Dramatis personae

An acute accent marks the vowel of a stressed syllable. Where such a vowel falls in an open syllable it will often be long (e.g., Humbaba). In some names the position of the stress is conjectural.

Gilgamesh, king of the city-state of Uruk
Ninsun, a goddess, his mother
Enkidu, his friend and companion
Shamhat, a prostitute of Uruk
Shamash, the Sun God
Humbaba, the guardian of the Forest of Cedar
Ishtar, the principal goddess of Uruk
Shiduri, a minor goddess of wisdom
Ur-shanabi, the ferryman of Uta-napishti
Uta-napishti, survivor of the Flood

A comprehensive list of the proper nouns that occur in the texts translated in this book is given on pp. 222ff.

The Standard Version of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic:
‘He who saw the Deep’

Tablet I. The Coming of Enkidu

Prologue and paean. King Gilgamesh tyrannizes the people of Uruk, who complain to the gods. To divert his superhuman energies the gods create his counterpart, the wild man Enkidu, who is brought up by the animals of the wild. Enkidu is spotted by a trapper, who lures him away from the herd with a prostitute. The prostitute shows him her arts and proposes to take him to Uruk, where Gilgamesh has been seeing him in dreams.

He who saw the Deep, the country’s foundation,
[who] knew . . . , was wise in all matters!

[He] . . . everywhere . . .
[He] . . . everywhere . . .
[who] knew . . . , was wise in all matters!
[He] . . . everywhere . . .
[He] . . . everywhere . . .

He who saw the Deep, the country’s foundation,
[who] knew . . . , was wise in all matters!

He came a far road, was weary, found peace,
and set all his labours on a tablet of stone.

He built the rampart of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
of holy Eanna, the sacred storehouse.

See its wall like a strand of wool,
view its parapet that none could copy!

Take the stairway of a bygone era,
draw near to Eanna, seat of Ishtar the goddess,
that no later king could ever copy!
Climb Uruk’s wall and walk back and forth!
Survey its foundations, examine the brickwork!
Were its bricks not fired in an oven?
Did the Seven Sages not lay its foundations?

[A square mile is] city, [a square mile] date-grove, a square mile is
clay-pit, half a square mile the temple of Ishtar;
[three square miles] and a half is Uruk’s expanse.

[See] the tablet-box of cedar,
(release) its clasp of bronze!
[Lift] the lid of its secret,
[pick] up the tablet of lapis lazuli and read out
the travails of Gilgamesh, all that he went through.

Surpassing all other kings, heroic in stature,
brave scion of Uruk, wild bull on the rampage!

Going at the fore he was the vanguard,
going at the rear, one his comrades could trust!

A mighty bank, protecting his warriors,
a violent flood-wave, smashing a stone wall!
Wild bull of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh, the perfect in strength,
suckling of the august Wild Cow, the goddess Ninsun!

Gilgamesh the tall, magnificent and terrible,
who opened passes in the mountains,
who dug wells on the slopes of the uplands,
and crossed the ocean, the wide sea to the sunrise;

who scoured the world ever searching for life,
and reached through sheer force Uta-napishti the Distant;
who restored the cult-centres destroyed by the Deluge,
and set in place for the people the rites of the cosmos.

Who is there can rival his kingly standing,
and say like Gilgamesh, ‘It is I am the king’?
Gilgamesh was his name from the day he was born,
two-thirds of him god and one third human.

It was the Lady of the Gods drew the form of his figure,
while his build was perfected by divine Nudimmud.

A triple cubit was his foot, half a rod his leg.
Six cubits was his stride,
... cubits the front part of his...

His cheeks were bearded like those of . . .,
the hair of his head grew thickly [as barley.]
When he grew tall his beauty was consummate,
by earthly standards he was most handsome.

In Uruk-the-Sheepfold he walks [back and forth,]
like a wild bull lording it, head held aloft.
He has no equal when his weapons are brandished,
his companions are kept on their feet by his contests.

The young men of Uruk he harries without warrant,
Gilgamesh lets no son go free to his father.
By day and by night his tyranny grows harsher,
Gilgamesh, [the guide of the teeming people!]

It is he who is shepherd of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
[but Gilgamesh] lets no [daughter go free to her] mother.
[The women voiced] their [troubles to the goddesses,]
[they brought their] complaint before [them:]
'[Though powerful, pre-eminent,] expert [and mighty,]
Gilgamesh lets [no] girl go free to [her bridegroom.]

The warrior's daughter, the young man's bride,
to their complaint the goddesses paid heed.

The gods of heaven, the lords of initiative,
[to the god Anu they spoke]...:
'A savage wild bull you have bred in Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
he has no equal when his weapons are brandished.

'His companions are kept on their feet by his contests,
[the young men of Uruk] he harasses without warrant.
Gilgamesh lets no son go free to his father,
by day and by [night his tyranny grows] harsher.

'Yet he is the shepherd of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
Gilgamesh, [the guide of the] teeming [people.]
Though he is their shepherd and their [protector,]
powerful, pre-eminent, expert [and mighty,]
Gilgamesh lets no girl go free to her bride[groom.]'

The warrior's daughter, the young man's bride:
to their complaint the god [Anu] paid heed.

The stanza which gives Anu's reaction has been dropped in the late edition of
the epic, but by good fortune it is preserved as a short extract from an older
version of the text, which was written by a student scribe on an exercise tablet
found in the city of Nippur:

'[Let] them summon [Aruru,] the great one,
[she it was created them,] mankind so numerous:
[let her create the equal of Gilgamesh,] one mighty in strength,
[and let] him vie [with him,] so Uruk may be rested!

The text of Tablet I resumes:

They summoned Aruru, the great one:
'You, Aruru, created [mankind:]
now fashion what Anu has thought of!'
'Over the hills he [roams all day,]
[always] with the herd [he grazes on grasses,]
[always] his tracks [are found] by the water-hole,
[I am afraid and] I dare not approach him.

'[He fills in the] pits that I [myself] dig,
[he pulls up] the snares that I lay.
[He sets free from my grasp] all the beasts of the field,
[he stops] me doing the work of the wild.'

[His father opened his mouth to] speak, saying to the hunter:
'[^My son, in the city of] Uruk [go, seek out] Gilgamesh! ......... in his presence,
his strength is as mighty [as a rock from the sky.]

'[Take the road,] set your face [toward Uruk,]
[do not rely on] the strength of a man!
[Go, my son, and] fetch [Shamhat the harlot,]
[her allure is a match] for even the mighty!

'[When the herd comes] down [to] the water-hole,
[she should strip off] her [raiment to reveal] her charms.
[He will] see her, and will approach her,
[his herd will spurn him, though he grew up amongst it.]

[Pay]ning heed [to the advice of his father,]
the hunter went off, [set out on the journey.]
He took the road, set [his face] toward Uruk,
before Gilgamesh the king [he spoke these words:]

'There was a man [came by the water-hole,]
mightiest in the land, strength [he possesses,]
his strength] is as mighty as a rock from the sky.

'Over the hills he roams all [day,]
always with the herd [he grazes on grasses,]
always his tracks [are found] by the water-hole,
I am afraid and I dare not approach [him.]
Shamhat unfastened the cloth of her loins, 
she bared her sex and he took in her charms. She did not recoil, she took in his scent: 
she spread her clothing and he lay upon her.

She did for the man the work of a woman, 
his passion caressed and embraced her.

For six days and seven nights Enkidu was erect, as he coupled with Shamhat.

When with her delights he was fully sated, 
he turned his gaze to his herd. The gazelles saw Enkidu, they started to run, the beasts of the field shied away from his presence.

Enkidu had defiled his body so pure, 
his legs stood still, though his herd was in motion. Enkidu was weakened, could not run as before, but now he had reason, and wide understanding.

He came back and sat at the feet of the harlot, watching the harlot, observing her features. Then to the harlot’s words he listened intently, [as Shamhat] talked to him, to Enkidu:

‘You are handsome, Enkidu, you are just like a god! Why with the beasts do you wander the wild? Come, I will take you to Uruk-the-Sheepfold, to the sacred temple, home of Anu and Ishtar, where Gilgamesh is perfect in strength, like a wild bull lording it over the menfolk.’

So she spoke to him and her word found favour, he knew by instinct, he should seek a friend.

Said Enkidu to her, to the harlot:
‘Come, Shamhat, take me along to the sacred temple, holy home of Anu and Ishtar, where Gilgamesh is perfect in strength, like a wild bull lording it over the menfolk.

‘I will challenge him, for [my strength] is mighty, I will vaunt myself in Uruk, saying “I am the mightiest!” [There] I shall change the way things are ordered: [one] born in the wild is mighty, strength he possesses.’

Shamhat:

‘Let [the people] see your face, ....... that exists I know indeed. Go, Enkidu, to Uruk-the-Sheepfold, where young men are girt with waistbands!

‘Every day [in Uruk] there is a festival, the drums there rap out the beat. And there are harlots, most comely of figure, graced with charm and full of delights. 

‘Even the aged they rouse from their beds! O Enkidu, [as yet so] ignorant of life, I will show you Gilgamesh, a man happy and carefree, look at him, regard his features!

‘He is fair in manhood, dignified in bearing, graced with charm is his whole person. He has a strength more mighty than yours, unsleeping he is by day and by night.

‘O Enkidu, cast aside your sinful thoughts! Gilgamesh it is whom divine Shamash loves. The gods Anu, Enlil and Ea have broadened his wisdom.
Before you even came from the uplands,
Gilgamesh in Uruk was seeing you in dreams:
Gilgamesh rose to relate a dream, saying to his mother:

"O mother, this is the dream I had in the night –

"The stars of the heavens appeared above me,
like a rock from the sky one fell down before me.
I lifted it up, but it weighed too much for me,
I tried to roll it, but I could not dislodge it.

"The land of Uruk was standing around it,
[the land was gathered] about it.
A crowd [was milling about] before it,
[the menfolk were] thronging around it.

"[Like a babe-in-arms they were kissing its feet,
like a wife [I loved it,] caressed and embraced it.
[I lifted it up,] set it down at your feet,
[and you, O mother, you] made it my equal."

[The mother of Gilgamesh] was clever and wise,
well versed in everything, she said to her son –
[Wild-Cow] Ninsun was clever and wise,
well versed in everything, she said to Gilgamesh:

"My son, the axe you saw is a friend,
like a wife you'll love him, caress and embrace him,
and I, Ninsun, I shall make him your equal.
A mighty comrade will come to you, and be his friend's saviour,
mightiest in the land, strength he possesses,
his strength is as mighty as a rock from the sky."

"Said Gilgamesh to her, to his mother,
"May it befall me, O mother, by Counsellor Enlil's
command!
Let me acquire a friend to counsel me,
a friend to counsel me I will acquire!"

[So did Gilgamesh] see his dreams.'
[After] Shamhat had told Enkidu the dreams of Gilgamesh,
the two of them together [began making] love.
Tablet II. The Taming of Enkidu

The prostitute takes Enkidu to a shepherds’ camp, where he is instructed in the ways of men and becomes the shepherds’ watchman. A passing stranger tells him how in Uruk Gilgamesh exercises droit de seigneur at wedding ceremonies. Enkidu, shocked by this practice, enters Uruk and interrupts the proceedings. Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight until Enkidu accepts Gilgamesh’s supremacy, whereupon the pair become firm friends. In search of fame and glory Gilgamesh proposes an expedition to the Forest of Cedar, ignoring Enkidu’s warning of the dangers. They kit themselves out with weapons. Gilgamesh announces his plans to the assembly of Uruk. The elders try to dissuade him.

[Enkidu] was sitting before her, ...

A lacuna follows the opening line of Tablet II, and when the text resumes the lines are still not fully recovered. The big Old Babylonian Pennsylvania tablet (P) supplies a better-preserved account, though one that partly overlaps with Tablet I:

While the two of them together were making love, he forgot the wild where he was born.

For seven days and seven nights Enkidu was erect and coupled with *Shamhat.

The harlot opened her mouth, saying to Enkidu:

‘As I look at you, Enkidu, you are like a god, why with the beasts do you wander the wild?

‘Come, I will lead you to Uruk-the-Town-Square, to the sacred temple, the home of Anu!

Enkidu, arise, let me take you to the temple Eanna, the home of Anu,

‘where [men] are engaged in labours of skill, you, too, like a man, will find a place for yourself.’

Her words he heard, her speech found favour: the counsel of a woman struck home in his heart. She stripped and clothed him in part of her garment, the other part she put on herself.

The text of Tablet II resumes:

By the hand she took him, like a god [she led him,] to the shepherds’ camp, the site of the sheep-pen. The band of shepherds was gathered around him, talking about him among themselves:

‘This fellow – how like in build he is to Gilgamesh, tall in stature, proud as a battlement. For sure it’s Enkidu, born in the uplands, his strength is as mighty as a rock from the sky.’

Bread they set before him, ale they set before him. Enkidu ate not the bread, but looked askance.

Here Tablet II becomes fragmentary again, and the episode is best taken from the Old Babylonian Pennsylvania tablet:
How to eat bread Enkidu knew not, how to drink ale he had never been shown.

The harlot opened her mouth, saying to Enkidu:

'Eat the bread, Enkidu, essential to life, drink the ale, the lot of the land!'

Enkidu ate the bread until he was sated, he drank the ale, a full seven goblets. His mood became free, he started to sing, his heart grew merry, his face lit up.

The barber groomed his body so hairy, anointed with oil he turned into a man. He put on a garment, became like a warrior, he took up his weapon to do battle with lions.

The text of Tablet II resumes again:

[When at night the shepherds lay sleeping,]
[he struck] down wolves, he [chased off lions.]

Sleeping lay the senior shepherds, their shepherd boy Enkidu, a [man wide] awake.

[A certain] fellow had [been invited] to a wedding, [to Uruk-the-Sheepfold [he was going] for the [banquet.]

Here another lacuna intervenes in Tablet II, which the Old Babylonian tablet again helps to fill:

Enkidu was having his pleasure with *Shamhat.

He lifted his eyes, caught sight of the man, and thus he spoke to the harlot:

'*Shamhat, bring the man over: why he came here, let me learn his reason.'

The harlot hailed the man, went up to him, spoke to him:

'Where do you hurry to, fellow? What is your journey so toilsome?'

The fellow opened his mouth, saying to Enkidu:

'I was invited to a wedding banquet, it is the lot of the people to contract a marriage. I shall load the ceremonial table with tempting foods for the wedding feast.

'For the king of Uruk-the-Town-Square, the veil will be parted for the one who picks first; for Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk-the-Town-Square, the veil will be parted for the one who picks first.

'He will couple with the wife-to-be, he first of all, the bridegroom after.

By divine consent it is so ordained: when his navel-cord was cut, for him she was destined.'

At the fellow's words his face paled in anger.

* * *

Off goes Enkidu, with *Shamhat following.

He entered the city of Uruk-the-Town-Square, and a crowd gathered around. He came to a halt in the street of Uruk-the-Town-Square, all gathered about, the people discussed him:

'In build he is the image of Gilgamesh, but shorter in stature, and bigger of bone. For [sure it's the one who] was born in the uplands, animals' milk is what he was suckled on.'

In Uruk they held regular festivals of sacrifice, young men made merry, set up a champion: for the fellow whose features were fair, for Gilgamesh, like a god, was set up a rival.
For the goddess of weddings the bed was laid out, Gilgamesh met with the maiden by night. Forward came (Enkidu), he stood in the street, blocking the path of Gilgamesh.

The text of Tablet II becomes legible once more:

The land of Uruk was standing [around him], the land was gathered [about him].

A crowd was milling about before [him], the menfolk were thronging [around him].

Like a babe-in-arms they were [kissing his feet], already the fellow . . . .

For the goddess of weddings was ready the bed, for Gilgamesh, like a god, was set up a substitute.

Enkidu with his foot blocked the door of the wedding house, not allowing Gilgamesh to enter. They seized each other at the door of the wedding house, in the street they joined combat, in the Square of the Land.

The door-jambs shook, the wall did shudder, [in the street Gilgamesh and Enkidu joined combat, in the Square of the Land.]

[The door-jambs shook, the wall did shudder.]

Another lacuna intervenes, again partly to be filled by the Old Babylonian Pennsylvania tablet:

Gilgamesh knelt, one foot on the ground, his anger subsided, he broke off from the fight. After he broke off from the fight, said Enkidu to him, to Gilgamesh:

'As one unique your mother bore you, the wild cow of the fold, the goddess Ninsun! High over warriors you are exalted, to be king of the people Enlil made it your destiny!'
They took hold of each other and ......, they [linked] their hands like ......

Gilgamesh .............., to Enkidu he spoke a word, [saying:]

'Why, my friend, [did your eyes] brim [with tears,] your arms fall limp, [your strength ebb away?]'

Said Enkidu to him, [to Gilgamesh:] 'My friend, my heart is aggrieved ......

'Through sobbing [my legs do] tremble, terror has entered my heart.'

The Old Babylonian Yale tablet fills the gap in the standard version:

Gilgamesh opened his mouth, saying to Enkidu:

'I will climb, my friend, [the forest's] slopes.'

The text of Tablet II resumes:

Enkidu [opened his] mouth [to speak, saying to Gilgamesh:] ['My friend], how can we [go to the home of Humbaba?]

So to keep safe the cedars, Enlil made it his lot to terrify men.

'That is a journey [which must not be made,] [that is a man who must not be looked on.]

He who guards the [Forest of Cedar, his reach is wide, Humbaba, his voice is the Deluge.

'His speech is fire, his breath is death, he hears the forest murmur at sixty leagues' distance. Who is there would venture into his forest? Adad ranks first, and Humbaba second.

'So to keep safe the cedars, Enlil made it his lot to terrify men; if you penetrate his forest you are seized by the tremors.'

Gilgamesh opened his mouth to speak, saying [to Enkidu:]

'Why, my friend, do you speak like a weakling? With your spineless words you [make me) despondent.

'As for man, [his days] are numbered, whatever he may do, it is but wind, ... exists not for me ......

'You were born and grew up [in the wild:] even lions were afraid of you, [you experienced] all. Grown men fled away [from your presence,] your heart is tried and [tested in] combat.
Come, my friend, [let us hie] to the forge!

A short lacuna follows. It can be filled from the Old Babylonian Yale tablet:

'[Let] them cast [us hatchets] in our presence!'  

They took each other by the hand and hied to the forge, where the smiths were sitting in consultation.

Great hatchets they cast, and axes weighing three talents apiece.

Great daggers they cast:

two talents apiece were the blades,
one half of a talent the crests of their handles,
half a talent apiece the daggers' gold mountings.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu bore ten talents each.

He bolted the sevenfold gates of Uruk, he convened [the assembly,] the crowd gathered round.
... in the street of Uruk-the-Town-Square,

Gilgamesh [seated himself on] his throne.

[In the street of Uruk]-the-Town-Square, [the crowd was] sitting before him.

[Thus Gilgamesh] spoke [to the elders of Uruk]-the-Town-Square:

'[Hear me, O elders of Uruk-the-Town-Square!  
[I would tread the path to ferocious *Humbaba,]  
I would see the god of whom men talk,  
whose name the lands do constantly repeat.

'I will conquer him in the Forest of Cedar:  
let the land learn Uruk's offshoot is mighty!  
Let me start out, I will cut down the cedar,  
I will establish for ever a name eternal!]

The text of Tablet II resumes:

[Then Gilgamesh spoke]  
[to the young men of Uruk-the-Sheepfold:]

'Hear me, O young men [of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,]  
O young men of Uruk, who understand [combat]  
Bold as I am I shall tread the distant path [to the home of Humbaba,]  
I shall face a battle I know not.

'[I shall ride] a road [I know not:]  
give me your blessing as I go on my journey,  
[so I may see again] your faces [in safety,]  
and return [glad at heart] through Uruk's gate!

'On my return [I will celebrate] New Year [twice over,]  
I will celebrate the festival twice in the year.  
Let the festival take place, the merriment begin,  
let the drums resound before [Wild-Cow] Ninsun!'

Enkidu [offered] counsel to the elders, and the young men of Uruk, who understood combat:

'Tell him not to go to the Forest of Cedar!  
That is a journey which must not be made,  
that is a man [who must not be] looked on.  
He who guards the Forest of Cedar, his [reach] is wide.

'This Humbaba, [his voice is the Deluge,]  
his speech is fire,] his breath is death!  
[He hears] the forest murmur [at sixty leagues' distance:]  
[who is there would venture] into his forest?

'[Adad ranks first, and Humbaba] second:  
[who is there would oppose him] among the Igigi?  
[So to keep safe the cedars,]  
Enlil made it his lot to terrify men;  
if you penetrate his forest you are seized by the tremors.'
The senior advisers rose,  
good counsel they offered Gilgamesh:  
‘You are young, Gilgamesh, borne along by emotion,  
all that you talk of you don’t understand.’  
II 290

‘This Humbaba, his voice is the Deluge,  
his speech is fire, his breath is death!  
He hears the forest murmur at sixty leagues’ distance:  
who is there would venture into his forest?’  
II 295

‘Adad ranks first, and Humbaba second:  
who is there would oppose him among the Igigi?  
So to keep safe the cedars,  
Enlil made it his lot to terrify men.’

Gilgamesh heard the words of the senior advisers,  
he looked with a [laugh at] Enkidu . . .:  
[‘Now, my friend, how frightened I am!]  
[In fear of him shall I change my mind?]  
II 300

The rest of Tablet II, perhaps twenty lines containing Gilgamesh’s reply to his counsellors, is lost.
Gilgamesh smote him in the neck, his friend Enkidu gave encouragement. He fell, the ravines did run with his blood. "Humbaba the guardian he smote to the ground, for two leagues afar... With him he slew... He slew the ogre, the forest's guardian, Ish at whose yell were sundered the peaks of Sirion and Lebanon, ... all the hillsides did tremble. He slew the ogre, the cedar's guardian, the broken... As soon as he had slain all seven (of the auras), the war-net of two talents' weight, and the dirk of eight, a load of ten talents he took up, he went down to trample the forest. He discovered the secret abode of the gods, Gilgamesh felling the trees, Enkidu choosing the timber.

After a gap the text of Tablet V resumes: Enkidu opened his mouth to speak, saying to Gilgamesh: 'My friend, we have felled a lofty cedar, whose top thrust up to the sky. I will make a door, six rods in height, two rods in breadth, one cubit in thickness, whose pole and pivots, top and bottom, will be all of a piece.' At this point Tablet V is badly damaged. A better-preserved version of the episode is known from an Old Babylonian tablet of unknown provenance, now in Baghdad: The Wild-Born knew how to give counsel, he said to his friend: 'By your strength alone you slew the guardian, what can bring you dishonour? Lay low the Forest of Cedar! Seek out for me a lofty cedar, whose crown is high as the heavens! I will make a door of a reed-lenth's breadth, let it not have a pivot, let it travel in the door-jamb. Its side will be a cubit, a reed-lenth its breadth, let no stranger draw near it, let a god have love for it. To the house of Enlil the Euphrates shall bear it, let the folk of Nippur rejoice over it! Let the god Enlil delight in it!'

The text of Tablet V resumes for the final three lines: They bound together a raft, they laid [the cedar on it. Enkidu was helmsman... , and Gilgamesh [carried] the head of Humbaba.

Tablet VI. Ishtar and the Bull of Heaven

Back in Uruk Gilgamesh's beauty provokes the desire of the goddess Ishtar and she proposes to him. Gilgamesh scorns her, reminding her of the fates suffered by her many former conquests. Ishtar is enraged and rushes up to heaven. She persuades Anu, her father, to give her the fiery Bull of Heaven (the constellation Taurus) so that she can punish Gilgamesh with death. The Bull of Heaven causes havoc in Uruk, but Gilgamesh and Enkidu discover its weak spot and kill it. They insult Ishtar further and return to the palace in triumph to celebrate their victory.
He washed his matted hair, he cleaned his equipment,
he shook his hair down over his back.
Casting aside his dirty gear he clad himself in clean,
wrapped cloaks round him, tied with a sash.
Then did Gilgamesh put on his crown.

On the beauty of Gilgamesh Lady Ishtar looked with longing:
'Come, Gilgamesh, be you my bridegroom!
Grant me your fruits, O grant me!
Be you my husband and I your wife!'
‘You loved Ishullanu, your father’s gardener, who used to bring you dates in a basket, daily making your table gleam. You eyed him up and went to meet him:

“O my Ishullanu, let us taste your vigour: Put out your ‘hand’ and stroke my quim!”

But Ishullanu said to you:

“Me! What do you want of me? Did my mother not bake? Have I not eaten, that now I should eat the bread of slander and insults? Should I let only rushes cover me in winter?”

‘When you heard what [he’d] said, you struck him and turned him into a dwarf. You sat him down in the midst of his labours, he cannot go up ..., he cannot go down .... Must you love me also and [deal with me] likewise?’

The goddess Ishtar [heard] these words, she [went up] to heaven in a furious rage. [Weeping] she went to Anu, her father, before Antu, her mother, her tears did flow:

‘O father, again and again does Gilgamesh scorn me, telling a tale of foulest slander, slander about me and insults too.’

Anu opened his mouth to speak, saying to the Lady Ishtar:

‘Ah, but was it not you who provoked King Gilgamesh, so he told a tale of foulest slander, slander about you and insults too?’

Ishtar opened her mouth to speak, saying to her father, Anu:

‘Father, give me, please, the Bull of Heaven, so in his dwelling I may slay Gilgamesh!’

‘If you do not give me the Bull of Heaven, I shall smash [the gates of the Netherworld, right down] to its dwelling, to the world below I shall grant [manumission], I shall bring up the dead to consume the living, I shall make the dead outnumber the living.’

Anu opened his mouth to speak, saying to the Lady Ishtar:

‘If you want from me the Bull of Heaven, let the widow of Uruk gather seven years’ chaff, [and the farmer of Uruk] grow seven years’ hay.’

[Ishtar opened her mouth] to speak, [saying to] her father, Anu:

‘ ......... already I stored, ........ already I grew.

‘The widow [of Uruk has] gathered [seven] years’ chaff, the farmer [of Uruk has grown seven years’] hay. With the wrath of the Bull I shall [have vengeance.]’

Anu heard this speech of Ishtar, the Bull of Heaven’s nose-rope he placed in her hands.

[Down came] Ishtar, leading it onward: when it reached the land of Uruk, it dried up the woods, the reed-beds and marshes, down it went to the river, lowered the level by seven full cubits.

As the Bull of Heaven snorted a pit opened up, one hundred men of Uruk fell down it.

The second time it snorted a pit opened up, two hundred men of Uruk fell down it.

The third time it snorted a pit opened up, and Enkidu fell in as far as his waist. Enkidu sprang up and seized the Bull by the horns. In his face the Bull spat slaver, with the tuft of its tail .........
Enkidu opened his mouth [to speak,]
saying to Gilgamesh, [his friend:]
'My friend, we vaunted ourselves [in our] city:
how shall we answer the thronging people?

'My friend, I have tested the might of the Bull . . . ,
so learning [its] strength, [and knowing its] purpose.
Let me [test] again the might of the Bull,
I [shall get myself] behind [the Bull of Heaven,]
I will seize [it by the tuft of the tail.]

'I will set [my foot on the back of] its leg,
in . . . . . . . . . it.
Then [you] like a [butcher, brave and] skilful,
between the yoke of the horns and the slaughter-spot thrust in
your knife!'

Enkidu rushed round to the rear of the Bull,
he seized it by the tuft of the tail.
[He set] his foot on [the back of] its leg,
[in] . . . . . . . . it.

Then Gilgamesh like a butcher, brave and skilful,
between the yoke of the horns and the slaughter-spot [he thrust
in] his knife.

After they had slain the Bull of Heaven,
they bore its heart aloft and set it before Shamash.
Stepping back they fell prostrate in the presence of the Sun God,
then both of them together sat down.

Ishtar went up on the wall of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
hopping and stamping, she wailed in woe:
'Alas! Gilgamesh, who mocked me, has killed the Bull of Heaven.'

Enkidu heard these words of Ishtar,
and tearing a haunch off the Bull he hurled it towards her.
'Had I caught you too, I'd have treated you likewise,
I'd have draped your arms in its guts!'
They washed their hands in the river Euphrates, 
took each other by the hand and in they came. 
As they drove along the streets of Uruk, 
the people were gathered to gaze [on them.]

Gilgamesh spoke a word to the serving girls of [his palace:]
‘Who is the finest among men? 
Who the most glorious of fellows?’
‘Gilgamesh is the finest among men! 
[Gilgamesh the most] glorious of fellows!’

Gilgamesh made merry in his palace.