

# Pluto, Lord of the Underworld: an analysis

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The following comparative textual analysis of primary sources follows Pluto's mythical footsteps through cultures and history – from Mesopotamian Inana's descent to the Netherworld, to Greek Demeter's search for her daughter Persephone who was abducted by Hades into "the misty realms of darkness", and to Plato's etymological analysis of the name Hades. The findings are measured against 20<sup>th</sup> century astrologer Dane Rudhyar's descriptions of the astrological Pluto in order to ascertain to what extent his portrayal is true to form. This analysis posits that the "Lord of the Underworld" and his realm are elusive and occult; that the dead are seeds of abundance and new life; that Pluto's words enchant and transform; and that in the Underworld, everyone is equal. Furthermore, this study conjectures that Rudhyar's astrological Pluto not only treads in Hades' mythical footsteps - but overcomes them.

## Introduction

This paper explores three of the titles bestowed upon the mythological Pluto - "The one known by many names"<sup>1</sup>; "Plouton - the giver of wealth"<sup>2</sup>; and "The one who receives many guests"<sup>3</sup>. To this end, a comparative textual analysis of three ancient and three modern primary sources was undertaken. The examined texts are: the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.)<sup>4</sup>; Plato's etymological analysis of the name "Hades" in *Cratylus*, (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.)<sup>5</sup>; the Mesopotamian epic of *Inana's Descent to the Nether World* (c. 1900-1600 B.C.E.)<sup>6</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Nagy, trans. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, (2001)., <http://www.scribd.com/doc/88358936/Nagy-Homeric-Hymn-to-Demeter>; [hereafter Nagy, *Demeter*], [18]

<sup>2</sup> Plato, "Cratylus", in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1921), [hereafter Plato, *Cratylus*], [403a];

<sup>3</sup> Nagy *Demeter*, [404].

<sup>4</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*:

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*.

<sup>6</sup> J.A. Black, G. Cunningham, E. Fluckiger-Hawker, E. Robson, and G. Zólyomi, trans., "Inana's Descent to the Nether World", in *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, (Oxford 1998), (<http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/>), [hereafter Black et al, *Inana*].

and three articles about the astrological Pluto written by the 20<sup>th</sup> century astrologer Dane Rudhyar.<sup>7</sup>

The rationale for the inclusion of the Mesopotamian myth is Bernadette Brady's argument that the Greek myth of Pluto's abduction of Persephone (the subject of the *Hymn to Demeter*) so strongly parallels the Mesopotamian myth of Inana's visit to the underworld, that there is a great possibility that it is a "male rewrite" of the latter and Nicholas Campion's suggestion that although those suffering from "Western Hellenophilia" prefer to view Greek myth as self-generated in Greece, there is increasing evidence of Mesopotamian influences on ancient Greek culture and mythology.<sup>8</sup> This paper concentrates on some of the earliest extant writings on Pluto and on one of the most important astrologers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who witnessed the astronomical discovery of the planet Pluto in 1930, and notably contributed to its consequent incorporation into the astrological pantheon.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, scholarly work by Carl Kerényi and Mara Lynn Keller on the Eleusinian mysteries (ancient Greek mystery rites honouring Demeter, Persephone and Pluto) is taken into consideration, as well as Johanna Stuckey's study of Inana's epic and Jane E. Harrison's study of the Olympian *Hades*.<sup>10</sup>

A primary concern of this analysis is to gather insights into the nature of the mythological and astrological Pluto and his realm, through the contrasting of ancient and modern sources. Another aim is to ascertain to what extent Rudhyar - one of the pioneers who shaped the astrological Pluto - reflected some of the

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<sup>7</sup> Dane Rudhyar, "Pluto - Sower of Celestial Seed", in *New Mansions for New Men 1938: A Spiritual Interpretation of Astrology in the Light of Universal Symbolism*, (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1938), (<http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/>), [hereafter Rudhyar, *Pluto*]; Dane Rudhyar, "Pluto and the Experience of Depth, Void and Recentering", in *The Galactic Dimension of Astrology: The Sun Is Also A Star*, (Aurora Press, 2004), [hereafter Rudhyar, *Galactic*]; Dane Rudhyar, "The Planets and their Symbols", in *Everywoman's Astrology*, (1966), [hereafter Rudhyar, *Planets*].

<sup>8</sup> Bernadette Brady, "Nergal's Story - A Mesopotamian look at Mars and his descent into the Underworld", *The Visual Astrology Newsletter*, (April 2006), [http://zyntara.com/VisualAstrologyNewsletters/van\\_April2006/VAN\\_april2006.htm](http://zyntara.com/VisualAstrologyNewsletters/van_April2006/VAN_april2006.htm); Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 1, (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> Rudhyar, *Pluto*.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), [hereafter Kerényi, *Eleusis*].; Mara Lynn Keller, "The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone: Fertility, Sexuality, and Rebirth", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), pp. 27-54, [hereafter Keller, *Fertility*].; Johanna Stuckey, "Inana's Descent to the Underworld", *MatriFocus, Cross-Quarterly for the Goddess-Woman*, (Beltane, 2005), Vol 4-3. <http://www.matrifocus.com/BEL05/spotlight.html> [hereafter Stuckey, *Underworld*].; Jane E. Harrison, "Helios-Hades", *The Classical Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Feb., 1908), pp. 12-16, [hereafter Harrison, *Hades*].

earliest recorded mythology on Pluto through his writings. The third aim is to investigate in what measure an examination of the Eleusinian mysteries can shed light on the "Lord of the Underworld".

### The one known by many names

"The one known by many names" is one of Pluto's titles in the *Hymn to Demeter*. To the ancient Greeks, *Hades* was the name of both the Lord of the Underworld and of the Underworld itself and Plato affirms that "...most people think that this [*Hades*] is a name of the Invisible (ἀειδής), so they are afraid and call him Pluto."<sup>11</sup> It appears that his "real" name was largely avoided and he was usually referred to indirectly by aliases and titles. He is named as *Hades* only six times in the entire Hymn, being invoked as "He" or by his formal titles throughout the rest of the text.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, his character is veiled, elusive, and of the six times that *Hades* is mentioned more informally, he is described in terms that allude to invisibility and furtiveness: he is depicted as giving Persephone, "...stealthily, the honey-sweet berry of the pomegranate to eat, peering around him..." and we are told that he "smiled with his brows" - which translates, according to Nagy, as "smiled knowingly".<sup>13</sup>

In the same vein, the Eleusinian rites themselves were shrouded in mystery, and Demeter refers to "...the holy ritual, which it is not at all possible to ignore, to find out about, or to speak out."<sup>14</sup> In agreement with this last, Kerényi writes of ceremonies that nobody could "describe or utter" and Keller notes that the mysteries' "mystical insight" was beyond words.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the entrance to Pluto's underworld realm at Eleusis was one of the very few recognised entrances to Hades in the ancient world. Harrison quotes Pausanias who claimed that the people of Eleusis were the "only known worshippers of *Hades*."<sup>16</sup> The Mesopotamian epic of Inanna's Descent reflects the mysteries at Eleusis and is also reflective of the stealth of the Olympian *Hades*, and of the invisibility of his realm. Inana is repeatedly admonished: "...you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld."<sup>17</sup>

From the above, it can be deduced that both Pluto and the rites that surrounded him were occult (invisible, hidden); and accordingly, Rudhyar associated the Plutonic realm with "occultism in its true character" - as opposed

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<sup>11</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, [18], Note 1; Plato, *Cratylus* [403a].

<sup>12</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, [2], [78], [84], [347], [357], [376].

<sup>13</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, [371-374], [357-358], Note 42.

<sup>14</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, [477-480].

<sup>15</sup> Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 13; Keller, *Fertility*, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, *Hades*, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Black et al, *Inana*, [129-133].

to what is commonly understood by the term - describing it as “cosmic depth-psychology”.<sup>18</sup> Rudhyar further compared the “Plutonian descent” to *the process of individuation*, as formulated in Jungian analysis, and added that it should not only lead to a personal “centering” but, more importantly, to the “permanent realm of the Self”.<sup>19</sup> Summing up the foregoing, it could be argued that *Hades’* title, “The one known by many names”, is particularly fitting, since cunning Pluto (in Rudhyar’s words) “...merely reflects one’s own hidden face...”<sup>20</sup>

### ***Plouton - The Giver of Wealth***

In contrast to the furtive and deathly image conjured above, *Hades* was often invoked as *Plouton* (the Roman Pluto), and Plato tells us that he was known as “...the giver of wealth (πλοῦτος) [*Plouton*], because wealth comes up from below out of the earth.”<sup>21</sup> Kerényi likewise finds that the Eleusinian mysteries were surrounded by “names and images of wealth”.<sup>22</sup> In parallel, the creatures that were sent to retrieve Inana from the underworld were offered a “river with its water” and a “field with its grain” instead of Inana’s corpse – referring to which, Stuckey asserts that fertility was of the underworld and that the dead were “seeds of new life”.<sup>23</sup> In line with this, Rudhyar writes of the astrological Pluto as associated with “the abundant life”, “the life full of seed”, and states that “...in the seed rests [...] the mystery of immortality.”<sup>24</sup> It would appear that the association of the underworld with the fertility and abundance of nature is solidly supported by Mesopotamian and Greek mythologies as well as by Rudhyar’s work.

But another aspect of the concept of abundance can be glimpsed in Plato’s words when he asserts that, according to him, the word *Hades* “...is not in the least derived from the invisible (ἀειδές), but far more probably from knowing (εἰδέναι) all noble things...”<sup>25</sup> Plato adds that *Hades* is a “perfect sophist”, and is called *Plouton* - the abundant - because “... so beautiful, [...] are the words which Hades has the power to speak...”<sup>26</sup> In turn, Rudhyar asserts that both Mercury and Pluto refer to the mind and while the astrological Mercury represents the individual mind, the astrological Pluto represents “the mind of the human species”.<sup>27</sup> In the Hymn, Hermes (the Roman Mercury) is sent to the Underworld to convince

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<sup>18</sup> Rudhyar, *Galactic*.

<sup>19</sup> Rudhyar, *Galactic*.

<sup>20</sup> Rudhyar, *Galactic*.

<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, [403a].

<sup>22</sup> Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Black et al, *Inana*, [273-281]; Stuckey, *Fertility*.

<sup>24</sup> Rudhyar, *Pluto*.

<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Cratylus* [404b].

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Cratylus* [404a].

<sup>27</sup> Rudhyar, *Planets*.

Pluto, “with gentle words”, to permit Persephone to leave “the misty realms of darkness”.<sup>28</sup> Hermes' characteristics of agility and intelligence, reflected in his title *Argos-killer* (the form *argos* conveys “swiftness and brightness”), are mirrored in the two small and flitting creatures that the Mesopotamian God Enki sends to redeem Inana from the underworld.<sup>29</sup>

Considering the above, it could be argued that the Greek Hermes and the two agile Mesopotamian creatures represent the same notion of the quick, practical, individual mind – the astrological Mercury – and furthermore, that Mercury and Pluto are bound together in a significant relationship as two aspects of the mind. According to Rudhyar, “Pluto's Great Work”, is the “... revelation of oneself to oneself in every remotest part of one's being...”<sup>30</sup> It could, therefore, be suggested that both within Plato's philosophy and Rudhyar's cosmology, the wealth ascribed to Pluto is not only material, but also spiritual: the implication would seem to be that piercing intelligence and unadorned wisdom combined with the power of the word, of *logos*, can operate change in the common human condition.

### **The One Who Receives Many Guests**

In the *Hymn to Demeter*, Pluto is obliquely referred to as “The one who receives many guests” - a delicate way of naming “all-devouring” death.<sup>31</sup> The question of grief is a central theme in the Hymn, and Demeter is depicted at various times as sitting unmoving and silent, mourning for her daughter Persephone – “For a long time she sat on the stool, without uttering a sound, in her sadness.”<sup>32</sup> Keller writes of Demeter's “sense of inexplicable loss” and of the “ritual identification” with her grief that the participants in the Mysteries had to undergo.<sup>33</sup> Concurrently, Inana, who had to accept the ruling of Ereshkigal (the Mesopotamian goddess of death) in the underworld, became the “afflicted woman”, who “...was turned into a corpse. And the corpse was hung on a hook.”<sup>34</sup> From this evidence, it could be surmised that the grief of the encounter with the Plutonic realm turns the living into simulacra of corpses – dark, silent, unmoving – in a ritual identification with death.

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<sup>28</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, [335-337].

<sup>29</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, Note 39; Black et al, *Inana*, [226-235].

<sup>30</sup> Rudhyar, *Pluto*.

<sup>31</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, [404]; Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, [98], [100], [197-199].

<sup>33</sup> Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 38, Keller, *Fertility*, p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> Black et al, *Inana*, [164-172].

In *Cratylus*, Plato asserts that humans are "...terrified because the soul goes to him [Pluto] without the covering of the body."<sup>35</sup> In fact, in both Demeter's and Inana's case, the "Plutonian descent" is accompanied by a shedding of garments and personal decorations in a possible analogy to the shedding of the body in death: we are told that Demeter tore off her headband (which identified her as a goddess) and shrouded herself in a "dark cloak"; while Inana was forced to shed a piece of clothing at every successive gate to the underworld until she "crouched down" naked.<sup>36</sup> Unerringly, Rudhyar writes of the "Plutonian process of total denudation", and argues that its essential task is to constrain us to "...plumb as profound a depth of human experience as our mental, affective, and spiritual condition can withstand."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Rudhyar writes of "the Void" which this process leads to, where the "scattered fragments" of the person's old self are rearranged – and concludes that "...Pluto is the ultimate Integrator."<sup>38</sup>

The process of "total denudation", which deprives humans of all the symbols of identity and status, would appear to – again, in a caricature of death – cancel the differences between people in a great democratic sweep. Kerényi quotes Vettius Agorius Praetextatus who stated that the Eleusinian mysteries were thought to "hold the entire human race together".<sup>39</sup> Rudhyar asserts that the "descent to hell" thrusts the individual into "the common and the undifferentiated", and cancels all pretension of individuality.<sup>40</sup> Considering the above, the title "The one who receives many guests", could be taken as an indication of Pluto's generosity in playing host ("Ultimate Integrator") at such a communal feast and allowing mortals to taste the fruits of deep Plutonian transformation.

## Conclusion

Plato's etymological analysis of the name *Hades* opened fruitful venues for exploration; in particular, the identification of Pluto's powers as a "perfect sophist", which appears to have influenced Rudhyar's recognition of Pluto as the "mind of the human species" - as opposed to the individual mind - and in bringing to light Pluto's significant relationship with Hermes/Mercury. Rudhyar's writings on the astrological Pluto have been amply supported by the examined mythological material, and his intuitions have proven to be based on a profound understanding of the mythology in question – it could be argued that he has

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<sup>35</sup> Plato, *Cratylus* [403b].

<sup>36</sup> Nagy, *Demeter*, [40-42]; Black et al, *Inana*, [129-163].

<sup>37</sup> Rudhyar, *Galactic*.

<sup>38</sup> Rudhyar, *Galactic*.

<sup>39</sup> Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Rudhyar, *Galactic*.

driven the Plutonic myth to its ultimate conclusions and firmly embedded it in the “modern times”. Furthermore, Kerényi's and Keller's studies of the Eleusinian Mysteries correlated with the findings of the analysis of the primary sources. Also, Brady's and Campion's arguments on the probable Mesopotamian seeding of Greek mythology were loosely confirmed by the comparative analysis of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and of *Inana's Descent to the Nether World* – although a more thorough and lengthy comparative study would be more conclusive.

The “Plutonian Descent” was seen to be accompanied by grief and mourning, which seem to transform the living into simulacra of corpses in a ritual identification with death - as does the process of “total denudation” which follows a “descent to hell” and which strips away identity and status to arrive at the common and undifferentiated – in Pluto's realm, everyone is equal. However, Pluto's generosity could prove hard to appreciate - loss, grief, “the Void”, disintegration of the personality; and then, (hopefully) an arduous ascent from hell to a new and integrated life. To conclude, within the examined primary sources, the “Lord of the Underworld” has been found to be an elusive and paradoxical figure suspended between invisibility and ruthlessness, between base cunning and sublime wisdom and between the stench of decaying bodies and the seeds of new life.

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