

# INITIATION AND THE PRIMAL WOMAN IN GILGAMESH AND GENESIS 2-3

JOHN A. BAILEY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN, 48108

THE most obvious contact between the Gilgamesh epic and the J source in Genesis, which proves that the J writer was familiar with the epic, is the account of the primeval flood. Yet there are a number of other elements in Gilgamesh and J which are worth comparing. It is my purpose in this paper to describe and compare the initiation of Enkidu and the rôle of the harlot in Gilgamesh with the initiation of the man and the rôle of the woman in Gen 2-3.<sup>1</sup>

In the epic the harlot is introduced to serve a specific purpose. Enkidu, the creature of nature created by Aruru to serve as a counterpoise to Gilgamesh, is himself causing trouble. Reminiscent a bit of Orpheus and of Kipling's Mowgli, he lives in harmony with the beasts, neither attacked nor attacking, sharing their food and drinking from their watering places (I.ii.35-41).<sup>2</sup> The only violence in his life is directed against the hunter who comes to set traps for his companions the animals. He tears up the traps, and scares the hunter away; when the hunter turns to his father for help, his father advises him to fetch from the city of Uruk a harlot who, seducing Enkidu, will cause him to abandon his wild companions for men, and henceforth cease to oppose the hunter. And so it happens. We have two accounts of the encounter of the harlot and Enkidu, the Old Babylonian (II.ii.3-iii.36), dating from about 1800, and the Assyrian (I.iv.6-vi.30), to be dated about six or seven centuries later.<sup>3</sup> A comparison of the two affords one of the clearest

<sup>1</sup> G. Lambert, "Le drame du jardin d'Eden," *NouvRevThéol*, 76 (1954), p. 1050, makes a strong case for the fact that J in Gen 2 f. spoke not of Adam, but of "the man," and that it was only the masoretic scribes who subtracted the article in 2 20, 3 17, and 3 21, thereby introducing the proper name; in accord with this reasoning the Jerusalem Bible translates "the man" throughout Gen 2 f.

<sup>2</sup> All references to, and quotations from, the tablets are according to E. A. Speiser's trans. in *ANET* (1950).

<sup>3</sup> Matous, "Les rapports entre la version sumerienne et la version akadienne," in *Gilgameš et sa légende*, ed. Paul Garelli (1960; hereafter referred to as Garelli), pp. 83 ff., dates the recension on which the Assyrian version is based ca. 1100; Landsberger, "Einleitung in das Gilgames-Epos," in Garelli, p. 34, dates it rather ca. 1250.

glimpses we have of the development of the epic in the course of centuries of reworking.

In the Old Babylonian version, the harlot and Enkidu cohabit for six days and seven nights, whereupon the harlot says to him (II.ii.11) "Enkidu, thou art become like a god." She recognizes that sexual experience has endowed Enkidu with a quality of divinity. She goes on to say that the wild creatures of the steppe are no longer worthy of him; she will lead him to Gilgamesh in Uruk. She then clothes Enkidu with one of her own garments, introduces him to human food and beer, and Enkidu "became like a man" (II.iii.25) — an interesting parallel to the harlot's statement that he has become like a god. Enkidu then takes a weapon and chases lions and catches wolves, so that the shepherds may rest at night; he is now a hero, on the side of man, not the beasts. There is no description of the reaction of Enkidu to any of this process of transformation, except mention of his initial revulsion from human food, his intoxication by beer, and the laconic statement "he forgot where he was born" (II.ii.5). Oppenheim<sup>4</sup> aptly speaks of the quasi-magical way in which the harlot's severance of Enkidu from his animalic past here occurs.

Far more interesting is the Assyrian version. There, after Enkidu has had his fill of the harlot's charms,

He set his face toward his wild beasts.  
On seeing him, Enkidu, the gazelles ran off,  
The wild beasts of the steppe drew away from his body.  
Startled was Enkidu, as his body became taut,  
His knees were motionless — for his wild beasts had gone.  
Enkidu had to slacken his pace — it was not as before;  
But he now had [wi]sdom, [br]oader understanding. (I.iv.23–29)

According to this account, Enkidu, having satisfied himself with the harlot, first thinks nothing has changed, and turns back to his former companions, the gazelles. But the gazelles run off, and Enkidu, startled, discovers that "it was not as before." This could be due to his abandonment by the animals, but more likely it is to be immediately connected with the statements that "his body became taut, his knees were motionless"; he discovers that he is not as fleet as he had been, and therefore cannot keep up with the gazelles. He becomes aware of change, not through a sense of gain (the experience of sex), but a sense of loss (abandonment by his former companions, and diminution of his strength). The experience of change is a negative one for him, but his loss is compensated for by a new awareness ("he now had [wi]sdom, [br]oader understanding").

<sup>4</sup> "Mesopotamian Mythology II," *Orientalia*, 17 (1948), p. 27, n. 2.

The account continues:

Returning, he sits at the feet of the harlot.  
 He looks up at the face of the harlot,  
 His ears attentive, as the harlot speaks;  
 [The harlot] says to him, to Enkidu:  
 Thou art [wi]se,<sup>5</sup> Enkidu, art become like a god! (I.iv.30–34)

Enkidu, abandoned by the animals, returns to her who is now his sole companion; he turns to her in a new way, intellectually attentive to her for the first time, seeking no longer satisfaction but solace, further understanding. And the harlot, become teacher, tells him he has become wise, and like a god. Wherein do his wisdom and his assumption of a godlike aspect lie? One might be tempted to answer that they lie in his awareness that, having known the company of the beasts and man, he realizes that he can not have both. Such an answer would be in accord with an acquisition of wisdom, but hardly of an aspect of divinity, and it must be rejected as too modern. Rather, he has acquired wisdom and a quality of divinity through sexual experience. We see here a reflection of the high value placed on sexuality in Mesopotamia, where fertility religion asserted that the earth, and sexuality, were the sphere of power of the gods.

Here in the Assyrian account Enkidu's initiation is described not magically but with great psychological perception.<sup>6</sup> Long ago Jastrow<sup>7</sup> suggested that Enkidu had had sexual relations with the animals, and that this explains their repulsion from him when he returns to them; Contenau<sup>8</sup> supports this with the observation that bestiality is not proscribed in the code of Hammurabi or in Assyrian law, as it is in the Mosaic and Hittite codes. This is, however, most unlikely; after Enkidu had been sexually satisfied by the harlot, he can hardly have turned back to the beasts for immediate sexual satisfaction; rather he turned back to them for the nonsexual companionship he had earlier found in them. Moreover, if his initiation was one which occurred through sexual experience, then it follows that he had had no previous sexual experience. His period of life with the beasts is therefore to be regarded as one not only of cultural immaturity but of sexual inexperience.

<sup>5</sup> Reading [e<sup>m</sup>/n]qata, wise, with Ebeling, in H. Gressmann, *Allorientalische Texte zum AT* (1962), Schott-von Soden, *Das Gilgamesch-Epos* (1958), Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic* (1946), and Speiser, *ANET*, rather than [dam]qata as Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1928), Contenau, *L'épopée de Gilgamesh* (1939), Oppenheim (cited above, n. 4), p. 27, and *The Assyrian Dictionary*, ed. I. J. Gelb et al., 3 (1959), p. 70, do. The context (I.iv.29: "but [Enkidu] now had [wi]sdom, [br]oader understanding") makes the first reading preferable.

<sup>6</sup> So rightly Oppenheim (cited above, n. 4), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* (1898), p. 478.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 219.

After telling Enkidu what his initiation signifies, the harlot suggests to him that they go to Gilgamesh, whereupon "he yearns for a friend" (I.iv.41). The harlot has prepared him for the central relationship of his life, and of the epic, his friendship with Gilgamesh. She then leads him to Uruk, telling him of the pleasures of life there (I.v.6–12),<sup>9</sup> and recounting to him the dreams Gilgamesh will have about him. At this point she drops out of the epic. She is but an incident, albeit a key one, in Enkidu's life. Her *raison d'être* in the epic is to wean Enkidu from the beasts and lead him to Gilgamesh; that accomplished, she disappears. She is a curious figure. Strong though Enkidu is, with the strength of the savage, her strength, that of sexuality, is greater (I.iii.20), and in that sense she tames him. But she is not only a sexual symbol. She is from Uruk, and, like Gilgamesh later on, she represents the city, telling Enkidu about life in Uruk. As the representative of the city, she is more knowledgeable than Enkidu. First, she is what he needs. Then she knows what he needs: she becomes something of a wise woman. Finally, telling of Gilgamesh's dreams, she becomes a seer. Her relationship with Enkidu undergoes a transformation: it begins, but does not end, with sex. Having (according to the Old Babylonian version) satisfied and clothed Enkidu, she leads him "like a little child"<sup>10</sup> to human food and drink. So she is mate, mother, companion to Enkidu, but she is never his friend; his friendship, his love Enkidu reserves for Gilgamesh and a relationship which will be terminated only by death. When the harlot abruptly disappears, Enkidu does not miss her.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Enkidu's turning back to the beasts after being satisfied by the harlot, and his deathbed curse of the hunter and the harlot, indicate that he was fonder of the beasts than of her.

This, of course, accords with the fact that she is a harlot. There has been scholarly disagreement as to whether or not she is to be understood as a hierodule, a devotee of Ishtar — hence not a common prostitute. In the epic two terms are used to describe her, *harimtu* and *samhat*; both are used of the attendants of Ishtar in VI.166. That means that, even though her initiation of Enkidu does not occur in a temple and therefore is not sacred, the harlot should perhaps be understood as a sacred prostitute. But that does not, surprisingly, elevate her above the level of a

<sup>9</sup> See, on these lines, Oppenheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 f.

<sup>10</sup> So Schott-von Soden translate II.ii.31.

<sup>11</sup> Contenau, *op. cit.*, p. 86, interprets *taabbiatum* in Old Babylonian III.ii.40 as "female friend," producing the reading "La femme [que j'aimais], mon ami, a entouré [ses bras] autour de mon cou [pour me dire adieu]." According to this interpretation, Enkidu's grief towards the beginning of the third tablet is caused by the harlot's departure. But the interpretation of Schott, *ZeitAssyr*, n. s. 8 (1934), p. 107, of *taabbiatum* as based on *nubbū* "to wail" — hence meaning "a cry" — producing a text in which Enkidu's grief has nothing to do with the harlot, is to be preferred.

common prostitute. She is a *ḫarimtu*, and there was a Babylonian proverb "Do not marry a *ḫarimtu*, whose husbands are innumerable."<sup>12</sup>

Her status as a prostitute is confirmed by the last reference made to her in the epic. Enkidu, at the end of his life, regrets the path of his life on which the harlot set him. He regrets the loss of his first companions, the beasts — a fact revealed in his malediction on the hunter (VII.iii.1–4). Dying, he sees his initiation as a fall, and the harlot as a temptress, and he curses her (VII.iii.5–22). Oppenheim<sup>13</sup> has succeeded in reconstructing part of this difficult passage, and has revealed its etiological aspect, particularly evident in lines 6 f.:

Come, prostitute,<sup>14</sup> I will decree thy fate,  
A fate that shall not end for all eternity.

This fate, as the following lines show, entails living on the rim of the settlement, near the city's refuse heap. But then the god Shamash points out to Enkidu that the civilized life the harlot introduced him to has not been all bad.

Why, O Enkidu, cursest thou the harlot-lass,  
Who made thee to eat food fit for divinity. . . .  
And made thee have fair Gilgamesh for a comrade? (VII.iii.35 f., 38)

Enkidu relents, and supplements the curse — for he cannot retract it — with a blessing which contains the words "[On thy account] shall be forsaken the wife, though a mother of seven" (VII.iv.10); he wishes her the life of a successful courtesan.

The harlot has no name — in that sense she is not fully a person; her function as a means, a tool, is thereby emphasized. And her namelessness gives her a certain representative character, as does the fact that she is the only woman sexually involved with either Enkidu or Gilgamesh in the epic. Jastrow<sup>15</sup> made the suggestive comment that the word "harlot" in the epic appears to be used as a general designation for women. In some way, the harlot *is* the primal woman of the epic, though, in view of her identification not with wives but with prostitutes in VII.iv.10, this must not be pressed too far.

Enkidu does not love the harlot, though she provides him with a key experience. And what about her point of view? What does he mean to her? Nothing. The experience, after all, brings her nothing new, she is by trade a harlot, her involvement is professional. And, though she leads Enkidu to Gilgamesh and to the hubris which characterizes Gilgamesh, she herself is completely free of hubris.

<sup>12</sup> Contenau, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 40 f.

<sup>14</sup> Speiser's translation "lass" for *ṣamḫat* misses the point of the lines.

<sup>15</sup> "Adam and Eve in Babylonian Literature," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 15 (1898–99), p. 201.

One may, finally, ask whether her function is understood in the epic as a positive or negative one. Thompson in his translation<sup>16</sup> points to the second when he places over I.iv.32 ff. the heading "how Enkidu was inveigled into Erech to fight with Gilgamesh." Is he right? Is the harlot in fact a malign figure, a hireling in a plot against Enkidu, using her sexuality to lead him astray, enticing him from the place where he belongs, and from innocence, down a path leading to compromising civilization, to hubris, and to his doom? According to the curse of Enkidu, that is the case. Yet Enkidu's curse of the harlot is not his last word. Equally important is another dimension: the harlot leads Enkidu from his extremely restricted life — hardly human — with the beasts, to civilization and to the full humanity which his friendship with Gilgamesh brings with it. She leads him to a richer, though more costly life. It is a measure of the greatness of the epic that his initiation is pictured as both gain and loss.<sup>17</sup> The harlot, who is an agent of change, emphasizes only the positive side, first wordlessly with her body and then with her words, of what she is leading him to. The other, the negative, side he must find out for himself. In this sense she is a temptress.

Like the harlot in the epic, the woman in Gen 2 f. serves a specific purpose. Yahweh, having created the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, decides that it is not good for him to be alone; he needs a helper. He therefore creates the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, only to discover that none of these is a helper fit for the man<sup>18</sup> — whereupon he creates woman from the rib of the sleeping man. There is no scholarly agreement as to what conception the creation-from-the-rib reflects. J. Boehmer<sup>19</sup> believes that the rib was a euphemism for the birth canal (uterus-vagina) which males do not have. Humbert<sup>20</sup> asserts that the verse is an attempt to explain the existence, paradoxical in the first man, of the navel — as in Plato; von Rad<sup>21</sup> believes there is here an answer to the question why ribs cover the upper but not the lower half of the human body. At any event, where the beasts and birds failed, the woman succeeds — witness the man's exulting statement when Yahweh

<sup>16</sup> Cited above (n. 5), *ad loc.*

<sup>17</sup> F. M. T. de L. Böhl, "Das Problem des ewigen Lebens im Zyklus und Epos des Gilgamesch," *Opera Minora* (1953), p. 248, overlooks the positive side of the harlot's rôle when he links the harlot, the human seducer, with Ishtar, the divine seducer appearing later on in the epic, and sees the poet as motivated in his portrayal of the harlot by his opposition to Ishtar and her cult.

<sup>18</sup> V. Maag, "Alttestamentliche Anthropogonie in ihrem Verhältnis zur altorientalischen Mythologie," *Asiatische Studien*, 9 (1955), p. 24, speaks of "an unsuccessful creative effort on Yahweh's part."

<sup>19</sup> "Die geschlechtliche Stellung des Weibes in Gen. 2 und 3," *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 79 (1939), p. 292.

<sup>20</sup> *Études sur le récit du Paradis et de la chute dans la Genèse* (1940), pp. 57 f.

<sup>21</sup> *Genesis* (Eng. tr., 1961), *ad loc.*

leads her to him, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Boehmer concludes from this and vs. 24 ("Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh") that עֵצֶר, translated "helper" by the RSV, has a primarily sexual connotation, and so should be translated "spouse." He has a point, though an exclusively sexual interpretation of עֵצֶר foreshortens the text; the choosing of a companion for the man is understood not only in the context of sexual satisfaction and procreation but of the man's naming of the other creatures, which has to do with his ordering of them and relating them to himself in a nonsexual sense.

The man then names the woman, and J concludes his account of creation with a statement relating marriage to creation (vs. 24), and with the comment that the man and woman were naked and unashamed (vs. 25). Seen from the vantage point of a world where clothes are a symbol of wealth and of the status of leaders (as in Isa 3 6), where they represent protection against loss of human dignity (see below), nudity without shame presupposes a world where the climate is gentle and where relations among men are not troubled by fear, hatred, or scorn.<sup>22</sup>

With the coming into existence of the woman, creation is complete — a fact which points to the remarkable importance the woman has in Gen 2. To be sure, the fact that she is the helper of man, and is named by him, indicates a certain subordination on her part. Yet this is more than offset by other factors. Whereas the man's creation is described in one verse (7), the woman's creation (vs. 22) comes, with the man's response to it (vs. 23), as the climax of vss. 18–23, and indeed of the whole account of creation;<sup>23</sup> she is the crown of creation. This is all the more extraordinary when one realizes that this is the only account of the creation of woman as such in ancient Near Eastern literature.

The woman's position, remarkable in ch. 2, is equally remarkable in ch. 3, the second act of J's drama. It begins with the serpent's approach to the woman, the account of the encounter between the two being J's masterpiece. The serpent appears as hostile to Yahweh — perhaps because of the special relationship which the man and woman have to Yahweh which he and the other creatures do not share — and envious of the man and the woman. He is the cleverest of all the creatures, cleverer than man; he knows, as only the man and woman do, about Yahweh's commandment — though he misrepresents it. He draws the woman into conversation about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and immediately accomplishes his goal: she turns away from Yah-

<sup>22</sup> So correctly Dubarle, "Le Pêché originel dans la Genèse," *RevBib*, 64 (1957), pp. 25 f.

<sup>23</sup> So correctly McKenzie, "The Literary Characteristics of Gen. 2–3," *TheolStud*, 15 (1954), p. 559.



weh's commandment. First she makes it harsher than it is, adding (vs. 3) to the prohibition of eating that of touching. The serpent then contradicts Yahweh's word — she will not die; rather, her eyes opened, she will be like the gods.<sup>24</sup> And the woman believes him rather than Yahweh. She "sees"<sup>25</sup> what cannot be seen — how good the fruit tastes, and that it bestows the gift of understanding. And, trusting the serpent and her own reaction, she eats. Then she gives the fruit to the man, and he, following her example, eats too.

Why did the serpent approach the woman rather than the man? Before we answer this, the character of the fruit which the two eat must be discussed. The great majority of scholars subscribe to one of two interpretations as to the nature of the knowledge of good and evil which the fruit confers.<sup>26</sup> The first, advocated by Ibn Ezra, by many Catholics including Coppens<sup>27</sup> and McKenzie,<sup>28</sup> and by Gunkel,<sup>29</sup> Boehmer,<sup>30</sup> and Gordis<sup>31</sup> among others, sees the knowledge of good and evil as primarily or exclusively sexual in character. The second, favored by Humbert,<sup>32</sup> Eissfeldt,<sup>33</sup> Gordon,<sup>34</sup> Cassuto,<sup>35</sup> von Rad,<sup>36</sup> Renckens,<sup>37</sup> and Buchanan<sup>38</sup> interprets the knowledge of good and evil in inclusive fashion, as meaning "everything possible."

Seven arguments are cited in support of the first view. 1) Whereas the man and the woman were naked and without shame before eating the fruit (Gen 2 25), after it they knew they were naked and, because

<sup>24</sup> So the LXX, Vulgate, KJV, and Jerusalem Bible. The ASV and RSV reading, "like God," is to be rejected, as 3 22 "behold the man has become like one of us" makes clear. Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 1058 f., sees in כְּאֱלֹהִים in 3 5 a purposeful ambiguity on J's part. The noun can be understood as sing. — and was, by the woman — or as pl., which turned out to be the truth. Lambert believes that the reason Elohim is used without Yahweh in 3 1-15, unlike the rest of 3 f., is to make possible the ambiguity of this promise. This is suggestive, though it may be oversubtle.

<sup>25</sup> So Buber, *Images of Good and Evil* (1952), p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> One other interpretation should be mentioned, that according to which "good and evil" refer to man's determination to decide for himself what is good and evil; this is advanced most recently by W. M. Clark, "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'Good and Evil' in Genesis 2-3," *JBL*, 88 (1969), pp. 266-78. But against this militates the fact that it was this determination which *led* the couple to eat of the tree; it did not result from eating it.

<sup>27</sup> *La connaissance du bien et du mal et le péché du Paradis* (1948), pp. 25 f.

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 570.

<sup>29</sup> *Genesis* (1901), pp. 11 f.

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 302.

<sup>31</sup> "The Knowledge of Good and Evil in the OT and the Dead Sea Scrolls," *JBL*, 76 (1957), p. 134.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 82-116.

<sup>33</sup> *OrientLittZeit*, 43, (1940), p. 403.

<sup>34</sup> *Introduction to OT Times* (1953).

<sup>35</sup> *Genesis* (Eng. tr., 1961), *ad loc.*

<sup>36</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> *Urgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte* (1959), pp. 242-44.

<sup>38</sup> "The OT Meaning of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," *JBL*, 75 (1956), p. 114.



they were sexually ashamed, they made themselves aprons. 2) There is no specific mention of sexual intercourse on the part of the two until 4 1, after they have eaten. 3) The serpent/snake, who causes the woman to eat, very generally has a sexual, i.e., phallic, significance in the ancient Near East, including Canaan.<sup>39</sup> 4) The Hebrew verb “to know” יָדַע, from which the noun “knowledge” in “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” is derived, frequently has a sexual meaning, as in Gen 4 1. 5) At least one parallel OT passage in which “good and evil” occurs, II Sam 19 36 (Eng., 19 35), lends itself to such an interpretation. 6) The Gilgamesh epic offers a parallel which points in this direction. After the harlot has seduced Enkidu, she says to him (I.iv.34), “Thou art [wi]se,<sup>40</sup> Enkidu, art become like a god!” In Gen the woman, looking at the tree of knowledge of good and evil, says (3 6) that it was to be desired to make one wise, and both the serpent (3 5) and Yahweh (3 22) say that the tree’s fruit makes its eater like the gods. 7) The scene of the eating, a garden in which fertility — that is, trees and water — plays a major rôle, lends itself to an interpretation of the forbidden fruit in terms of sexuality.

But these arguments are not as strong as they seem initially, as the following comments make clear.

1) Nakedness in the OT usually refers to the loss of human and social dignity, as in Gen 9 21 (Noah’s nakedness), Exod 20 26 (the nakedness of priests at the altar), II Sam 6 20 (David’s dancing), II Sam 10 4–5 (the humiliation of David’s ambassadors by the Ammonites), Isa 3 17 and Hos 2 10 (punishment of adulterous women), and Isa 20 4 (treatment of prisoners of war). The only passage where nakedness clearly has to do with sexuality, specifically sexual arousal, is II Sam 11 2 (David and Bathsheba).

2) The lack of mention of sexual intercourse in ch. 3 is not significant. The cry of the man when the woman is brought to him (2 23), and his giving her a name which is used of sexually mature females, imply that the man and woman were created sexually mature; J took for granted sexual intercourse on their part from the beginning,<sup>41</sup> or else he saw the disobedience of the two and their expulsion from paradise as following immediately upon their creation.

3) Yahweh’s punishment of the serpent (Gen 3 15) “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” has etiological

<sup>39</sup> See, on this, Coppens, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–134.

<sup>40</sup> See n. 5, above.

<sup>41</sup> In this case the situation is similar to that in Gilgamesh VII.iii.35–39, where Shamash reminds Enkidu of the blessings the harlot introduced him to. He mentions fine food and drink, and splendid clothes, but not the harlot’s function as sexual initiator, though according to I.iii.19–25 and iv.1–34 that is of primary importance.

significance; it indicates that the serpent is henceforth thought of as an enemy of man, rather than as a sexual symbol.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, one could conceivably, in view of the woman's punishment (multiplication of pain in childbirth, accompanied paradoxically by sexual desire for the dominant male), speak of enmity between sexuality and women; but "seed" in 3 15 refers to all the woman's offspring, male as well as female. To say that J conceives of an unending struggle on the part of all mankind against sexual sin<sup>43</sup> is surely to inject a dualism foreign to it into the text. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that J understood the serpent as having any sexual reference. The rôle of the serpent elsewhere in the OT confirms this.<sup>44</sup> There the serpent is the commonest form for demonic beings; this is no doubt related to the fact that the serpent in Canaan, as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, was thought of as a holy animal — which many other biblical writers, like J, were concerned to expose as not holy but demonic. The story of the bronze serpent in Num 21 6–9 (cf. II Kings 18 4) points to the association of the serpent with the power of healing — probably a reflection of the power of the serpent over life itself. One recalls in this context the statement of Sanchuniathon<sup>45</sup> that the serpent was thought by the Phoenicians and Egyptians to have something of a divine nature, in that it is the longest-lived of all creatures, and moves with such extreme rapidity, without the need of hands and feet. If the ultimate reference as regards the serpent is sexual, sexuality appears generally in the Bible but also often outside it in the ancient Near East to have receded in favor of other meanings.

4) Only in certain clearly recognizably cases does נָדָב in the OT have a sexual meaning, and always there is a clear sexual object. Here there is no sexual object; "good and evil" are not that.

5) Most of the parallel OT passages in which "good and evil" occur point to its meaning "everything possible," the two opposites good and evil being employed not for their own sake but to express a totality (what lies between the two) — a case of merism. The clearest instance of this is II Sam 14 17–20, where "to discern good and evil" is parallel to "to know all things that are on the earth"; also II Sam 13 22, where the term, in a negative context, means "nothing." This meaning of "good and evil" is supported by the use of the terms in a passage from the Dead Sea scrolls, 1QSa 1 9–11, which reads<sup>46</sup> "He shall not (approach) a woman to know her by lying with her before he is fully twenty years old, when he shall know [good] and evil." Here knowledge of "good and

<sup>42</sup> In this regard, similar to the serpent in Gilgamesh.

<sup>43</sup> So McKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 564.

<sup>44</sup> See, on this, A. Brock-Utne, *Der Gottesgarten* (Avhandling Utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II, Hist.-Filos. Klasse [1935], No. 2), pp. 39–43.

<sup>45</sup> In Eus., *Praep. Ev.*, I. 40 f.

<sup>46</sup> Following Vermes' translation, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (1962).

evil" characterizes the time of intellectual maturity; this passage, furthermore, supports interpretation of "good and evil" in Deut 1 39 and Isa 7 14 f. in a general, rather than sexual, sense. The evidence is clear: the knowledge of good and evil in Gen means the knowledge that is a part of developed adult life.

Before going on to the sixth and seventh arguments, one may mention two other considerations which militate against the sexual interpretation. According to Gen 3 22 Yahweh states "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil"; very broad knowledge, but not sexuality, belongs to divinity as the Hebrews understood it. Also, according to Gen 3 the woman eats of the fruit first, and only then does the man do so — which hardly fits well if the eating of it refers to sexual intercourse between the two of them.

6) The evidence against the sexual interpretation is thus so strong as to be conclusive. This means that the Gilgamesh parallel is of significance not because it indicates the path which J followed, but rather the path which he knew but from which he departed. Within the context of Mesopotamian fertility religion it is understandable that sexual experience would be considered the means of initiation into civilization. But in the context of the religion of Israel, which does not see fertility as the ground of all being human and divine, there was no place for such an initiation. J therefore altered the tradition he knew at this point.

7) Therewith the seventh argument loses its force. The garden milieu provides an excellent setting for a sexual initiation, to be sure — and maybe, at an earlier stage, in one of the traditions upon which J drew, it actually did so. For J, who understood Yahweh in nonsexual terms and did not see sexuality as the key to man's development, this could no longer be the case.<sup>47</sup> The woman in Gen 3 is, therefore, not to be understood like the harlot, as a sexual temptress who seduces the man.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Therewith falls McKenzie's source theory, *op. cit.*, p. 562, according to which J replaced the original climax of ch. 2, which must have been an epithalamion, by the story of the disobedience of ch. 3, which "is in some way a perversion of the intended union of the sexes." McKenzie's article is valuable for its review (pp. 554–57) of a number of other source theories on Gen 2 f. — all of which he rightly calls unsuccessful. (See also Hesse's review in *RGG<sup>3</sup>*, Vol. 5, cols. 98 f.) The problem with Gen 2 f. source theories is this. Virtually all scholars agree that there are doublets and conflicts in these chapters, which point to J's use of varying traditions, if not written sources. But there is no agreement as to which doublets are real and which imagined; for two recent and disparate lists see Humbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–47, and von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 96. Lacking agreement on the doublets, there can be no agreement on the sources used, as witness the recent work of Begrich, McKenzie, Humbert, Robinson, Dus, and Lewy. There is increasing consensus that, while J used varying traditions, the disparate elements of which are visible in the account he produced, he nevertheless so altered them in combining them that they can no longer be disentangled.

<sup>48</sup> Against Jastrow, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

The initiation of the woman and the man focuses on their pursuit of the widest possible knowledge. The word "omniscience" should, however, be avoided in this context,<sup>49</sup> for clearly the two, after eating, are not omniscient. The initiation of the couple is an expression of their hubris. Reicke,<sup>50</sup> taking a position similar to Wellhausen's, speaks of the couple's arrogating to themselves the powers of civilization, and of their Prometheanism. This term should perhaps not be used. For,<sup>51</sup> though the couple's initiation is the first step leading to civilization, which was Prometheus' gift to man, nevertheless they themselves do not achieve it, but rather their descendents, particularly their grandchildren Jabal, Jubal, and Tubalcain (Gen 4 20–22). Still, the initiation of the two is, potentially, an initiation into civilization. The woman is, therefore, vis-à-vis the man, an agent of civilization, as the harlot is in Gilgamesh. The difference here is that civilization is seen in a more negative light by J than by the poet of the Gilgamesh epic, though the latter does not regard it as unambiguously good.

We are now in a position to discuss the question of why the serpent approached the woman rather than the man. A common explanation, advanced by Augustine and recently by H. Renckens,<sup>52</sup> is that the woman was the weaker of the two.<sup>53</sup> Surely it is more in accord with the view of the woman found in ch. 2 to say that the serpent approaches her as the more sensitive — and therefore the more illuminating, the more human — of the two; more open to suggestion, and therefore more vulnerable.

Here, too, a comparison between the woman's and the harlot's rôle is in order. The harlot, as initiator of Enkidu, does not act on her own initiative, but carries out Gilgamesh's orders. And at a casual glance it might seem that the Gen woman, as the initiator of the man, likewise does not act on her own initiative, but is only the agent of the serpent. Yet this is not so, as the dialogue between the woman and the serpent makes clear; the woman is influenced by the serpent, but her decision to eat the fruit, and to give it to her husband, is hers; in her responsibility for her act she is fully human. Gunkel's description of "das harmlos-kindliche Weib, das neugierig und lüstern die schönen Früchte betrach-

<sup>49</sup> Against von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>50</sup> "The Knowledge Hidden in the Tree of Paradise," *JourSemStud*, 1 (1956), p. 198.

<sup>51</sup> So correctly Gordis, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>53</sup> A view widely held is that the woman was approached as the sexually central figure, either because through her attractiveness to man she enslaves him to sexual desire (so McKenzie, *op.cit.*, p. 570) or because, preoccupied with fecundity, she was prone to participation in fertility cults (so Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 1046). This interpretation depends upon an understanding of "good and evil" in sexual terms, and so is to be rejected.

tet''<sup>54</sup> is at best one-sided. It ignores the fact that the woman's act is due to her refusal to accept the limitations of humanity, defined by J in terms of unquestioning obedience to Yahweh; her curiosity is a symptom of that. The centrality of the woman here — motivated by a hubris foreign to the harlot in Gilgamesh — is matched by the passivity of the man in relation to the woman, whom he trusts more than Yahweh; he is as malleable in the woman's hands as Enkidu was in the harlot's. On the other hand, where in Gilgamesh Enkidu alone is initiated, the harlot being the initiator, in Gen 3 the woman is both the initiator of the man and at the same time she is initiated, along with him, into the knowledge of good and evil. Also, whereas Enkidu, the child of nature, is motivated in his initiation by the natural, and morally neutral, force of sexuality, the couple in Gen are motivated by a mistrust of Yahweh which, according to J, is neither natural nor morally neutral.

The result of their act — of mistrust of Yahweh — is fear of him — they hide from him — and mistrust of each other. The man blames the woman (as well as Yahweh) for what has happened; "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Gen 3 12). His blaming her underlines the importance of her position,<sup>55</sup> and is analogous to the dying Enkidu's curse of the harlot.

And that is only the beginning. The knowledge the two have gained includes the knowledge that their natural (naked) state is one both vulnerable and undignified, and they seek to rectify this by clothing themselves. This is an echo of the harlot's clothing Enkidu in Gilgamesh, an echo all the clearer because in the epic the harlot clothes herself as well:

She pulled off (her) clothing;  
With one (piece) she clothed him,  
With the other garment  
She clothed herself. (Old Babylonian II.27-30)

And then comes Yahweh's punishment of the two, which in theory is separate from the act which provokes it and the knowledge that act brings, but in fact cannot be separated from that knowledge. Both the man's and woman's punishments strike them in the roots of their being — she in her function as wife and mother, he in his function of gaining a livelihood from the land. Both are etiological in character, like Enkidu's final curse and blessing of the harlot. The fact that the woman's punishment involves her fertility, and the man's punishment involves the fertility of the land, is a further indication that at an earlier stage in the

<sup>54</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>55</sup> The dominant position of the woman caused Begrich, "Die Paradieserzählung," *ZAW*, 50 (1932), pp. 108 f., to conclude that the account of primal disobedience originally had only two actors, the woman and the serpent. But this has not generally been accepted.

tradition both the serpent and the fruit of the tree were sexual in character, though that is no longer the case in J's account. If they ever did so, the punishments no longer fit the crime.

The chapter closes with the expulsion of the two from the garden. Yahweh's act presupposes that they are incorrigible. Having eaten of the one tree they will, despite their punishment, eat of the other if they have the chance, and that — for the sake of Yahweh's transcendence — must be prevented.

The initiation, therefore, has disastrous consequences, not only for the pair but for their descendents, for all humanity — and it therefore is to be understood as a fall. The woman, who plays a key rôle in the fall, might therefore seem to take on an essentially negative valuation in J's eyes. But that is not the case; Gen 3 20, which J incorporated in his account despite its conflict with 2 23b, tells of the man's giving his wife the honorific name Eve, as the mother of all living — an indication that J does not regard either the man or woman, or human life, as entirely spoiled by their fall. And the next chapter tells of the woman's fulfillment of her rôle as mother. The fact that she does so underlines the difference between the primal women of Gilgamesh and Gen. The harlot has a status subordinate to men; she is a seductress, not a mother — a means to an end, an episode. The woman of Gen 2–3 is the crown of creation. To be sure, she herself through her disobedience damages the splendid position of equality with the man Yahweh has conferred on her, and assumes the position of inferiority which was hers throughout the ancient Near East. Yet, as a mother, she continues, even after her punishment, to play a central rôle never achieved by the harlot or any other woman in the Gilgamesh epic.