition — perhaps
specifically Assyrian — which has displaced the original end of the
poem' (1962, 154).

Our immediate concern here is not with whether or not this tale
actually functioned in a ritual context but with the structure of it

as narrative. The inclination, though, to view this concluding

passage as a reference to an annual occurrence and perhaps ritual, obscure

to us but well known to members of the cult, does say something about

its narrative properties, or lack thereof. We perceive narrative as

such by a more or less intuitive recognition of its structure. Such a

perception seems to be missing here.

If this concluding passage were to constitute a third motifeme

we would be able to discern in it actants and an act which alter , or

attempt to alter some initial state. In the Sumerian tale there was

a motifeme which consisted of actants (motif characters Inanna and

Dumuzi) who engaged in an act (Confrontation) which resulted in Dumuzi's

death. Here we apparently have reference to such a Result, but the act

itself is missing and the only actants are those who seem to have already

been acted upon. We are presented with an altered situation, but none

of the narrative activity which leads up to it. Structurally, this is

not another motifeme. It is primarily texture, and seems to refer to

much more than it actually says. It functions in the overall structure

as a Final Situation, referring to the state of affairs which now

prevails after Ishtar's adventure and in contrast to that state which

preceeded it.

The two motifemes of this tale are each realized by two motifs.

In the first motifeme, after the scene is set by Ishtar's decision and a

description of the nether world, the initial motif recounts her descent

and entrance into Ereshkigal's realm. Embedded within this is her

brief confrontation with the gatekeeper. This is texture, a sort of

potential motif. It tells of what she will do if she is denied, but

Ereshkigal's response prevents this and the motif of Ishtar's entrance

continues to its conclusion. The second motif is that of her confron-

tation with her sister Ereshkigal, which results in Ishtar's imprisonment

and death.

The second motifeme opens with Papsukkal's mourning and his appeal to Ea, resulting in Ea's creation of the eunuch, Asushunimar. That is the first motif. In the second motif Asushunimar beguiles Ereshkigal into uttering 'the oath of the great gods', which apparently places her under certain obligations of hospitality, enabling the eunuch to request the 'life-water bag'. Ereshkigal seems to anticipate what he will do with this gift and orders Ishtar freed. (This is another indication that this particular narrative is not so much telling a story as re-telling it. As with the condensation of Ea's instructions into the action itself, indeed in all the neglected opportunities for elaboration, the tale seems very anxious to just 'get on with it'. The prime indication of this is, of course, the ending. There the tale is, at least to us, abrupt unto obscurity.)

On the level of the texture this last motif actually has two results. To the revival of Ishtar is added Ereshkigal's curse upon Asushunimar. The eunuch's life, it seems, is not destined to be a happy one. His inability to create new life, the fact that his own fertility is dead, enables him to enter the nether world and get close to Ereshkigal, drawing from her the oath. Like the fly in the longer Sumerian version, this is an instance of the helpfulness of the useless. The one who would seem to have the least to contribute to the restoration of ferti-lity, which is the central theme of this tale, turns out to be the best, indeed the only, person for the job. And like the fly he is rewarded with a decreeing of his fate. Except that where Inanna granted the fly a boon, here Asushunimar draws Ereshkigal and her curse. This is another example of the darker and more hostile tone of the Akkadian myth.

These two motifemes again demonstrate that principle of narrative balance in their structuring which we have found so often elsewhere:

two motifemes, of two motifs each, each recounting a descent and confrontation, the second undoing the damage brought about by the first. Thus the semantic structure of this tale is based upon a simple two part movement of deterioration-ameloration, though, as the concluding lines would seem to indicate, matters are not returned to exactly the same position from which they began. The actual result, though, beyond the release of Ishtar, is not entirely clear.

In the first part Ishtar, goddess of fertility, confronts her sister, the queen of the nether world, and is struck down and dies. This results in a general loss of fertility, with the concentration here upon its animal and human aspects. Ishtar is then rescued in the second half, but there is no direct reference to the restoration of fertility, the loss of which was the specific result of her disappearance and cause for freeing her. Perhaps its restoration, on its observable seasonal basis, is referred to in the ending which introduces Tammuz and Belili. We know that a replacement for the goddess is required by the nether world and that Tammuz (as the Sumerian Dumuzi) has played this role before. But there is no clear statement, or narrative presentation, of this here. The last part of the myth refers to Tammuz and his sister, but rather perfunctorily, in a manner which includes them yet certainly does not dwell upon their contribution.

This tale lacks the fully articulated semantic structure of the longer Sumerian version, or at least has radically abbreviated it. Indeed, in some ways it seems to be unsatisfactory - less than completely realized - as a narrative. It consists of a simple two-part movement, and an ambiguous ending. There are reflections of the style of this ending in the tendency of the body of the tale to condense or altogether neglect the usual opportunities for elaboration which Mesopotamian

poetry most commonly employs. Considerations such as these lend some support to the suggestion that this text belongs to a ritual context. It appears to assume a great deal, which the existence of a concomitant ritual may have served to provide. But while this myth displays a general tendency to waste little time in its telling it does linger over some details, and these are important indications of its attitude toward the material.

This is a much darker vision that the Sumerian. Where the earlier tale detailed the world that Inanna was leaving this one offers a comprehensive description of the one Ishtar means to enter. Her confrontation with Ereshkigal is also much more graphic, and her fate, the imposition of the myriad 'miseries', is read out for us in full. The curse that Ereshkigal lays upon Ishtar's rescuer, Asushunamir, is another notable addition. And the fertility aspect of this version is shifted from the implicitly agricultural to the explicitly sexual; the burden of the threat to fertility is on that of animal and human life. Taken all in all, this tale, while disregarding much conventional narrative elaboration, at the same time strongly emphasizes those passages dealing with the dark hostility of death and its realm.

All of the differences between the Sumerian and Akkadian versions point to a basic difference in outlook. Where the Sumerians integrate life and death on a principle of balanced sovereignty, this version maintains a constant sense of adversarial tension. This is reflected in their respective structures as well.

In essentially ending with the release of Ishtar from the nether world this version is taking as its central events the two confrontations with Ereshkigal. The growth of Ereshkigal's role is in keeping with this choice. The two confrontations are presented in a linear, parallel structure of descent and ascent which turns on the tension between life

and death.   Two movements, one from full life to total death, the other
a return to life, but to a life now in thrall to death.   In Ishtar's
outburst at the gates to the nether world, her threat to release the
dead to feed on the living, we glimpse the fragility of this relationship,
the ever present possibility that death may overwhelm life.   It does
the goddess when she confronts it straight on.   The eunuch momentarily
beguiles Ereshkigal, but he pays for this as well.   Ishtar fails in
her quest, she does not conquer but returns beholden.   If either were
ever to win a final confrontation, it seems it must be death.

The Sumerian version, on the other hand, utilizes this portion of
the tale as but the first part of a larger structure which eventually
brings the relationship full circle to an integration by means of the
seasonal cycle represented by Dumuzi and Geshtinanna.   This resolution,
reached after consideration of the possibilities of the relation,
displays an attitude more of respect than fear.   Fear is certainly
present, but the attempt is made to reason with and accept it.

The Akkadian myth regards death more as something that must be held
at bay.   Its ending may refer to the resolution whereby Tammuz and his
sister serve as the substitutes which free Ishtar, but the keynote is
fear.   Belili cries out: 'My only brother, bring no harm to me! '
(reverse, line 55).   This is not the compassion which willingly accepts
a shared death.

Perhaps the closing lines find the myth, the final situation establish-
ed, jumping directly to that moment in the year when Tammuz and Belili
exchange places in the nether world.   The first part would be a descrip-
tion of Tammuz's preparations to ascend from his imprisonment, and the
second Belili's reaction to his approach.   This, however, is not a
happy but rather a very dangerous moment, that at which the tension in

the life-death relation is at its most vulnerable.   There is an
incantatory quality to Belili's words.

> 'My only brother, bring no harm to me!
> On the day when Tammuz comes up to me,
>   When with him the lapis flute (and) the
>   carnelian ring come up to me,
> When with him the wailing men and the wailing
>   women come up to me,
> May the dead rise and smell the incense.'

Unlike the Sumerian, which brought itself to a conclusion through a
full structure of logical stages, this is an ending always in the making.
It lacks a palpable conclusion because there can be none where the idea
of stand-off has replaced that of balanced co-existence.

The concentration of this myth upon the tension, the confrontation,
between life and death is its recognition that it is a relation uneasily
maintained.   If it had a ritual context it may be itself a part of the
vigilance.   In any case it cannot be sanguine.   There is always the
possibility that, like the flood overwhelming the canals maintained to
control it, some lapse or occurrence, or goddess' whim, might 'raise
up the dead, eating the living, / So the dead will outnumber the living'.

VII. CONCLUSION

Mythology is a difficult and subtle object of study.   Indeed,
the problem of definition alone has been the scene of much, often
disputatious, endeavour.   Specific instances of myth become even more
opaque when they are the products of a culture as distant from our own,
in time and place, as ancient Mesopotamia.   One thing that can be
asserted and generally agreed to, however, is the universal expression
of myth through narrative.   It is this identity of the subject's texts
as tales which initially encouraged the possibility that narrative
analysis might provide a fruitful means of approach to them.   In this
study, as an approach which also seeks to move beyond formal description
to the discovery of how in each of its individual manifestations the
narrative structure of a text is the basis for a structure of meaning.
For meaning is at the center of myth, in whatever terms, of content
and function, we might try to define it.   Language is the basic tool
of thought;   and structure, in whichever it originates, imparts itself
one to the other.   Narrative language, as the basic means of the
expression of mythic thought, constitutes the ground and vehicle of its
structure and meaning.

The basic premise, drawn originally from linguistics, is that the
narrative text operates along two axes, the syntagmatic and the paradig-
matic.   The first, syntagmatic, axis is diachronic, the one along which
the linear construction of the narrative composition unfolds.   The
analytic method here is based on an understanding of narrative structures
as existing simultaneously on three levels.   The deepest and most
abstract of these, the motifeme level, describes narrative in its most
basic form, the combination of actant and act into a narrative event,
the lowest common denominator of all narrative being the sequence:

situation–response–result. On this level these categories remain empty, they represent only the structure which the individual narrative fills in coming into being as narrative. The filling of these structural positions by the elements of the other two levels is what creates the particular tale. This specification on the motif level consists in providing the actual characters and actions of the tale. The manifestation of the abstract motifeme level by motifs is essentially a process of naming. Abstract narrative movement (situation–response–result) is replaced by concrete plot. The texture level is the most immediate. This is the full and complete verbalization, written or oral, of the text. It involves all of the more or less complex elaboration of the tale which realizes in specific language the simple framework of the plot. The motif level remains abstract to the extent that, as the sequential combinations of character and action, it may be summarized or translated, as it were, complete. The texture level, on the other hand, is utterly specific. Simply put, it is the text itself.

Analysis of a tale according to these levels isolates its compositional components in terms primarily of motifs (the actions of characters) and the broader episodes into which these combine to manifest the underlying motifemes (the individual stages of narrative movement). The texture level, in so far as it is available to us here in these instances in translation, is both the starting point for this syntagmatic analysis and the initial source for the characterization of the contents of these compositional elements, the semantic relations of which constitute the paradigmatic axis.

Analysis of the paradigmatic axis, which is synchronic, involves the discovery of the system of oppositions which the contents of the narrative units establish among themselves. These oppositions are

created out of the various transformations of semantic elements across
the narrative. Theoretically they need not assume any particular
structure. In the tales analyzed here, however, they were found to
arrange themselves into semantic rectangles. This system of semantic
transformation is the story's way of thinking about, by 'trying out',
the various possibilities of a given situation, and the contradictions
naturally inherent in it.

The narrative analyses of the texts presented here have demonstrated
the usefulness of the method I have outlined in a number of ways. It
compels us, first of all, to concentrate solely on the actual contents
of the tale under analysis. The text is isolated by the initial task
of discovering its diachronic narrative structure. We seek, at this
first stage, not external resonances but internal forms. The motifeme
structure is abstracted and only then do we witness the reanimation of
the tale through analysis of the specific characters and events which
realize it on the motif level, and the actual verbalization which
creates its texture.

When we come to consider the message generated on the paradigmatic
axis, this concentration on the immediate contents of the text helps
guard against our bringing our own ideas, suppositions, and expectations
to the material from without. Our concern must be with the relations
the particular contents assume among themselves, one to another. Each
text is seen to have meaning in itself, self-contained and to some
extent complete. This is not to say, of course, that the individual
texts do not fit into a larger structure of significant relations,
among themselves and, indeed, the entire culture to which they belong.
But, and this is particularly true of ancient Mesopotamia, a full
picture of this culture is a very difficult thing for us to grasp in its
entirety. The complex system of signification within which the living

members of a culture are raised, and thus understand, as it were
intuitively, we can only hope to reconstruct by painstaking and sensitive
analysis of the individual surviving artifacts.   This structure of
signification is recoverable though, to the extent that its modes and
products are, by a process such as I have begun in this work, of synthe-
sis based on the rigorous analysis of these artifacts, as far as possible
on their own terms.   And it is these particular terms which this method
is designed to first all discover.

By beginning with the analysis of narrative structure we are
obliged to consider all of the elements of the tale.   Events and
characters cannot be singled out for what they suggest or evoke but
must be considered in their relation to all of the other aspects of
the particular tale.   The initial syntagmatic analysis provides a
basis for then marshalling all of the contents and basing their intell-
igibility on their own discoverable relations and internal coherence.
To say that all narrative grows out of certain basic structures is not
to circumscribe and impoverish it, but rather to acknowledge the extra-
ordinary and fertile freedom with which these structures are available
to realization.   It provides us with a means by which we can begin to
deal with this daunting diversity.   By establishing a basis of order
in this diversity we provide a way to understanding its meanings.   This
method produces more complete and coherent readings of each individual
tale, and interpretations which encompass and account for many more of
the elements of each.   This degree to which the various elements of
a myth are included and accounted for in its interpretation must be a
basic criterion for the success of that interpretation.   Previous
readings of this material have tended to be much more piecemeal and
partial.   The recognition of syntactic narrative structures as the
basis for semantic ones provides for a more rigorous and thoroughgoing

approach to understanding myth.

In an even more practical and utilitarian respect this method of narrative analysis can help in simply reading these texts, in that it provides a framework within which to consider their frequent gaps, fragmentations, and obscurities. This is complementary to the aid which the requirements of narrative structure render the poet in his production of a tale. To delineate the narrative structure of a text is, in a sense, to develope a certain set of expectations about it, just as any telling and hearing of stories relies on a system of conventions with which the author satisfies or confounds the expectations of his audience. Gaps in the text itself will assume a certain character according to the way in which they correspond to apparent gaps or inconsistencies in the tale's underlying structure. Of course, it would be unwise to rely too strongly on such correspondences as a means of re-creating a text. For one thing, the larger the break the less we can say about its structural position and role, and what we can say becomes progressively broader and more abstract. It would serve us little to try to do so in such a case, as the poet's freedom to fill the structures must, as long as our purpose is to know his thought, warn us away from assuming his role.

The best example among the texts studied hereof this sort of endeavour is Wolkstein's modern edition of the Inanna story. I have already pointed out in my discussion of it the potential dangers in such compilations, especially as regards their usefulness for the understanding of the specifically Sumerian culture. It consists, though, primarily of her own arrangement of various Sumerian materials. To that extent it it generally faithful to the culture it portrays. And the fact remains that although this edition of the tale was not consciously attempted in terms of a theory of narrative structures, it takes shape according to

the status of the myth as narrative and all of the expectations and constraints attendant therefore on the deployment of the materials available. In so far as structure is a constraint upon the story-teller our knowledge of it can help us to know more narrowly and precisely what options were available to him at such points where his actual product is lost or broken.

More useful in this respect is the help narrative structures can give us in the consideration of small fragmentations and especially obscurities of language and meaning. In the case of small gaps and fragmentary passages the understanding of narrative structures provides another tool to be combined with knowledge about literary forms and conventions to further confirm, or question, possible restorations.

We can expect to most confidently be able to apply the fruits of narrative analysis to the actual reading of a text at those points where the text itself exists but remains obscure, whether from diffi-culties of translation or of idiom. Here we can hope to make better sense of such elements according to the position they hold, and role they play, in the narrative structure. Thus our understanding of 'Gilgamesh and Agga' was at two points informed by considerations of structure.

In the case of Gilgamesh using an identical appeal to two different groups, and drawing the opposite response from each, I argued that there was no need to see in this a problem of understanding idioms. The appeal can be understood at essentially face-value if it is considered that it is the outlooks of the parties addressed which differ and not the thrust of the appeals. Structurally the episodes find their meaning in the contrary responses of two groups to the identical situation.

Even more perplexing, initially, appears the confusion of speakers and objects when the various men appear on the city walls.   But here again the structure and logic of the narrative movement, and the oppositions it establishes on the paradigmatic axis, allowed me to put forward a reading which both respects and clarifies the text.

I think that by recognizing that narrative operates along two axes and by providing us with a means of approach to both of them this method holds much promise for the study of myth.   It has demonstrated here that it can be used to read and interpret some often puzzling tales.   The stories of some mythologies are even more obscure and apparently incomprehensible.   But in this method we have a first approach or 'way in' to any narrative.   It is a tool with which we can come to grips with any story, however strange and, seemingly, illogical.   We can begin to make sense of and understand tales, and most importantly, do so on their own terms, if we have an idea of the fundamental structures upon which they are based.   To understand narrative in this way is only to recognize writing and reading, telling and hearing, as complementary acts;   one process in two directions.   The full utility of narrative analysis is realized in its paradigmatic aspect, which provides for the interpretation of tales.   Out of the analysis of narrative universals comes the synthesis which reveals individual meanings.

Having demonstrated the utility of the method developed here by its application to individual tales, there remains only to briefly consider what the interpretation of this body of texts can tell us about the religion and culture of ancient Mesopotamia.

The myths analyzed in this study were originally set down in two different languages.   Four of them,'Gilgamesh and Agga','Enki and Ninhursag','Enlil and Ninlil', and 'Inanna's Descent', are translated from the Sumerian.   The other two, 'Adapa' and 'Ishtar's Descent', are

Akkadian. This difference is partly due to the different periods at
which the surviving copies were recorded. Though the Semitic Akkadian
came to replace Sumerian in general usage, however, the older language
survived, on the strength of its traditional importance, in scribal bi-
lingualism and certain religious contexts. The date of the actual
recording of the surviving tablets is, in any case, an unreliable guide
to the true age of stories which almost all must certainly have had long
histories of traditional transmission. Thus there could appear in
Akkadian both translations from the Sumerian and more or less original
texts. Moreover, the corpus is such a small one that while we can
initially compare them as distinct groups according to language and
date of recording, we can expect only slight and preliminary results.
Ultimately, we will learn rather more from considering them all together
as samples from the continuous stream of Mesopotamian culture.

In considering the Sumerian tales as a group a further internal
distinction immediately presents itself. The story of the confrontation
between Agga and Gilgamesh clearly differs from the others. To begin
with, it does not involve gods at all, whereas the other three tales are
wholly divine in their characters and content. As one result of this
the issues of its message are more social and historical than truly
cosmic. This is not to belittle its importance nor, yet, the possible
validity of its status as myth. Its concerns, however, are not the same
as those of the others.

'Gilgamesh and Agga' serves primarily to validate the historical
claims of a city, Erech, and its legendary king, Gilgamesh. In so doing
it presents a model which opposes the active assertion of historical
right and justice to passive subordination, and the true line of kingship
to the false and imposed. In these social and political terms it is
foundational and validating.

Its depiction of a culture organized along the lines of what Jacobsen has termed 'primitive democracy' is important, moreover, for our understanding of another aspect of that culture. This is because it was a society which understood itself as founded upon a divine model. And as this divine society was thus itself based upon the idea of a constant interplay between the gods as an assembly and as individuals it informs the sense of flux which human culture felt as inherent in its divine counterpart. The same sort of disagreements and conflicts that occur in human society were also seen as part of the divine world. Cosmic affairs thus remain dynamic, and dramatic. Nothing is fixed and set, with absolute assurance, for all time.

The resultant anxiety and insecurity felt by mortals finds expression in the other tales, which deal directly with the activities and relationships of the gods.

'Enki and Ninhursag' and 'Enlil and Ninlil' both explore the possibilities and limits of fertility and the divine relationships which organize the universe. The first concerns itself with both sexual and agricultural fertility. 'Enlil and Ninlil' concentrates more on sexual matters and morals, and it is there that the role of the gods in the organization and maintenance of the cosmic order is brought most explicitly to the fore. Both, however, are concerned with the manner in which divine activities form the ground for the natural and cultural structures of mortal life. Events in both tales test the limits of fertility in order to illustrate and come to terms with its negative aspect, the infertility and death which is also apart of the world in which man lives.

'Enki and Ninhursag' seems the most clearly foundational of these tales. In it fertility is established and discovers its limits. Sexual roles, too, are marked out and firmly established. In its

progress from a disease and death-free, yet dry, primordial Dilmun to a present, vital world of fertility which balances wet and dry, life and death, it explores various possibilities of a different order. Its attitude, inquiring and testing as it is, is ultimately realistic. It does not shy from the roles of disease, infertility, and death, but integrates them into the very vitality of being.

'Enlil and Ninlil' tests some of the same structures. But it tests them rather less rigorously, in the sense that one great god, coming up against established order as enforced by divine assembly, while not exactly subverting or even much altering that order, nonetheless manipulates it to his own advantage. This again illustrates the basic anxiety in the Mesopotamian attitude to the divinely informed world around them, that the divine interplay tended toward a certain stability, but was in no way firmly and for all time fixed. Enlil's genius for organization is highlighted and praised, but not without allusion to the disruption also possible as the divine drama unfolds. Fertility is again presented as a state balanced by its negation, and the cosmic order as sustained by organizational forces which integrate competing aspects, such as life and death and heaven and the nether world.

The issue of death is confronted most directly in 'Inanna's Descent to the Nether World'. Here yet again it is a matter of understanding all mortality as an aspect of the greater cosmic order. The tale might imply that the two realms, of life and death, were originally more clearly separate, but not that one ever existed without the other. Death is treated as an absolute, a divine principle with its own gods and location. What the narrative seeks to understand is how these two principles came to be integrated into their recognizable expression on the middle ground between heaven and the nether world, in the natural seasons

of mankind and the earth. All the various phenomena of the world are manifestations of individual gods, who themselves possess personality and will. In the longest version of the tale they engage in an extended contest, literally a running battle, to be reconciled finally in a pattern of cyclical sovereignty which serves to explain, and maintain, the processes of the natural world.

These tales embody both a theology and a metaphysics. The theology understands the world as the manifestation of a virtual infinity of divinities. The relationships of these gods are ordered, but still dynamic. The personality they exhibit means that their society, like that of human personalities, is not fixed but remains in a state of flux, open to all manner of conflict and reconciliation. Yet beneath this dramatic cosmic dynamism certain major principles appear as essentially unchanging. The essential genius of each divinity fixes certain funda-mental relationships. Inanna, for instance, cannot be queen of both heaven and the nether world, though she might try, and in her attempt is discovered the nature of the relationship between these realms and its expression in the ordering of the world. By means of this interplay between the various divine elements are understood the basic structures of the world, the relations between life and death, fertility and infer-tility, male and female.

The two Akkadian texts hold to these same basic patterns of thought. Where they do differ it is primarily a matter of tone. 'Ishtar's Descent' tells essentially the same story, as far as it goes, as the Inanna version. But in only going so far it centers its attention on the initial confrontation between the supreme forces of life and death and in the obscurity of its ending seems to foreground a sense of fear where the Sumerian versions continue at some length to work out a somewhat more reassuring pattern for the eternal integration of death into the ongoing

process of life in the world.   Neither shies from the direct
consideration of the fact and role of death, but the Akkadian does seem
to express more the tension of an adversarial relation.

Such evidence is too slight for us to draw any conclusions from
it.   We might speculate that perhaps some of this is the weight of
history coming to bear on a culture.   Life renews itself, ever subtly
different, yet death is inexorable and always the same.   And to histori-
cal recollection the endings of things tend to be more awesome, and
visible, than their beginnings.   The evidence of this dark power does
tend to accumulate and press on the mind.   But this can be only
speculation.   An imaginative sympathy is necessary in reading and
thinking about these texts.   However, we must remember its limits and
pitfalls as well.

'Adapa' is notable for treating directly the relationship between
mankind and the gods.   It examines various possibilities of this
relationship, up to the very brink of one man's assumption of equality.
Yet, beneath the fantastic prospect of this exciting possibility, it
never actually loses touch with the underlying perception, fundamental
to Mesopotamian culture, of mankind as created for the service of the
gods.   Adapa's mastery over nature, in breaking the wing of the south
wind, comes about only in Ea's service and with his help.   And there
are strictures of the divine order which constrain even that great god
and friend to mankind.   The sense of man's helplessness and dependence
on the gods is only increased as the narrative proceeds.   In the end
it is the gods who, with or without man's understanding, decree every
aspect of his existence, including life and death, disease and its
relief.   Mankind can only emulate Adapa, 'a model of men', in the
service of the gods, thereby fulfilling their role in the divinely
determined order of things.

There is a sense whereby man, in his utter dependence, is neverthe-
less tempted to examine the idea of his possible indispensability.   In
the tales of the deluge the gods come to regret the destruction of their
servants.   Here Adapa's diligence almost earns him the ultimate reward.
Yet it is in obedience to Ea that he fails to grasp what Anu offers.
And so finally it is the limits of understanding which make it impossible
for mankind to presume about the centrality of his role in the cosmic
order.   He may feel he is indispensable, at least in so far as main-
taining an order which is beneficial to himself.   But he dares not
assume too much about his place in the greater scheme of things.   There
is so much about it, whatever his efforts to understand, which belittles
him.   He can only serve as if he were indispensable and in that way
secure as far as possible his niche.   The degree of reciprocity in his
relations with the divine is for the gods alone to decide.   Though if
even they can sometimes fail to agree or always know the ways and wills
of one another this might go some ways to explain the lapses and
unpredictabilities of the world, and some of the all too apparent
divergences between deserts and rewards.   It is this aspect of the
divine which these narratives draw upon in their attempt to make sense
of the universe.

The number of tales studied here is really too small to be able to
tell us much, by itself, about differences between the earlier and
later stages of Mesopotamian civilization.   A certain shift in tone
has been noted.   As for subject and theme, the Sumerian tales are
generally concerned with fertility and irrigation, while the Akkadian
take up more directly human aspects of mortality and man's relationship
to his gods.   Differences in subject matter, though, may owe something
to accidents of survival and recovery.   It should also be borne in mind
that Akkadian tales do not replace or supplant Sumerian ones.   They are
all part of the same cultural continuum.   If the Akkadian myths do not

treat exactly the same subjects it may only be because Sumerian ones
already do. They can introduce new concerns within the background of a
long and continuing history and culture. There is an essential uni-
formity throughout this long history of ancient Near Eastern culture.
As Speiser puts it, 'the eventual bearer of this heritage, in the strict
cultural sense, was not properly a Sumerian, a Babylonian, or an Assyrian.
He was essentially a Mesopotamian' (1967, 277). It is within this
continuum that we can best consider what this group of tales can tell
us about the Mesopotamian's attempt to find and explain order in the
world, and to understand its inconsistencies.

The main themes uncovered by the analyses of these myths — fertility
and sex; death; man's relations with the numinous — are not particu-
larly surprising ones. They are central to any culture's thought about
itself and the world. Here they are expressed in terms of the primary
concerns of an established, urban, agricultural society. As regards
agriculture, the tales are an attempt to apprehend seasonal patterns,
the relations of one to another and those of their constituent elements,
wet and dry, life and death. That their sexual dimension tends more
toward the examination of limits most probably is a reflection of the
society's settled, urban nature. The diversification of labour and
attendant concentration of people into cities reduces problems of
providing mates and maximizing procreation while emphasising the
importance of relating produce to populace and ensuring the stability
of an agrarian economy. Their whole sense of the organization of the
universe is informed by this feeling for balance, as for instance in the
equilibrium between wet and dry which irrigation and all its attendant
efforts, a cooperative cultural enterprise directed toward organizing
and enhancing the natural world, struggles to maintain. This struggle
to assert influence and control is also reflected in the political
nature of the tales. Political in the sense of the issues of power and

relationship which they raise, and in the very concept of a divine
society.

These myths are told about the gods, for the most part, but their
ultimate terms of reference are very human. They ground in divine
terms the basic principles which underlie the successful maintenance
of an urban, agricultural community. Nature, though in many ways
benevolent and adhering to a certain order, is nonetheless changeable
and uncertain. Mankind's role in this order is clearly, if only
implicitly, central. It needs him as much as he needs it. Yet it is
also clear that, important as his role may be, it is not, of itself,
sufficient. The order displays a degree of regularity, but is not
mechanistic. It is not guaranteed or always consistent. This quality
of uncertainty gives it the appearance of an active psychology, of will
and impetuosity. Behind the myriad events and processes of the
universe are sensed the presence of as many individual deities. Thus
the ultimately self-referential quality of these tales. In the quest
for sense and order in such a universe human structures are projected
onto the divine realm, which in turn serves to ground the very human
society upon which it is based. Such a projection takes as its starting
point the conclusion, based on the grounds of apparent dependence, that
the true order of establishment is precisely the reverse.

Since the divine realm serves as the model for the earthly one, it
must contain within it the structure of relationships which is so
concretely manifested here below. In these tales are described the
contest of forces which man feels to be taking place all around him and
which are the eternal activities of the gods. By endeavouring to
understand these relationships, and their foundational status, the
Mesopotamians sought not only to make sense of and reconcile themselves
to the divine will, but to fulfil the very basis of their own being, which

was to serve it.

In this sense of clashing divine personalities and wills there is, naturally enough, a sense of awe and of fear. Cosmic order, like the earthly maintenance of fields through constant building and rebuilding of dikes and dredging and redredging of canals, was something achieved, not given. And, as an achievement continually taking place, it was vulnerable. What separates gods from men, in this understanding, is this ability to impose and maintain order on a cosmic scale, and thus make it possible in the human sphere. The Mesopotamians sought to comprehend the nature and extent of this order in terms of the relationships of the supernatural personifications of its constituent elements. These tales discover the sources of cultural structures in those of nature, and the sources of these natural structures in divine culture. It is a circular understanding which nevertheless represents a fairly rigorous intellectual, if rather colourful and metaphoric, approach to the problem of orientation.

The structures of thought and its objects are interdependent; they form and inform one another. There remains, however, scope for the play of imagination, for filling and testing these structures in terms of desires as well as those of empirical observation. It is by this means that myth achieves, beside understanding, its further goals of justification and reconciliation. By imagining what might be it seeks to accommodate what is.

These tales tend to be radical and challenging in their approach to a theme, yet conciliatory and conservative in their conclusions about it. By their depictions of threatened order they cleave the more firmly to the positive aspects of order's very existence. And they betray at the same time the sense of anxiety and precariousness which is at the root of Mesopotamian man's servility before his gods. His efforts to

comprehend are also a form of praise, and of supplication.

One theme which emerges from this study of these tales, and has perhaps been somewhat neglected in previous considerations, is that dealing with the question, the problem, of death.   Certainly it has been noted that in comparison with, for instance, Egypt where it was a central and existential concern, in Mesopotamia 'death was accepted in a truly matter-of-fact way' (Oppenheim 1977, 176).   We should take care, though, not to dismiss the matter too lightly.   Even if this describes much of the apparent attitude, it cannot be a position easily, or thoughtlessly, arrived at.

I have already pointed out the anxiety and fear which contributed so much to the manner of their efforts to make sense of the organiza- tion and functioning of the universe.   The role of death is central to this.   What is lacking, however, from the mythological record as it is preserved for us, is any explicit preoccupation with the origin of human mortality.   They understood man as created mortal.   The only conscious attempt to overcome this fact is that of Gilgamesh in the 'Epic of Gilgamesh', and this is doomed to failure.   Adapa and the survivor of the flood are the unconscious pawns of circumstance and the gods, and only one of them is granted the prize.

The Mesopotamian acceptance of death as a fact of life is not a simple given though.   Rather, it is, as these texts reveal, an aspect of their apprehension of cosmic order in the balance of many contending forces.   They chose not, like the Egyptians, to try and overcome death, but to integrate it, understanding it as the other part, somehow equal, of life.   Their means of achieving this is indicative of the entire manner of their mythological thought, of the attempt to encompass as much of the apparent, and often troubling, universe in dynamic systems of order.

For the ancient Mesopotamian death was an inherent fact of human life. Man, as created, was mortal. He did not throw away, have stolen, or otherwise lose a primordial freedom from death. Yet death was not seen as an absolutely intrinsic aspect of all life, even its relentless inevitability for mortal man had, in the one instance of the survivor of the deluge, been turned aside. It was, rather, a potentiality made possible by the very fact of life in whatever particular manifestation. Death, for the Mesopotamian, was the dark twin of life itself. Each constituted, as Frankfort puts it, 'a substantial reality' (1949, 23). Even the gods, possessing an immortality immune to the natural fate of man, could have the reality of death thrust upon them by violence. The 'Enuma Elish' informs us that the first generations of gods spawned by the original chaos inflicted this very fate on the 'primordial Apsu, their begettor' (ANET, 61). Tiamat, too, is slain, as is the god Kingu to provide the raw material for the creation of mankind.

Death is seen as a species of separate reality which, if it can be imposed on a god, can also be denied in a man. In the myth of Adapa the mortal is told by the god Ea that he will be offered the food and water of death. What he is in fact offered are the food and water of life. This idea of life and death as residing in edible substances also appears in both the Sumerian and Akkadian versions of the descent of Inanna/Ishtar to the nether world. Here the food and water of life (just the water in the Akkadian) are sprinkled on the corpse of the dead goddess and she is revived. While the two states, life and death, were obviously related, one did not necessarily follow from the other. If death could be imposed where it did not naturally occur, immortality could as well be granted or life regained. And they expressed this idea in the concrete terms they knew so well: life-giving sustenance and death-dealing violence.

There is also in the mythology a further expression of this separate and concrete conception of death. In so far as death meant confinement to the nether world it was transferable, at least in the case of the gods. This appears as the reason for Enlil's begetting three brothers for the moon-god Sin on his way to his own banishment in 'Enlil and Ninlil'. When Inanna/Ishtar emerges after her descent to the nether world she is accompanied by demons whose task it is to claim her replacement.

Yet if death represents a separate and substantial reality it is nevertheless one to which all individual living forms eventually succumb. The deities which were the source of all phenomena may have been immortal, but individual manifestations, animal and vegetable especially, were not. It is significant too, that if divinity was, in the natural course of things, immortal, it was not absolutely so, it was not unkillable.

The reality of death is so fundamental that the Mesopotamian response was to choose to recognize it as a basic force which actually contributes to the organization of the cosmos. Thus in 'Enki and Ninhursag' primordial Dilmun may be free of death and disease, but in this state its potential has not begun to be fully realized. The introduction of fresh water is the crucial life-giving event, but it leads inexorably to a countervailing expression of the power of death. The myths of fertility and organization such as this and 'Enlil and Ninlil' seek to understand the role of infertility, though troubling and a source of fear, as also somehow necessary. The universe is not a fixed and static expression of divine will, but the scene of its constant, multiform working out. Every action has a reaction. What sustains it is the continual maintenance of a balance among its many forces. And as one of its fundamental aspects death plays a central role in this.

Mortality is accepted as a full participant in the structure of the world.

The theme of integrating death as a part of the cosmic order is most explicitly treated in the tales of Inanna/Ishtar's descent to the nether world. Here the realms of life and death engage in direct confrontation. The resolution of this conflict involves Dumuzi/Tammuz and his sister serving each alternately. In the alternation of the seasons is found an expression of the coexisting sovereignty of both realms.

If the Mesopotamian attitude toward death appears to us as one basically of acceptance this can be traced, paradoxically, to the anxiety and fear which understands the universe as constituted of myriad forces both good and ill. In seeking the principles of organization which establish order among these forces mortality is integrated as a fundamental participant, rather than an interruption or intrusion.

Thus in the theology of the god-man relationship, as reiterated in the myth of Adapa, human beings are created mortal, partaking of the same mortality as the rest of the living things of the earth with which they serve the gods, this service being their fundamental role and raison d'être.

The Mesopotamians were not complacent about death; Gilgamesh's rather frenzied quest for immortality in the great epic demonstrates that profoundly enough. But just as he must finally come to terms with it, so did the culture itself, not by seeking to deny or overcome it, but by means of integrating it into their conception of the universe. A conception of the universe which emphasised its nature as a complex organization in a condition of continually finding its order in the interplay of its many constituent forces, among which was death in its various forms.

It is the idea of the world as a system of dynamic flux depending for a sense of stability upon the equilibrium of these forces, life and death, fertility and infertility, male and female, which clearly emerges from all of these tales.

Finally, I would like to return, briefly, to the problem of myth as a genre, its definition and function.

A myth is a story. That is the premise upon which this entire enterprise has been based. However, the method developed and used here is not based on the narrative as myth, but the myth as narrative. It seeks to identify certain universals of narrative, and can be applied to any type. So it cannot, in its syntagmatic aspect at least, be used to identify and differentiate narrative genres. For this we must return to considerations of content. Syntagmatic narrative structures are empty vessels, utterly lifeless until filled by their particular contents. It would not be irrelevant to recall here an old distinction made between comedy and tragedy: if I slip on a banana peel it is tragedy; if you do so, it is comedy. Same story, different genres.

It is possible to conceive, of course, of certain types of contents which might tend to be expressed in certain specific syntagmatic patterns. This would involve, though, considering the syntagmatic elements, speci-fically the motifs, according to the more or less specific nature of their manifestations, and not as purely abstract units. That is, not just as characters and actions but as, for instance, good or bad characters engaged in activities of conflict or cooperation. It was in this manner that Propp set out to describe the particular narrative structure of the Russian fairy tale. And he succeeded in defining it according to a closed set of functions arranged in an invariable order.

The method employed here is capable of doing both more and less. By means of a greater level of abstraction it is able to describe the

structure of any and all narrative. But the description of structure on this level can make no distinction between tales beyond longer or shorter, more or less complex. We use it, however, not merely to describe, but because we seek in its elements, as they are animated by their contents, a concomitant structure of meaning. Motifs and motifemes are everywhere, the mythical lurks somewhere in the particular manner of their manifestation.

Ultimately, I must wonder how necessary it is to arrive at any one wholly specific definition of myth. Certainly the mythical must concern those matters which are most important to a culture, and do so in terms that are considered to be, in their context, 'true'. Beyond this, what other criteria need be considered? The 'hard case' in terms of this study must be that of 'Gilgamesh and Agga'. This tale differs from the others in two main ways. Firstly, it involves no divine characters. Secondly, its oppositions, while stark enough, are weaker, that is, not cosmic but more mundane and political. But hard cases, it must be remembered, make bad law. If nothing else, we must continue, in our conclusions, to avoid the overly dogmatic.

The idea that the presence of divine figures can be used as a defining mark of myth has often been put forward. And it may have a certain attraction in this particular context, where we have before us a picture of a universe of a myriad contending forces, each the physical realization of a divine source. Here in order to deal with important and fundamental issues reference must often be made to this background of divine interplay. But in general, and even here specifically, the reference to divine or supernatural elements is not entirely satisfactory as a criterion. It is, finally, too simplistic, and would tend to exclude some tales which we might want to consider, on other grounds, as myth. The possibility arises in this case of 'Gilgamesh and Agga' if we approach

it from another direction.

Another possible way to distinguish between myth and other types of folktale is according to whether they concern matters of collective or only individual importance (see Meletinsky, et. al. 1974; Jilek and Jilek-Aall 1974, 143; Burkert 1979, 23-4). This is a more promising distinction because it addresses the 'seriousness' of a tale's themes.

Folktales that are immediately accepted as not being myths, such as fairy stories and legends, are ones which are concerned only with the fates of their individual heroes. They are told primarily for their narrative qualities. One aspect of this involves their use of names. The fairy tale relies on generic and descriptive names, such as 'Jack' and 'the Giant'. 'This practice reflects at once the range of their appeal, their lack of specific local reference, and the importance of situation at the expense of character' (Kirk 1971, 39). More mythological tales, on the other hand, signal their collective signification by specifying proper names, family relationships and local references. These provide references around which statements of coll- ective solidarity and validation can coalesce.

This is what we find happening in 'Gilgamesh and Agga'. This tale, unlike the others here, does not concern questions of cosmic organization. But neither is it simply the tale of one of Gilgamesh's adventures. It refers also to the political and moral solidarity of the city of Erech, and to its historical validity. Because of this collective importance, this folktale is more than a simple legend. In the common anthropological term, as coined by Malinowski, it is a charter myth.

In fact, the strongest challenge and alternative to the mythic status of this tale would lie in considering it as history. It has a

fairly straightforward appearance of reportage, and makes no undue
claims on our credulity. And we assume the accuracy of the nature
and possibility of its events if we use it as a record of the shape
of certain Sumerian political institutions. Indeed, this is the very
sense in which it was most probably understood by the Mesopotamians
themselves, as a central and significant event in the history of Erech
and, perhaps more importantly over a wider area, in the kingship of
the great Gilgamesh. But it is precisely this importance as 'history',
which preserves it down through the ages, which also indicates that it
is something more than a tale of purely narrative interest, concerned
only with the fate of its individual hero.

If it is, perhaps, not yet as wholly mythical a work as the other
tales presented here, that is because the distinction between genres
is not fixed and absolute. The fluidity and freedom of traditional
transmission allows for a continuous shifting of emphasis and grada-
tion of centers of gravity in tale type and purpose as they are formu-
lated and reformulated down through time. 'Gilgamesh and Agga', as
history and myth, must have clearly conveyed to its hearers some
important element of their sense of themselves both politically and
culturally.

If the method used here to interpret these tales does not serve,
by itself, as a simple means of identifying what is and is not a myth,
neither does it require only myths to be applied. All narrative,
sensitively interpreted, can contribute to our understanding of the
culture which produced it. What we then recognize as myths are those
tales which touch on matters which are vital to the beliefs and concerns
of a society.

And as we can see from the analyses of these tales, myths do not
simply justify, or blithely explain, but actually attempt to grapple with

and think through very real and important problems of human existence. These texts represent an ongoing attempt to order and make sense of their context. The end result may be one of justification, for there is an existential intractability about many of these fundamental questions, but it is much more satisfying, and effective, for having been reached in this way.

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