

Sophus Helle

Enheduana's Invocations: Form and Force

A fundamental element of ancient poetry – be it hymns, prayers, or myths – is the use of invocations.¹ In poetry about or addressed to a divine figure, invocations serve to summon the deity into the text, centering them as the subject or recipient of the poem. At the same time, invocations mark a distance between the speakers and the gods, who are addressed not as nearby interlocutors but as far-away, all-mighty figures to be apostrophized and praised. The invocation is thus a moment of exceptional poetic force, reaching out to a distant deity and inviting them into the text.

The importance of invocations for ancient poetry too often goes unnoticed. While there is some scholarship on the religious significance of invocations in cuneiform poetry (for example, what their format can tell us about ancient conceptions of the divine), their literary role has not received the same attention.² This may be because modern eyes too easily skip past an address to a deity (“Oh Inana!”) to reach what seems at first to be the core of the poem: its storyline, images, allusions, tropes, and so on. For many modern readers, there is something *empty* about invocations (Culler 1977: 59–60). They bear no meaning in themselves, they do not advance the plot, often they do not even describe the deity but merely repeat their name or titles. Invocations seem trimmable. When studying ancient poems, they are the parts that one is most tempted to overlook – but, as I argue in this essay, scholars ignore invocations at their own peril.

In the following, I analyze the use of invocations in the Sumerian poem **nin me šar₂-ra**, known in English as *The Exaltation of Inana*. The poem is commonly attributed to the Old Akkadian high priestess Enheduana – an attribution that would make her the first named author in the history of world literature. The *Exaltation* is a fascinating poem, full of stunning images and meta-poetic reflections. With more than eighty preserved manuscripts, it is also among the best-attested Sumerian poems, and it is practically unique in cuneiform literature for being preserved in its entirety – it has no gaps or lacunae – though it still offers

1 I would like to thank Nicole Brisch for her kind and constructive feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. All shortcomings remain my own.

2 On approaches to invocations in cuneiform hymns and prayers from a religious (rather than a literary) perspective, see e.g., Mayer 1976: 39–45, Zgoll 2003: 195, and Lenzi 2010. On the poetics of prayer and religious rituals in the cuneiform world, see e.g., Abusch 1983, Lenzi 2011, Zgoll 2004, Schwemer 2014, and Veldhuis 1999.

many other philological challenges, from obscure phrases to hapax legomena.³ Crucially, the invocations of the goddess Inana that appear in the *Exaltation* are no empty shout-outs: they serve to structure and organize the poem, and lend it a particular poetic force.

My argument falls in two parts, one focused on the poem's structure and one on its literary effects. The first part argues that the *Exaltation* can be divided into six sections based on the form of the narrator's address to Inana: the invocations thus give the poem a previously unnoticed clarity of composition. The second part turns to what role invocations play in the poetics of the text, that is, what literary effects they are used to achieve. I examine four such effects – action, presence, withheld names, and triangulated address – to argue that invocations imbue the *Exaltation* with a singular literary power. The invocations do not merely describe the goddess, as any epithet might – they *move* the audience in their relation to Inana, while also structuring the poem and highlighting its key transitions.

1 The Exaltation of Inana

The *Exaltation* is a hymn to Inana – the Sumerian goddess of war, love, and transformation – that includes an account of how Enheduana was thrown into exile by a usurper named Lugal-Ane. The historical Enheduana was the daughter of the Old Akkadian king Sargon and served as the high priestess of the moon god Nanna in the city of Ur. The *Exaltation* is one of several poems attributed to her by the Old Babylonian scribes, but the earliest preserved manuscripts of those poems date to centuries after her death, meaning that they may have been composed later in her name (see e.g., Civil 1980: 229; Michalowski 1996: 183–85; Glassner 2009; but cf. Foster 2016: 207; Lion 2011: 97; Helle forthcoming). During the Old Babylonian period (19th–17th century BCE), the *Exaltation* became a mainstay of the ancient school curriculum. Students copied out the poem to familiarize themselves with the complexities of literary Sumerian, which is why the poem has survived in so many manuscripts, leading its editor Annette Zgoll

³ The text was first edited by Hallo and van Dijk (1968), an updated edition was published by Zgoll (1997) and a further updated score transliteration can be found in Delnero (2006: 2021–18). All quotations from the text follow Zgoll's edition; the English translations are my own, though they are highly indebted to the French translation by Attinger (2019). I am preparing a book-length study of Enheduana and the poems attributed to her (Helle forthcoming); it will be accompanied by a website that will include a line-by-line translation and exegesis of the *Exaltation*, at enheduana.org/exaltation/.

(1997: 40) to dub it “der erste Bestseller der Weltliteratur.” Though it is unclear whether Enheduana composed the *Exaltation* herself, the poem is still a remarkable literary achievement. It yokes together strings of striking metaphors, creating images that are both vivid and obscure. Its word choice is often unusual or archaic, and there are lines that can be read in several contradictory ways at once (Helle 2020: 61). None of these features are unique to the *Exaltation*, but their combination makes it a work of stunning complexity.

The *Exaltation* begins with a hymnic section that extols the might of Inana, describing the fury with which the goddess destroys all who rebel against her. The narrator Enheduana then introduces herself and explains her plight. She has served faithfully as the high priestess of Nanna, but now Lugal-Ane has seized power in Ur, expelled Enheduana from the temple, and driven her into exile. She wanders through the land praying desperately to Nanna, but he does not answer. The situation is described as an open court case that leaves Enheduana suspended in uncertainty, awaiting her judgment (Zgoll 1997). Since Nanna refuses to step in, Enheduana turns to his daughter Inana instead, asking her to intervene and in so doing succeed Nanna as divine arbiter. Enheduana interprets her own ambiguous predicament as Nanna's de facto abdication; meaning that if he will not decide the matter one way or another, he has effectively left the case to Inana: ^dnanna li-bi₂-in-du₁₁-ga za-a-kam bi₂-in-du₁₁-ga / nin-ĝu₁₀ ib₂-gu-ul-en i₃-mah-en, “Nanna has said nothing, so he has said: ‘It is up to you!’ / This has made you greater, my lady, this has made you the greatest” (ll. 133–134). In other words, since Nanna has issued no verdict in Enheduana's case, he has deliberately left the matter to Inana, paving the way for the goddess's rise to power, if only she is willing to seize her chance.

In other words, Enheduana must convince Inana to rule in her favor, but also to rule in the first place, and so replace her father as a ruler among gods. But Enheduana faces one more challenge, and a particularly daunting one at that: she has lost her eloquence. Her power of speech, with which she used to soothe the angry gods, has disappeared. This is the real crisis of the narrative. Without her eloquence, Enheduana will remain unable to persuade Inana and so save herself. The problem is finally remedied by the composition of the poem itself, as the climax of the story describes how Enheduana created the text we have been reading so far and thus regained her poetic powers. The text effectively ends by describing how it came into being, in the narrative equivalent of a snake biting its own tail. In the last eleven lines (ll. 143–53), an epilogue informs us that the hymn was successful, that Inana accepted Enheduana's prayer and intervened on her behalf, and that Nanna approved his daughter's rise to power. Despite its brevity – it is a mere 153 lines – the *Exaltation* is a complex and multi-layered text, which reflects on its own composition and the voice of its narrator.

The story is essentially about itself, and about how the characters who are described in the poem are transformed by that poem. All this is narrated in an often unusual and tightly packed poetic language, replete with elliptical references to other myths about Inana.

The first step in any interpretation must be to establish some structure in the poem, but every translation has done so differently. The first editors, William Hallo and J.J.A. van Dijk (1968: 14–35), divided it into eighteen stanzas that are grouped into three main sections, “Exordium,” “Argument,” and “Peroration” (ll. 1–65, 66–135, and 136–153). In a later edition, Zgoll opted for four main sections (ll. 1–59, 66–73, 74–96, and 100–108), linked by transitional passages, and further divided into fourteen subsections (see the tables in Zgoll 1997: 37–38 and 55). The translation by Benjamin Foster (2016: 331–36) has twelve sections, that by Jeremy Black et al. (2004: 315–20) has fourteen, while that by Pascal Attinger (2019) does not subdivide the text at all. In short, there seems to be no consensus among scholars about how the text is structured. Of course, this need not be a problem: it is often the case for poetic texts that their transitions are so gradual and their structure so complicated that readers will reach different conclusions about how the text is to be subdivided, and Assyriologists will often offer outlines of the literary texts they study.

However, I will argue that the *Exaltation* does in fact mark its internal transitions quite clearly, carefully guiding the audience through the poem and highlighting its every shift in focus. Instead of imposing onto the text such terms as “peroration,” taken from the much later tradition of Classical rhetorics, I think it best to follow the poem’s own way of treating textual boundaries. Intriguingly, the *Exaltation* marks its subdivisions through invocations. When Enheduana repeatedly addresses Inana with the same phrase, this signals to the audience that a shift is taking place. When we hear a formula that we have come across before, we are to take note: the invocations are the internal thresholds of the poem, the boundary markers that make its structure apparent.

2 Invocations and Structure

The *Exaltation*’s use of repeated invocations first comes into view in l. 6, which begins with the phrase **nin-ĝu₁₀**, “My lady!” Fourteen lines later, one finds another line that begins with the same phrase. It is then found again in ll. 27 and 34. The distribution is no coincidence: with the exception of l. 13, every seventh line of the poem’s introductory hymn to Inana begins with the phrase **nin-ĝu₁₀**. The apparent exception, l. 13, is remarkable for another reason. In place of the

expected **nin-ĝu** one finds the phrase **izi bar₇-bar₇**, “flaming fire,” which in cuneiform is written with the sign NE repeated thrice. The beginning of the poem thus consists of five seven-line stanzas, four of which are introduced by the invocation “My lady!” and the last of which begins with the threefold repetition of the same sign. In fact, the audience is warned in advance that the text will be divided into groups of seven lines. The line just before the first occurrence of the phrase **nin-ĝu₁₀**, l. 5, reads: **me imin-be₂ šu sa₂ du₁₁-ga**, “You who took hold of the seven cosmic powers!” The number seven can signify totality, implying that Inana has seized *all* cosmic powers (Sumerian **me**), but in this context, it also serves to announce the structure of the immediately following text.

Just after the last of the five stanzas, one finds the following couplet: **ib₂-ba nu-te-en-te-en dumu gal^dsuen-na / nin kur-ra diri-ga a-ba ki-za ba-an-tum₃**, “Your rage cannot be cooled, great daughter of Suen! / Lady, outstanding in the land, who can take anything from your domain (lit.: place)?” (ll. 41–42). This couplet is repeated almost verbatim in ll. 58–59: **u₃-sumun₂ zi-zi dumu gal^dsuen-na / nin an-ra diri-ga a-ba ki-za ba-an-tum₃**, “Charging aurochs, great daughter of Suen! / Lady, outstanding in the heavens, who can take anything from your domain (lit.: place)?” The parallel is a satisfying mix of repetition and variation. The first half of the first line is different, and in the second line, the word “heaven” replaces “earth,” but otherwise the couplets are identical. In between the couplets, the poem tells of how Inana destroyed two enemies: a mountain she invaded – an external enemy – and a city that rebelled against her – an internal enemy (ll. 42–50 and 51–57, respectively).⁴ The two passages begin by invoking the place that is about to be destroyed: **hur-saĝ**, “mountain,” is the first word of l. 42; **iri**, “city,” is the first word of l. 51. Whereas the previous section was structured by a linear sequence of seven-line blocks, here we find a chiasmic structure: a couplet invoking Inana, the destruction of an invaded mountain, the destruction of a rebellious city, and a second, highly similar couplet invoking Inana.

4 It is not clear whether Inana invades the mountain, or whether she retaliates against the mountain's invasion of her territory (**ki**): the phrase **hur-saĝ ki-za ba-e-de₃-gid₂-de₃**, l. 43, can mean either “you extended your dominion over the mountain,” as Zgoll (1997: 7) reads it, or “the mountain, which (sought to) extend into your dominion,” as read by Attinger (2011: 55 n. 33) reads it. Either way, the contrast between the mountain and the city as external v. internal enemies still applies. I read the stanza as an allusion to the myth of *Inana and Ebih*, in which Inana invades and destroys the mountain of Ebih, which is why I prefer Zgoll's interpretation (note that Inana's destruction of the city is motivated by its failure to honor her, just as in *Inana and Ebih*). The grounds for attributing *Inana and Ebih* to Enheduana seem to me extremely slim, but her poems do repeatedly refer to this myth, especially in ll. 110–112 of the *Hymn to Inana*.

The following section is less clear to me. After the second of the repeated couplets, the poem moves into a narrative mode, introducing its narrator Enheduana and describing her reason for beseeching Inana (ll. 60–108). Invocations continue to play a key role, but their repetition is less exact; instead, the narrator seems to switch back and forth between various addressees. Some lines are addressed to Inana, some to Nanna, and some are Enheduana’s description of herself. But if one follows these shifts, a subtle pattern emerges. In ll. 60–66, the as yet unnamed narrator invokes Inana, declaring that she will recite a song for her. In l. 67, the narrator introduces herself: **en-me-en en-he₂-du₇-a-na-me-en**, “I am the high priestess, I am Enheduana.” In l. 74, she turns to Nanna, invoking him by name: **^dsuen**.⁵ In l. 81, Enheduana returns to herself: **en-he₂-du₇-a-na-me-en**, “I am Enheduana.” After describing her plight, she invokes Inana once more in l. 91: **^dsumun₂ zi-ĝu₁₀**, “My righteous aurochs!” Finally, she turns back to herself one last time in l. 100, which begins with the word **ĝa₂-e**, “I.” Briefly put, the fourth, narration section of the *Exaltation* zigzags between self-description and divine invocation. Enheduana addresses Inana, names herself, turns to Nanna, names herself, addresses Inana, and returns to herself once more. Though this structure is perhaps more muddled than the other sections, it does powerfully capture the narrator’s sense of anguish as she turns from one god to the other, desperate for either to reply.

The next passage is again clearer, as it is structured by the threefold repetition of the phrase **nin ki-aĝ₂ an-na-ĝu₁₀**, “My lady, beloved of An!” (ll. 109, 121, and 135; note that in l. 109, it appears as **nin kal-kal-la an-ne₂ aĝ₂**, “Precious lady, whom An loves!”). This yields three distinct sections that bring the poem to a climactic resolution. In the first, Enheduana describes why her appeal to Inana remains necessary: **di ni₂-ĝa₂ nu-mu-un-til di kur₂ di-ĝu₁₀-gin₇ igi-ĝa₂ mu-un-ni₁₀-ni₁₀**, “The trial against me is still open! An adverse verdict coils around me, as if it were mine” (l. 117). In the second, the hymn breaks down into a list of epithets that glorify Inana, marked by the epiphoric repetition

5 Not all translators agree that Enheduana turns from Inana to Nanna in these lines. I follow the interpretation by Foster (2016: 333–34) and Black et al. (2004: 318): since Inana is referred to in the third person in ll. 77–80, they parse ll. 74–75 as Enheduana saying to Nanna that he should tell An about her problems with Lugal-Ane. One can then translate **nam-ĝu₁₀ ^dsuen lugal-an-ne₂ / an-ra du₁₁-mu-na-ab**, as, “My fate, Suen, (namely this) Lugal-Ane—tell it to An.” Zgoll (1997: 11) and Attinger (2019: 7) take a different view, seeing these words as still addressed to Inana, leading to a translation such as: “My fate (which concerns) Suen (and) Lugal-Ane—tell it to An.” They see ll. 77–80 as An’s instruction to Inana, explaining why she is referred to in third person. But regardless of whether the stanza is addressed to Inana or Nanna, my larger point still stands, as the section zigzags between Enheduana invoking the gods (though possibly just Inana) and returning to her own situation.

of the phrase **he₂-zu-am₃**, “Let it be known!” (ll. 122–132). In the third section, Enheduana describes how she composed the *Exaltation*, which, as noted above, effectively resolves the tension of the narrative. Once again, the crescendo that unfolds in this section is structured by a repeated invocation, as the phrase **nin ki-aĝ₂ an-na-ĝu₁₀**, “My lady, beloved of An,” marks the transition from appeal through climax to resolution.

The final section, ll. 143–153, is clearly set off from the rest of the poem by a grammatical shift, as Enheduana is transformed from a first-person narrator into a third-person character. It seems that by composing the poem and relegating it to the **gala** singer who performs it in l. 140, the author has disappeared from her own text (Helle 2020). The epilogue states that the hymn was successful: Inana accepted Enheduana’s prayer (ll. 144–145) and Nanna approved Inana’s exaltation (l. 148). The poem has reached a conclusion, as emphasized by the repetition of phrases first found in the prologue. The first couplet of the poem is **nin me šar₂-ra u₄ dalla e₃-a / munus zi me-li₉ gur₃-ru**, “Lady of all cosmic powers, bright daylight streaming down, / righteous woman dressed in splendor;” which is echoed in the epilogue: **iti₅ e₃-a-ĝin₇ la-la ba-an-gur₃**, “Like a moonbeam streaming down, she was dressed in delight” (l. 147). The text uses the repetition of key phrases (**e₃-a** and **gur₃**) to mark its circular closure, and the shift from sunlight to moonlight (**u₄** to **iti₅**) to show that a transformation has taken place. Finally, the epilogue is once more delimited by a repeated invocation of Inana, as its first and last lines both begin with the word **nin**, “lady” (ll. 143 and 153). This is also the very first word in the text, and the word that is repeated every seventh line in the introductory hymn (its repeated appearance in the *Exaltation* is noted by Zgoll 1997: 18–27). In short, this is the defining word of the poem, echoing through the text like a *Leitmotif* and bringing us back each time to the might of Inana.

To sum up, while the *Exaltation* is a challenging text in any number of ways, it can be shown to follow a relatively clear narrative structure, as it marks the shift from one section to the next through repeated invocations of its main characters, especially Inana. By tracking these invocations, six distinct sections emerge, as shown in Table 1. The first is a prologue, which sets the tone for the rest of the poem by describing Inana’s cosmic power. The second is a hymn to Inana, emphasizing her role as the goddess of war. The third section is a warning not to disrespect Inana, telling of how she destroyed an enemy mountain and a rebellious city. The fourth section is the main narrative section of the poem, introducing the narrator and explaining her predicament. The fifth section is the climax of the poem, culminating in the composition of the text itself. The sixth section is an epilogue that describes the outcome of the hymn and returns to its opening lines.

Table 1: Overview of the Structure of the *Exaltation*.

Lines	Section	Structure and repeated invocations
1–5	The <u>prologue</u> sets out the overall theme of the poem: Inana’s cosmic power.	The text begins with an invocation of Inana: nin me šar₂-ra , “Lady of all cosmic powers” (l. 1).
6–40	The <u>introductory hymn</u> describes Inana in her role as goddess of war.	A sequential section consisting of five stanzas of seven lines each, four of which begin with the word nin-ĝu₁₀ , “My lady” (ll. 6, 20, 27, and 34).
41–59	The <u>warning to rebels</u> describes Inana’s punishment of a mountain and a city that defied her rule.	A chiasitic section framed by two matching couplets invoking Inana (ll. 41–42 and 58–59), divided into a section addressed to the mountain (ll. 43–50) and to the city (ll. 51–57).
60–108	The <u>main narrative</u> introduces Enheduana and her reasons for appealing to Inana.	An alternating section, where the narrator turns back and forth between Inana (ll. 60–66), herself (ll. 67–73), Nanna (ll. 74–80), herself (ll. 81–90), Inana (ll. 91–98), and herself (ll. 99–109).
109–42	The <u>climax</u> glorifies Inana through a list of attributes, then describes the poem’s composition.	A sequential section, consisting of three subsections introduced by the phrase nin ki-aĝ₂ an-na-ĝu₁₀ , “My lady, beloved of heaven!” (ll. 109, 121, and 135).
143–53	The <u>epilogue</u> presents the resolution of the story.	The section refers to the narrator in the third person and repeats key phrases from the prologue. It is framed by the invocation of Inana as nin , “lady” (ll. 143 and 153).

The use of repeated invocations to organize the hymn has many parallels in other Sumerian poems. As noted by Jeremy Black (1992), repetitions are often used in oral poetry to structure the text for the benefit of the listening audience, who, unlike a reading audience, cannot turn to a previous page and review information they might have missed. Listeners are locked into a linear mode of reception; they can neither speed up, skip ahead, or go back. The difficulty involved in this mode of reception can be alleviated by “the use of (i) markers that are regularly associated with particular points of a composition (beginning, section boundary, end) and which thereby serve to ‘flag’ structural features for the listener; and (ii) by the use of repetition as a means of demarcating sections of the narrative structure” (Black 1992: 72) – a description that applies

perfectly to the *Exaltation* as well. Black goes on to illustrate his point through a reading of the Sumerian narrative poem *Lugal-e*, which evidences many of the same features, though there, it is not only invocations that are repeated, but all sorts of phrases. An even more exact parallel was pointed out to me by Gina Konstantopoulos (personal communication), namely the Sumerian royal hymn *Iddin-Dagan D*, which after an initial praise of the goddess Nininsina turns to a selection of other deities, including An, Enlil, Ninlil, and Aruru: each god receives eight lines of hymnic praise, all beginning with an invocation of the deity in question. This structure is very similar to the second section of the *Exaltation*, where a repeated invocation is also followed by a fixed number of lines. However, the *Exaltation's* choice of seven lines may be unusual. In his discussion of verse structure in Sumerian poetry, Herman Vanstiphout (1993) gives examples of distichs, tercets, quatrains, and sextets, but I know of no other Sumerian poems that demonstrably arranges its verses into septets. But there is still much research to be done on the formal structures of Sumerian poetry, so groups of seven lines may yet turn out to be a more common feature than they seem at present.

3 Invocation and Poetics

In what remains of the essay, I will argue that the invocations of the *Exaltation* are used not only to divide the text into sections, but also to lend it a particular poetic force. In this analysis, I am guided by Jonathan Culler's thought-provoking study *Theory of the Lyric* (2015), in which he argues that the traditional focus in literary studies on *hermeneutics* (which asks what the poem means) should be complemented by the older, but as of late neglected focus on *poetics* (which asks what the poem does or seeks to do). In the following, I identify four interlinked aspects of the literary role of invocations as they appear in the *Exaltation*: action, presence, withheld names, and triangulated address.

3.1 Apostrophe as Action

A seminal moment in Culler's study of the lyric tradition and its poetics was an article from 1977 on the apostrophe, a rhetorical device that has much in common with invocations: the apostrophe is an exclamatory address to an absent person or inanimate object. As Culler remarks, apostrophes are an embarrassment to modern poetry. Phrases like "O stars!" have the ring of the ridiculous.

Contemporary poets tend to employ apostrophes only with a touch of irony, and literary critics tend to ignore them altogether. Culler persuasively argues that this sense of suspicion stems from the apostrophe's attempt not just to describe the world but to change it. The apostrophe *does* something: it summons, scolds, or exalts its subject. Since modern poets have grown disenchanted with the idea that poetry can have real-life effects (as Auden famously wrote: "poetry makes nothing happen"⁶), the apostrophe's blatant assertion of poetic efficacy has come to sound like posturing pretense. When we turn to premodern texts, we risk carrying that bias with us, disregarding invocations in ancient literature as nothing more than grandiloquent embellishments.

There can be no question that the *Exaltation* tries to do something, at least according to its internal narrative logic. As described above, the *Exaltation* depicts a situation in which Enheduana has been cast into exile by a revolt and attempts to regain her position in Ur by appealing to Inana. Enheduana's plea to Inana must overcome a series of hurdles to be successful: Inana must take over Nanna's position as arbiter among gods, and Enheduana must reclaim her lost eloquence. These hurdles are finally cleared in the poem's climactic resolution, where Enheduana composes the text we have been reading. In short, the poem is about its own lyrical efficacy. The resolution of the narrative tension – the question of whether Enheduana will be saved and reinstated as high priestess of Ur – depends entirely on whether the plea to Inana is successful, and the plea is nothing other than the text itself (except the last eleven lines of the text, which state that the prayer has achieved its intended effects). The account of Lugal-Ane's insurrection and Enheduana's exile is merely given as background information, a flashback that explains the main action of the text, which is Enheduana's prayer to Inana. In other words, what happens in the poem is the poem itself. The *Exaltation* is not an account of dramatic events – as an epic would be – but an event in its own right.

As Culler observes, the use of the apostrophe in lyric poetry highlights the voicing of the poem as a self-standing action. That is, an address to a person or thing, irrespective of whether that person or thing will ever hear said address, lends the poem the force of an action, which would be lacking from a more static formulation of the same sentiment. In Culler's words, the apostrophe carries "the incalculable force of an event" (Culler 1977: 68). Compare the sentence "Inana is great" with "Oh great Inana!" The former is a descriptive statement that could be spoken by anyone or by no one; it implies no particular speaker

6 This oft-quoted line is from the second section of W.H. Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats."

or recipient and could just as easily be spoken or written. The latter, by contrast, is clearly addressed to Inana and is just as clearly spoken by a personified narrator, whether or not the identity of that narrator is made explicit. Even if the latter sentence appears exclusively in writing, it summons the *idea* of a voice calling out to the goddess. Finally, whereas the former sentence only describes the world, the latter seeks actively to change it, if only the fictional world of the text: it seeks to attract the goddess's attention and enlist her help. In short, the action of the text is its own voicing.

Before moving on, I would like to briefly note that this discussion of “voicing” does not necessarily mean that the *Exaltation* was orally performed.⁷ As noted above, the use of repetition as a structural marker to flag transitions is a common feature of oral poetry; furthermore, the *Exaltation* refers to itself as being orally performed by a **gala** priest on the day after its composition (l. 140). However, other aspects of the text indicate a predominantly written circulation. Remember that in l. 13, the invocation **nin-ĝu**₁₀, “My lady!” is replaced with the phrase **izi bar₇-bar₇**, “flaming fire,” written NE NE NE. The pun transposes the force of repeated invocations into the medium of writing, by having the copyist write the same sign again and again. But this is an exclusively graphic pun: it does not work if the text is read out, because a recitation must collapse the polysemy of the cuneiform sign into a single pronunciation. At present, the question of whether – or rather, to what extent – the *Exaltation* was orally performed remains difficult to answer. The notion of voicing discussed above thus refers more generally to how the text became voice in the mind of the audience, regardless of whether that happened through performative recitation or internal dictation.

3.2 Creating Presence

In the preceding section, I treated invocations and apostrophes as if they were functionally equivalent, and to an extent, they are. However, a poetic apostrophe to the stars, the winds, or the seasons is not quite the same as a pious invocation of a deity: in the latter case, the speaker assumes that it is at least possible for the deity to hear the prayer and respond, by altering fate in their favor. Alan Lenzi (2011: 12) offers a brief summary of what invocations can be seen as doing in a religious setting: “Just as one might speak one’s friend’s name aloud in a group to gain their attention before conversing with them, the

⁷ On the oral performance of Sumerian poetry, see the essays collected in Vogelzang and Vansiphout 1992, Alster 1992, Delnero 2015, and Wasserman 2021.

invocation is intended to get the supra-human being's attention before the prayer continues." That may be so, but there is also a crucial difference between the two situations: the friend, hearing their name spoken, would turn around and acknowledge one's presence; the deity offers no such immediately visible response. In short, the invocation of a deity is unlike the apostrophizing of an inanimate object in that one can *hope* for the deity's attention; and unlike an address to a friend in that one cannot be *certain* of it.

As a result, the invocation establishes both the presence and the absence of the deity in the text. The absence is the more obvious of the two. The invocation of a divine figure calls attention to the fact that the gods are not here, or at least not certainly here: otherwise, there would be no need to invoke them. An address implies distance – whether it is the short distance to a friend who is talking to someone else, the vast gulf between the poet and the stars, or the ontological distance that separates the supplicant from an omnipresent deity, who may be physically close but is also a radically different kind of being.⁸ The Sumerian gods, however, seem not to be omnipresent, and there is a frequent fear in ancient prayers that one's petition may go unheard. Indeed, that is the central drama of the *Exaltation*. Enheduana appeals to Nanna, the god whom she served as high priestess, but Nanna does not answer: **ḏanna-ĝu₁₀ en₃-ĝu₁₀ ba-ra-an-tar**, "My Nanna does not care for me (lit.: does not ask about me)" (l. 100). In turning to Inana, Enheduana naturally fears that the failure of her plea will repeat itself, asking Inana with obvious anxiety: **ša₃-zu na-ma-še₁₇-de₃**, "Will your heart not be appeased (lit.: cool down) towards me?" (l. 137). The fact that the gods may or may not be listening gives the invocation an open-ended character, which, in the *Exaltation*, carries a clear element of despair. This angst is especially apparent in the fourth section of the poem, the narrative section, where Enheduana turns back and forth between Inana, Nanna, and herself. That is also the section where Enheduana states that she has lost her eloquence, linking her current lack of rhetorical prowess to the gods' inattention to her words. It is only at the end of the poem, after Enheduana has regained her poetic skills, that Inana is said to have heard her prayer (ll. 143–144).

The invocation thus seeks to overcome the deity's absence (or at least the uncertainty about their attention) by bringing them into the text. It is an attempt

⁸ Another example of such an ontological distance are the statues of gods, which may have been thought to be one of the gods' physical manifestations; see Walter and Dick 2001: 6–8 and Jacobsen 1987 for an opposing perspective. If hymns were ritually performed in the proximity of those statues, their invocations would not need to overcome a physical distance (since the god was close by), but rather the distance in being that separates the human supplicant from the deified statue.

to establish their presence by and through words. The invocation reaches out to a distant figure and cajoles them into closeness, whether physically or metaphorically: some invocations ask the god or goddess to literally approach the supplicant (Sappho's *Ode to Aphrodite* is a memorable example),⁹ while others are satisfied with a more figurative kind of presence. The *Exaltation* culminates in an invitation to Inana to join Enheduana in a night-time ritual in the shrine of the Holy Inn, where Enheduana composes the poem (ll. 135–142). We are told that Inana accepted Enheduana's prayer, but it is unclear whether she literally appeared in the Holy Inn. However, the nature of her appearance may not be all that important. In a sense, the invocation creates its own mode of presence – a strictly poetic presence, in which the deity is made manifest through their names, titles, and deeds as they are listed by the speaker. The invocation thus becomes a solution to its own problem, as it gives the deity a textual presence if nothing else.

In short, invocations function as a rhetorical recompense for the physical distance of the deity (whatever the nature of that distance), inviting the god or goddess to appear before the speaker, either physically in a temple or figuratively in the text. Intriguingly, this aspect of invocations is also emphasized in another text that the Old Babylonian scribes attributed to Enheduana: *The Temple Hymns*, an anthology of forty-two hymns addressed to various Sumerian temples. Each hymn glorifies the temple and so, by extension, the deity who lived there and the city in which it stood. Monica Phillips, who is currently preparing a new edition of *The Temple Hymns*, argues that the entire anthology consists of a series of invocations (Phillips 2018; Phillips forthcoming). According to Phillips, each hymn can be thought of as an “extended naming” of the temple in question. The hymns first give the actual names of the temple and then unpacks, interprets, and expands those names to yield a hymnic description of the building as a whole. Phillips argues that this form of invocation was particularly effective in the cuneiform world because names were thought to be a manifestation of the object they referred to. All persons and objects were thought to be present in the world in several ways at once, including their physical body and the writing of their names (Radner 2005; Bahrani 2003, chaps. 4–5). When Enheduana names the temples, she not only describes their glory but also grants them a new channel of existence. In the cuneiform world, naming was therefore an especially effective way for invocations to achieve the textual presence that is their goal. To invoke a deity or a temple by name blurs

9 For a comparison of the *Exaltation* and Sappho's *Ode to Aphrodite*, see Helle 2020: 62.

the distinction between physical and figurative presence I set up above, since the name was seen as a very real, concrete mode of being.

3.3 Withholding Names

The power of names in cuneiform cultures and their fundamental role in another text attributed to Enheduana makes it all the more striking that the *Exaltation* so consistently avoids naming Inana (Zgoll 1997: 156). The goddess is invoked in a myriad of ways, but her name is given only three times in the poem, in ll. 12, 83, and 153. As noted above, Enheduana's authorship is a contested issue: since the earliest manuscripts of her poems date to centuries after the Old Akkadian period, we may be dealing with pseudepigraphic attributions; it is also possible that the historical Enheduana composed either the *Exaltation* or *The Temple Hymns*, but not both. However, regardless of the veracity of these attributions, it is striking that two of the poems that the Old Babylonian scribes attributed to the same author take so different approaches to the poetry of names. Both texts are structured around a series of invocations, but one fashions those invocations around the name of the temple being addressed, while the other withholds the name of its addressee altogether.

No such reticence applies to other gods in the *Exaltation*: the moon god is named as Nanna in ll. 93, 100, 120, 122, 148, as Suen in ll. 41, 48, and 74, and as Dilimbabbar in l. 84; An is named in ll. 14, 15, 19, 59, 75, 76, 85, 86, 94, 109, 121, 135, and 152; the Anuna are named in ll. 34, 113, and 115; Enlil is named in ll. 18 and 95; Ningal in ll. 119 and 149; Ishkur in ll. 10 and 30; and Dumuzi, as Ushumgalana, in l. 111 (see Zgoll 1997: 86 and 156). The absence of Inana's name is all the more striking in contrast to these other deities. Of the three times her name is used, two come with a caveat. In l. 153, she is named as part of the traditional **za₃-mi₂** formula, which concludes many Sumerian hymns, giving the name of the deity to whom the text is addressed: “[Name of the deity] be praised!” The appearance of Inana's name in this line – while remarkable in contrast to its preceding absence – thus carries the weight of convention. The first time her name is mentioned is more unusual. In l. 12, the narrator says: **d⁴inana-bi me-en**, “You are their Inana!” This strange sentence can be interpreted in several ways. Foster (2016: 331) translates it as “you are their warrior goddess,” implying that the word “Inana” is here being used as a title; while Attinger (2019: 3) suggests that it may be a reference to the folk etymology of Inana's name as “mistress of heaven.”

One effect of the conspicuous absence of Inana's name is that the poem instead invokes her through a wealth of circumlocutions, of which some were

cited in the previous section: “my lady,” “great daughter of Suen,” “my righteous aurochs,” “my lady, beloved of An,” and so on. The poem is replete with such indirect forms of address, which, instead of stating Inana’s name, summon a particular facet of the goddess. In that sense, absences can be productive, as the withholding of Inana’s name allows for a proliferation of titles and epithets that magnify her might. One might also consider what the absence of names tells us about the relation between Enheduana and Inana. The absence of names finds a striking parallel in the Standard Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, where, as noted by Martin Worthington (2011), the main characters Gilgamesh and Enkidu consistently avoid speaking each other’s names, referring to one another instead as *ibri*, “My friend.” Other characters use their names, and they use the names of other characters – just as Enheduana is willing to use the names of any god except Inana. I have suggested elsewhere that the avoidance of names in *Gilgamesh* is used to create an intimate sphere of affection, where the difference between the two friends is gradually blurred (Helle 2021: 171–78). A similar argument can be made for the *Exaltation*, in which we also find a certain intimacy between Inana and Enheduana, culminating in the night-time ritual in the Holy Inn, where Enheduana composes the text to her goddess.¹⁰

It is possible that there was in cuneiform literature a convention by which the avoidance of names indicates intimacy, but the argument is uncertain even in *Gilgamesh*, and the parallel to the *Exaltation* is shakier still. Indeed, the avoidance of names could just as easily indicate the opposite: Enheduana’s humble unwillingness to use Inana’s name out of reverence and respect for the goddess. At present, the avoidance of names is hard to pin down. While it is a central aspect of how invocations are used in the *Exaltation*, more study is needed to understand its role. It is also possible that the omission would have been ambiguous already in antiquity, leaving the audience to surmise its meaning in individual ways. That ambiguity would in itself have given the invocations a particular force, the force of intrigue.

¹⁰ William Hallo observes that when Enheduana is referred to with the third-person pronoun in the epilogue, it creates an even closer link between the priestess and the as yet unnamed goddess: “the exaltation of Inanna implies at the same time the restoration of Enheduana, their two fates being so closely linked that in lines 146 f. it is hard to decide whether the narrator [. . .] is speaking of the one or the other” (Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 62).

3.4 Triangulated Address

A feature of invocations that is so obvious as to easily escape analysis is that they focus the attention of the audience on the deity being invoked: in this case, Inana. Accordingly, the previous three sections have paid special heed to the relation between Enheduana and Inana. However, this aspect of invocations is obvious only on the surface; diving deeper into their structure, one finds a more complicated relationship between speaker and addressee. In a poem such as the *Exaltation*, the invocation will always have a double direction: towards the deity being invoked, and towards the audience reading the poem or listening to its performance.

According to Culler (2015: 16), lyric poetry is characterized by a “complexity of the enunciative apparatus,” that is, a relation between the voices contained in the text that is anything but straightforward. In lyric poetry, it is often difficult to determine who is speaking to whom, and apostrophes brings these questions to a head. For example, when we come across Shelley’s apostrophe “O wild West Wind!”, whose voice are we hearing?¹¹ That of Shelley, his poetic persona, “the speaker,” or our own? And to whom are the words directed? The actual wind, the coming revolution for which the wind is a metaphor, or the reader?

Culler (2015: 186–88) notes that apostrophes in particular and lyric poetry in general often operate through what he calls a “triangulated address,” meaning that they invoke one addressee in order to be heard by another. Poets may speak to the stars, but they expect their words to reach their readers. In a fortuitous phrase coined by John Stuart Mill (1860: 95), poetry is not heard but *overheard*: in lyric poems, we come across a situation to which we are made obliquely privy, as the poets seem not to address their readers directly but speak to themselves or some other apostrophized entity (Culler 1977: 60). There is a striking example of triangulated address in the climactic section of the *Exaltation*, where Enheduana invokes Inana with a litany of invocations:

an-gin₇ mah-a-za he₂-zu-am₃
 ki-gin₇ daḡal-la-za he₂-zu-am₃
 ki-bal gul-gul-lu-za he₂-zu-am₃
 kur-ra gu₃ de₂-za he₂-zu-am₃
 saḡ ḡiṣ ra-ra-za he₂-zu-am₃
 ur-gin₇ ad₆ gu₇-za he₂-zu-am₃
 igi huš-a-za he₂-zu-am₃

11 These are the opening words of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind.”

igi huš-bi IL₂-IL₂-i-za he₂-zu-am₃
 igi gun₃-gun₃-na-za he₂-zu-am₃
 uru₁₆-na nu-še-ga-za he₂-zu-am₃
 u₃-ma gub-gub-bu-za he₂-zu-am₃

Let it be known that you are tall as the skies,
 let it be known that you are huge as the earth,
 let it be known that you destroy the rebel lands,
 let it be known that you roar at the enemy,
 let it be known that you crush skulls,
 let it be known that you eat corpses like a lion,
 let it be known that your eyes are terrifying,
 let it be known that you glance is terrifying,
 let it be known that your eyes flash and flicker,
 let it be known that you are stubborn and unruly,
 let it be known that you always stand triumphant! (ll. 123–132)

The passage lists Inana's glorious traits and asks that the goddess should "let them be known" (**he₂-zu-am₃**). This passage purports to address Inana, not the audience, but if that is so, the demand seems to be directed at the wrong recipient, since it asks of Inana that people who are not Inana, including the audience, should recognize her might. Culler shows that this kind of misdirection is typical of lyric poetry. Enheduana puts the triangulated address to great effect: the listener who hears the invocation and so comes to know that Inana crushes skulls is effectively recruited into the fulfillment of the narrator's demand. The repetitious, charm-like nature of the passage works to bring the message home, inculcating the might of Inana into the mind of the audience. When Enheduana asks Inana to let her power be known, the unwitting listener is simultaneously fulfilling that request for her: now we know.

Part of the force of invocations thus comes from the split structure they impart to the poem: their simultaneous address to a deity and – if they appear in a literary text that will be heard or read by others – to a larger audience as well. Just as invocations carry a tension between the absence and presence of the deity being invoked, they also carry a tension between the two audiences they hope to reach. Indeed, the double nature of invocations is the premise that underlies my previous analysis of the *Exaltation's* division into sections. When Enheduana invokes Inana, she is also relaying crucial information to the audience about the shifts and flows of the text: the narrator addresses the goddess with one eye turned to the audience, guiding them through the poem.

4 Conclusion

As I hope to have shown, invocations can play a crucial role in ancient literature. While they may seem at first to be the most marginal elements of the text – brief exclamations that introduce the main characters before the poem moves on to meatier matters – they can change the entire thrust and structure of a composition. They can mark key shifts in the narrative and imbue the poem with dynamism and entrancing tensions; they can capture and redirect the attention of the audience; they can intrigue and compel. Invocations may not advance the plot or give us new information about the subject matter, but that is simply because they are not a description of an event: they are themselves a poetic event, reaching out from the world of the text to summon a divine presence, while also lighting up a path through the poem.

Bibliography

- Abusch, Tzvi. The Form and Meaning of a Babylonian Prayer to Marduk. *JAOS* 103: 3–15.
- Alster, Bendt. 1972. *Dumuzi's Dream: Aspects of Oral Poetry in a Sumerian Myth*. Mesopotamia 1. Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag.
- Attinger, Pascal. 2019. Innana B (Ninmešara) (4.7.2). Available online at: <https://zenodo.org/record/2667768#.XhScnRdKgWo>
- Bahrani, Zainab. 2003. *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Black, Jeremy. 1992. Some Structural Features of Sumerian Narrative Poetry. Pp. 71–101 in *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?*, ed. Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L.J. Vanstiphout. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Black, Jeremy, Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson, and Gábor Zólyomi. 2004. *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Civil, Miguel. 1980. Les limites de l'information textuelle. Pp. 225–32 in *L'archéologie de l'Iraq: Du début de l'époque néolithique à 333 avant notre ère*, ed. Marie-Thérèse Barrelet. Colloques internationaux du CNRS 580. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Culler, Jonathan. 1997. Apostrophe. *Diacritics* 7: 59–69.
- Culler, Jonathan. 2015. *Theory of the Lyric*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Delnero, Paul. 2006. Variation in Sumerian Literary Compositions: A Case Study Based on the Decad. Unpublished dissertation. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Delnero, Paul. 2015. Texts and Performance: The Materiality and Function of the Sumerian Liturgical Corpus. Pp. 87–118 in *Texts and Contexts: The Circulation and Transmission of Cuneiform Texts in Social Space*, ed. Paul Delnero and Jacob Lauinger. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 9. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Foster, Benjamin R. 2016. *The Age of Agade: Inventing Empire in Ancient Mesopotamia*. London: Routledge.

- Glassner, Jean-Jacques. 2009. En-hedu-ana, une femme auteure en pays de Sumer, au III^e millénaire? *Topoi Suppléments* 10: 219–31.
- Hallo, William W. and J.J.A van Dijk. 1968. *The Exaltation of Inanna*. YNER 3. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Helle, Sophus. 2020. The Birth of the Author: Co-Creating Authorship in Enheduana's *Exaltation*. *Orbis Litterarum* 75: 55–72.
- Helle, Sophus. 2021. *Gilgamesh: A New Translation of the Ancient Epic*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Helle, Sophus. Forthcoming. *Enheduana: The Complete Poems of the World's First Author*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Jacobsen, Thorkild. 1987. The Graven Image. Pp. 15–32 in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.
- Lenzi, Alan. 2010. Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual. *JBL* 129: 303–15.
- Lenzi, Alan (ed.). 2011. *Reading Akkadian Prayers & Hymns: An Introduction*. Ancient Near East Monograph 3. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.
- Lion, Brigitte. 2011. Literacy and Gender. Pp. 90–112 in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mayer, Werner. 1976. *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen "Gebetsbeschwörungen"*. StPohl SM 5. Rome: Biblical Institute Press.
- Michalowski, Piotr. 1996. Sailing to Babylon, Reading the Dark Side of the Moon. Pp. 177–93 in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century: The William Foxwell Albright Centennial Conference*, ed. Jerrold S. Cooper and Glenn M. Schwartz. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Mill, John Stuart. 1860. Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties. *The Crayon* 7: 93–97.
- Phillips, Monica L. 2018. "O House!" The Invocation of Temple Names in the Collection of Sumerian Temple Hymns. Paper read at the 64th RAI, Innsbruck.
- Phillips, Monica. Forthcoming. *Uniting Heaven and Earth: The Collection of Sumerian Temple Hymns*. Unpublished dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Radner, Karen. 2005. *Die Macht des Namens: Altorientalische Strategien zur Selbsterhaltung*. Santag 8. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Schwemer, Daniel. 2014. "Form Follows Function"? Rhetoric and Poetic Language in First Millennium Akkadian Incantations. *WO* 44: 263–88.
- Vanstiphout, Herman L.J. 1993. "Verse Language" in Standard Sumerian Literature. Pp. 305–29 in *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor and Wilfred G.E. Watson. AOAT 42. Neukirchen: Butzon & Bercker.
- Veldhuis, Niek. 1999. The Poetry of Magic. Pp. 35–48 in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives*, ed. Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn. AMD 1. Groningen: Styx.
- Vogelzang, Marianna E., and Herman L.J. Vanstiphout (eds.). 1992. *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?* Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Walker, Christopher, and Dick Michael. *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mis Pi Ritual*. State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts 1. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
- Wasserman, Nathan. 2021. Lists and Chains: Enumeration in Akkadian Literary Texts. Pp. 57–80 in *Lists and Catalogues in Ancient Literature and Beyond: Towards a Poetics of*

- Enumeration*, ed. Rebecca Lämmle, Cédric Scheidegger Lämmle, and Katharina Wesselmann. Trends in Classics Supplementary Volumes 107. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Worthington, Martin. On Names and Artistic Unity in the Standard Version of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21: 403–20.
- Zgoll, Annette. 1997. *Der Rechtsfall der En-ĥedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*. AOAT 246. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.
- Zgoll, Annette. 2003. Audienz: Ein Modell zum Verständnis mesopotamischer Handerhebungsrituale. Mit einer Deutung der Novelle vom *Armen Mann von Nippur*. *BagM* 34: 181–203.
- Zgoll, Annette. 2004. *Die Kunst des Betens: Form und Funktion, Theologie und Psychagogik in babylonisch-assyrischen Handerhebungsgebeten zu Ishtar*. AOAT 308. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.