

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., Humbaaba). In some names the position of the stress is conjectural.

Gilgámesh, king of the city-state of Úruk
Nínsun, a goddess, his mother
Enkídu, his friend and companion
Shámhat, a prostitute of Uruk
Shámash, the Sun God
Humbába, the guardian of the Forest of Cedar
Íshtar, the principal goddess of Uruk
Shidúri, a minor goddess of wisdom
Ur-shanábi, the ferryman of Uta-napishti
Úta-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.

I

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

Tablet I. The Coming of Enkidu

Prologue and paeon. 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!
[Gilgamesh, who] saw the Deep, the country's foundation,
[who] knew . . . , was wise in all matters!

[He] . . . everywhere . . .
and [*learned*] of everything the sum of wisdom.
He saw what was secret, discovered what was hidden,
he brought back a tale of before the Deluge.

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? I 20
 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! I 25
 [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! I 30
 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, I 35
 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; I 40

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, I 45
 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. I 50

* * *

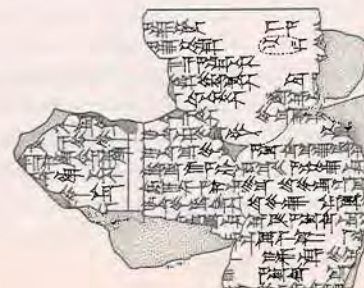
A triple cubit was his foot, half a rod his leg. I 56
 Six cubits was his stride,
 . . . cubits the *front part* of his . . .

His cheeks were bearded like those of . . . ,
 the hair of his head grew thickly [as barley.] I 60
 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, I 65
 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!] I 70

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:]



2 'Like a wild bull lording it, head held aloft'.

‘[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. 175

The gods of heaven, the lords of *initiative*,
 [to the god Anu they spoke] . . . : 180
 ‘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 harries without warrant.
 Gilgamesh lets no son go free to his father, 185
 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*,] 190
 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. 193

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, MB Ni
 [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:] 195
 now fashion what Anu has thought of!

‘Let him be a *match* for the *storm* of his heart,
 let them vie with each other, so Uruk may be rested!’
 The goddess Aruru heard these words,
 what Anu had thought of she fashioned within her. 1100

The goddess Aruru, she washed her hands,
 took a pinch of clay, threw it down in the wild.
 In the wild she created Enkidu, the hero,
 offspring of silence, knit strong by Ninurta.

All his body is matted with hair, 1105
 he bears long tresses like those of a woman:
 the hair of his head grows thickly as barley,
 he knows not a people, nor even a country.

Coated in hair like the god of the animals,
 with the gazelles he grazes on grasses, 1110
 joining the throng with the game at the water-hole,
 his heart *delighting* with the beasts in the water.

A hunter, a trapper-man,
 did come upon him by the water-hole.
 One day, a second and then a third, 1115
 he came upon him by the water-hole.
 When the hunter saw him, his expression froze,
 but he with his herds – he went back to his lair.

[The hunter was] troubled, subdued and silent,
 his mood [*was despondent*,] his features gloomy.
 In his heart there was sorrow, 1120
 his face resembled [one come from] afar.

The hunter opened [his mouth] to speak, saying [to his father:]
 ‘My father, 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. 1125

'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, I 130
 [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! I 135
 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,] I 140
 [*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.' I 145

[*Paying 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*,] I 150
 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 155
 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.' I 160

Said Gilgamesh to him, to the hunter:
 'Go, hunter, take with you Shamhat the harlot!

'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, I 165
 his herd will spurn him, though he grew up amongst it.'

Off went the hunter, taking Shamhat the harlot,
 they set out on the road, they started the journey.
 On the third day they came to their destination,
 hunter and harlot sat down there *to wait*. I 170

One day and a second they waited by the water-hole,
 then the herd came down to drink the water.
 The game arrived, their hearts *delighting in* water,
 and Enkidu also, born in the uplands.

With the gazelles he grazed on grasses, I 175
joining the throng with the game at the water-hole,
 his heart *delighting* with the beasts in the water:
 then Shamhat saw him, the child of nature,
 the savage man from the midst of the wild.

'This is he, Shamhat! Uncradle your bosom, I 180
 bare your sex, let him take in your charms!
 Do not recoil, but take in his scent:
 he will see you, and will approach you.

'Spread your clothing so he may lie on you,
 do for the man the work of a woman! I 185
 Let his passion caress and embrace you,
 his herd will spurn him, though he grew up amongst it.'

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: I 190
 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, I 195
 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. I 200
 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, I 205
 [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, I 210

'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: I 215
 '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 220
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. I 225
 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, I 230
 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! I 235

'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! I 240
 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: I 245
 "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. I 250

"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 255
 [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, I 260
 well versed in everything, she said to Gilgamesh:

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

"You lifted it up, set it down at my feet, I 265
 and I, Ninsun, I made it your equal.
 Like a wife you loved it, caressed and embraced it:
 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. I 270
 Like a wife you'll love him, caress and embrace him,
 he will be mighty, and often will save you."

'Having had a second dream,
 he rose and entered before the goddess, his mother.
 Said Gilgamesh to her, to his mother, I 275
 "Once more, O mother, have I had a dream –

"[In a street] of Uruk-the-Town-Square,
 an axe was lying with a crowd gathered round.
 The land [of Uruk] was standing around it,
 [the country was] gathered about it. I 280

"A crowd *was milling about* before it,
 [the menfolk were] thronging around it.
 I lifted it up and set it down at your feet,
 like a wife [I loved] it, caressed and embraced it,
 [and you, O mother,] you made it my equal." I 285

'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. I 290
 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! I 295
 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. I 300

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, . . .

II 1

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.

P 46

For seven days and seven nights

Enkidu was erect and coupled with *Shamhat.

P 50

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?

P 55

'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,

P 60

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

P 63

* * *

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.

P 66

P 70

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:

II 36

'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.'

II 40



3 'For sure it's Enkidu, born in the uplands'.

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

II 45

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. P 90

The harlot opened her mouth,
saying to Enkidu: P 95

'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. P 100

His mood became free, he started to sing,
his heart grew merry, his face lit up. P 105

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. P 110

The text of Tablet II resumes again:

[When at night the shepherds lay sleeping,
[he struck] down wolves, he [chased off lions.] P 160
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*.] P 164

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

Enkidu was having his pleasure with *Shamhat. P 135
He lifted his eyes, caught sight of the man,
and thus he spoke to the harlot:

*Shamhat, bring the man over: P 140
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? P 145
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. P 150
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; P 155
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. P 160
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. P 166

* * *

Off goes Enkidu, with *Shamhat following. P 175

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, P 180
all gathered about, the people discussed him:

'In build he is the image of Gilgamesh,
but shorter in stature, and bigger of bone. P 185
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, P 190
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. P 195

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.

P 200

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.]

II 103

II 105

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.

II 110

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.]

II 115

[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:

P 230

'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!'

P 235

P 240

At this point the Old Babylonian Pennsylvania tablet ends. Its sequel, the Yale
 tablet (Y), is less well preserved. In the first intelligible episode Enkidu is speaking
 to Gilgamesh:

'Why do you desire to do this thing?
 . . . anything . . . do you want so much?
 Let me ,
 a feat that never was done in the land.'

Y 15

They kissed each other and formed a friendship.

After another lacuna Tablet II resumes with an episode in which Gilgamesh
 introduces Enkidu to his mother:

'The mightiest [in the land, strength he possesses.]
 [His strength is as mighty as a] rock from the sky,
 he is tall in [stature, *proud* as a battlement.]'

II 162

The mother of Gilgamesh [opened her mouth to speak,]
 saying to [her son -]
 Wild-Cow Ninsun [opened her mouth to speak,]
 [saying to Gilgamesh:]

II 165

'My son, in his gate ,
 bitterly you '

II 169

* * *

'You hold ,
 . . . in his gate '

II 172

'Bitterly he ,
 Enkidu possesses no [*kith or kin*.]
 Shaggy hair hanging loose
 he was born in the wild and [*has*] no [*brother*.]'

II 175

Standing there, Enkidu heard [what she said,
 and thinking it over, he sat [down *weeping*.]
 His eyes brimmed with [tears,]
 his arms fell limp, [his] strength [*ebbed away*.]

II 180

They took hold of each other and ,
 they [*linked*] their hands like

Gilgamesh ,

to Enkidu he spoke a word, [saying:] II 185

'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, II 190
 terror has entered my heart.'

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

Gilgamesh opened his mouth,
 saying to Enkidu: Y 90

* * *

' ferocious *Humbaba, Y 97
 . . . [let us] slay him, [so *his power*] is no more!

'In the Forest of Cedar, [where *Humbaba] dwells, Y 100
 let us frighten him in his lair!'

Enkidu opened his mouth,
 saying to Gilgamesh: Y 105

'I knew him, my friend, in the uplands,
 when I roamed here and there with the herd.
 For sixty leagues the forest is a wilderness,
 who is there would venture inside it?

'*Humbaba, his voice is the Deluge, Y 110
 his speech is fire, and his breath is death!

Why do you desire to do this thing?
 An unwinnable battle is *Humbaba's ambush! Y 115

Gilgamesh opened his mouth,
 saying to Enkidu:

'I will climb, my friend, [*the forest's*] slopes.' Y 119

The text of Tablet II resumes:

Enkidu [opened his] mouth [to speak, saying to Gilgamesh:] II 216

'[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,] II 220

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. II 225

'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.'

Gilgamesh opened his mouth to speak, II 230
 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, II 235
 . . . 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. II 240

'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!' Y 162

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.

Y 165

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.

Y 170

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.

Y 175

[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.

Y 180

'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!'

Y 185

The text of Tablet II resumes:

[Then Gilgamesh spoke] II 258
[to the young men of Uruk-the-Sheepfold:]

'Hear me, O young men [of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,] II 260
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, II 265
[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, II 270
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, II 275
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:] II 280
[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; II 285
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, II 300
 he looked with a [laugh at] Enkidu . . . :
 ['Now, my friend, how frightened I am!]
 [In fear of him shall I change my mind?']

The rest of Tablet II, perhaps twenty lines containing Gilgamesh's reply to his counsellors, is lost.

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. VI 5

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!

'Let me harness you a chariot of lapis lazuli and gold, VI 10

its wheels shall be gold and its horns shall be amber.

Driving lions in a team and mules of great size,

enter our house amid the sweet scent of cedar!

'As you enter our house

doorway and footstool shall kiss your feet! VI 15

Kings, courtiers and nobles shall kneel before you,

produce of mountain and lowland they shall bring you as tribute!

'Your goats shall bear triplets, your ewes shall bear twins,

your donkey when laden shall outpace any mule!

Your horse shall gallop at the chariot in glory, VI 20

no ox shall match yours at the yoke!'

[Gilgamesh] opened his mouth to speak,

[saying] to the Lady Ishtar:

'[And if indeed I] take you in marriage,

' body and clothing, VI 25

[*whence would come*] my food and my sustenance?

[*Would you feed me*] bread that is fit for a god,

[*and pour me ale*] that is fit for a king?' VI 28

* * *

'[*Who is there*] would take you in marriage? VI 32

[You, a frost that congeals no] ice,

a louvre-door [that] stays [not] breeze nor draught, VI 35

a palace that massacres . . . warriors,

'an elephant which . . . its hoods,

bitumen that [*stains the hands*] of its bearer,

a waterskin that [*cuts the hands*] of its bearer,

limestone that [*weakens*] a wall of ashlar,

'a battering ram that destroys [*the walls of*] the enemy, VI 40

a shoe that bites the foot of its owner!

What bridegroom of yours did endure for ever?

What brave warrior of yours went up [*to the heavens?*]

'Come, let me tell [you the tale] of your lovers:

of his arm. VI 45

Dumuzi, the lover of your youth,

year upon year, to lamenting you doomed him.

'You loved the speckled *allallu*-bird,

but struck him down and broke his wing:

now he stands in the woods crying "My wing!" VI 50

You loved the lion, perfect in strength,

but for him you dug seven pits and seven.

'You loved the horse, so famed in battle,

but you made his destiny whip, spur and lash.

You made his destiny a seven-league gallop, VI 55

you made his destiny to drink muddy water,

and doomed Silili his mother to perpetual weeping.

'You loved the shepherd, the grazier, the herdsman,

who gave you piles of loaves baked in embers,

and slaughtered kids for you day after day. VI 60

'You struck him and turned him into a wolf,

now his very own shepherd boys chase him away,

and his dogs take bites at his haunches.

'You loved Ishullanu, your father's gardener,
who used to bring you dates in a basket,
daily making your table gleam. VI 65

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: VI 70

"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, VI 75
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, VI 80
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, VI 85
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, VI 90
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! VI 95

'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.' VI 100

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.' VI 105

[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, VI 110
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: VI 115
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. VI 120
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. VI 125
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? VI 130

'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.] VI 135

'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!' VI 140

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, VI 145
 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. VI 150

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. VI 155
 'Had I caught you too, I'd have treated you likewise,
 I'd have draped your arms in its guts!'



7 'Between the yoke of the horns and the slaughter-spot he thrust
 in his knife'.

Ishtar assembled the courtesans, prostitutes and harlots,
 over the Bull of Heaven's haunch she began rites of
 mourning.

Gilgamesh summoned all the smiths and the craftsmen, VI 160
 the size of the horns the craftsmen admired.

Thirty minas of lapis lazuli in a solid block,
 two minas each their *rim*s,
 six kor of oil, the capacity of both.

He gave them to his god Lugalbanda, to hold oil for
 anointment,
 he took them in to hang in his chamber. VI 165

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.]

VI 170

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!'

VI 175

* * *

Gilgamesh made merry in his palace.

VI 179