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ISHTAR'S PROPOSAL
AND GILGAMESH'S
REFUSAL: AN
INTERPRETATION OF
THE GILGAMESH EPIC,
TABLET 6, LINES 1-79

For Thorkild Jacobsen, beloved teacher and friend

Since its rediscovery in the nineteenth century, the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh has again captured the imagination of the literate public. The epic combines the power and tragedy of the Iliad with the wanderings and marvels of the Odyssey. The epic has reentered the mainstream of Western culture and now takes its place beside Homer and the Books of Judges and Samuel. I can hardly do better than quote the words of a reviewer in a recent issue of the *New York Times Book Review*: "The Gilgamesh epic is a powerful tale in almost any telling. Rilke once called it the greatest thing one could experience, and many consider it the supreme literary achievement of the ancient world before Homer. It has something of the qualities Henry Moore once said he admired in Mesopotamian Art—bigness and simplicity without decorative trimming. It is about nature and culture,

The substance of this paper was read before the 193d meeting of the American Oriental Society, Baltimore, March 1983. I have enjoyed conversations with several friends here in Boston, notably Thorkild Jacobsen, William Moran, Piotr Steinkeller, and Irene Winter, about my interpretation of the text. I recall gratefully also the various scholars who reacted with questions and observations during the discussion following the presentation of my paper to the AOS. I should like to express my gratitude to Peter Stark for his generous assistance and to thank Kathryn Kravitz for her help.

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the value of human achievements and their limitations, friendship and love, separation and sorrow, life and death."¹

In the epic, man is addressed both as an individual and as a social being. The formulation is writ large, and the characters, feelings, and actions are exaggerated, for Gilgamesh is no mere man—he is Hero, King, God. The monumental form is an advantage, for by projecting human questions onto a colossus, the author is able to explore the human predicament more deeply and to formulate his answers with greater boldness and clarity. And indeed, the work does explore many issues; it provides a Mesopotamian formulation of human predicaments and options. The work examines the possibility of life in nature; yet, while it is not blind to the costs of civilization, it finally comes down in favor of urban life. It allows for the possibility of natural disorder but then affirms the political restructuring of the cosmos. But most of all, the work grapples with issues of an existential nature. Gilgamesh must learn to live. He must find ways to express his tremendous personal energy but still act in a manner that accords with the limits and responsibilities imposed upon him by his society and universe. Yet in the final analysis, he must also come to terms with his own nature and learn to die, for Gilgamesh is both a man and a god, and as both he will experience loss and will die.

The Epic of Gilgamesh (GE) gives voice to many of our concerns and fantasies. The depth and immediacy of its effect are remarkable, even startling. And its impact grows stronger with each reading. Occasionally, though, familiarity has a lulling effect, and we come to accept Gilgamesh's behavior without really understanding why he acts as he does: why he chooses a certain course of action and then performs it in a particular manner. We acquiesce until our attention is arrested by something that interests us or perplexes us. Some years ago I noted that GE tablet 6, line 16 was similar to a line in an incantation that I was then reconstructing; this observation suggested an explanation for some of Gilgamesh's actions in tablet 6 and set me thinking about the first part of the tablet. The main purpose of this paper, then, is to present a new reading of Ishtar's proposal and Gilgamesh's response in GE tablet 6, lines 1–79.² I hope thereby to

¹ W. L. Moran, "Ut-napishtim Revisited," *New York Times Book Review* (November 11, 1984), p. 14.

² For exemplars and composites of our text, see P. Haupt, *Das babylonische Nimrodepos*, Assyriologische Bibliothek 3 (Leipzig, 1884–91), p. 29 ff.; R. Campbell Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Oxford, 1930), pls. 20 ff. and pp. 38–39; R. Frankena, "Nouveaux fragments de la sixième tablette de l'épopée de Gilgameš," in *Gilgameš et sa légende*, ed. P. Garelli (Paris, 1960), p. 113 ff. For a partial layout, cf. K. Hecker, *Untersuchungen zur akkadischen Epik*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament-*

contribute to a better understanding of the episode as well as to a fuller appreciation of the character of the goddess and of Gilgamesh. In addition, I shall remark on one or two points in the epic that seem to invite comment in light of the proposed interpretation: the place of the episode in the epic and the reason for the addition of tablet 12.³

I

Although the episode is well known, it will facilitate our discussion if we first set out the verbal interchange between Ishtar and Gilgamesh in summary form. King Gilgamesh dons his royal raiment (lines 1–5). Spying the king, the goddess Ishtar is struck by his attractiveness and grows desirous of him (line 6). She proposes to him (lines 7–21); pronouncing a marriage formula of sorts, she asks him to bestow upon her his fruit. In return she offers him a marvelous chariot drawn by powerful steeds, the fragrance of cedar upon his entrance into their new home, the obeisance there of rulers, their delivery to him of tribute of the earth, and the enhancement of the numbers and powers of his animals. In response, Gilgamesh speaks up (lines 22–23) and delivers a long speech (lines 24–79) in which he spurns Ishtar's offer. The speech divides neatly into three sections: (1) lines 24–32, (2) lines 33–41,⁴ (3) lines 42–79.

Sonderreihe 8 (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1974), pp. 181–83. There are many translations; I have repeatedly consulted E. A. Speiser, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, 3d ed. (Princeton, N.J., 1969), pp. 83–84 (hereafter *ANET*); R. Labat et al., *Les religions du Proche-Orient asiatique* (Paris, 1970), p. 181 ff.; A. Schott and W. von Soden, *Das Gilgamesch Epos* (Stuttgart, 1970), p. 50 ff. There are many retellings of our episode; one of the most interesting and sensitive readings is Th. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, Conn., 1976), pp. 201, 218–19. My reading differs from Jacobsen's, and it may well be that our interpretations are mutually exclusive. Still, I should like to think that they may be complementary, each seeing the scene from a different perspective and playing it out on a different plane.

³ Elsewhere I hope to discuss the connections and common mythological background of such myths as the *Gilgamesh Epic* (GE) tablet 6, the *Descent of Inanna/Ishtar*, and *Nergal and Ereshkigal*.

⁴ E. A. Speiser, "Gilgamesh VI 40," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 12 (1958): 41, began his study of GE tablet 6, line 40 with the remark "the second stanza of Gilg. VI (22–44)—marked off as such by horizontal lines in the text. . . ." As noted above, I have divided Gilgamesh's speech differently. The separation of lines 24–32 from lines 33–41 is based, first of all, on the observation that each of these sections is characterized by thematic and formal features that unify it and set it off from the other. As for lines 42–44, I need only note that lines 42–43 look forward—they anticipate the accounts of the first two lovers in lines 45–50, and that line 44—following the opening questions in lines 42–43—contains Gilgamesh's own statement that he will now recount Ishtar's various amatory escapades and, so, introduces the recital itself. The horizontal dividing line after line 44 is in no way decisive; I suspect that it does not even exist. It is absent in E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts* (Leipzig, 1915–23) (hereafter *KAR*), no. 115 + (cf. Frankena, p. 120) as well as in Sm. 2112 (Haupt, p. 32) and K. 231

1. Much of the first section is broken, and it is difficult to ascertain its purport. The section is framed by the verbal form *ahhazki*; it treats food, garments, and toiletries. Gilgamesh seems to be saying that he is unwilling to marry Ishtar; while it is possible that he declares his willingness to bestow gifts upon her,⁵ it is more likely that he states that Ishtar has no need for the kinds of gifts that a bridegroom would normally bestow upon his bride.⁶

2. In the second section, Gilgamesh addresses Ishtar by nine kennings. One line is given over to each kenning. In each case, an object is first introduced and then defined by an epithet that describes or denotes a seemingly negative or destructive characteristic (e.g., *ekallu munappiṣat qarrādi*, “a palace that crushes the warrior” [line 35]).

3. The third section is devoted to a recital of Ishtar's dealings with six lovers. Gilgamesh recounts the story of each of the lovers and the destructive treatment that Ishtar has meted out to them. The section begins and ends with rhetorical statements (lines 42–43, 79). The final statement (line 79) refers to as many lovers as had been previously listed: “If you love me, will you not treat me as you treated them?” (*kī šāšunu*). Similarly, the opening two questions (lines 42–43) also refer to Ishtar's lovers: “Which spouse have you loved forever? Which shepherd bird kept pleasing you?” These two questions make actual reference only to the first two lovers in the subsequent recital. They serve as a stylized abbreviation and assume the full sequence of lovers.⁷

(Haupt, p. 38; cf. Thompson, pl. 21, nn. 3, 10). Outside of the Haupt and Thompson composites (Thompson, pl. 21; cf. Haupt, p. 43, n. 18: “Theilstrich.”), I only find the dividing line in Haupt, p. 30 (= [?] K. 4579a; P. Jensen, *Assyrisch-babylonische Mythen und Epen*, Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek 6/1 [Berlin, 1900], p. 166, n. 2, treats K. 4579a as unpublished, but it seems to be the unnumbered text in Haupt, pp. 30–31), but in view of Haupt's procedure there (see p. 30, col. 2 after line 11), the horizontal lines seem to have been a modern copyist's device that was subsequently erroneously introduced into the edition. If so, there is probably no dividing line between lines 44 and 45; collation is required. Because of its fragmentary nature, I have not taken account of line 45 in the present essay.

⁵ Compare the translation of lines 27–30 in I. M. Diakonoff, review of *Het Gilgamesj Epos* by F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl and *Epos o Gilgamešovi* by L. Matouš, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 18 (1961): 63.

⁶ Compare the translation of lines 27–28 in Labat, p. 182.

⁷ Line 42 (*ayyū hāmīraki* . . .) anticipates the Tammuz story of lines 46–47, and line 43 (*ayyū allalki* . . .) anticipates the shepherd-bird story of lines 48–50. The fact that the opening questions refer only to the first two lovers may be interpreted in one of two ways. It may reflect an earlier form of the text in which Gilgamesh limited his recital to these two lovers. More probably, it serves as a stylized abbreviation, citing only the first two lovers, but assuming the full list. I prefer this second explanation. The use of the device is known elsewhere. Here I should note that the use of a similar form of abbreviation explains, I think, the mention of only the “eye” and the “tooth” in the unit dealing with slaves in Exod. 21:26–27: instead of repeating the various parts of the body and types of wounds mentioned in verses 24–25, the writer cited only the first two. In

The entire episode is curious. Gilgamesh's refusal to wed Ishtar is strange. We tend to condone his refusal and to treat it as if it were a perfectly natural way to act. Perhaps we do so because we think of the goddess—especially when she is an initiator—as an aggressive and harmful woman; but on the face of it, at least, Gilgamesh has not convinced us of the necessity or even the desirability of refusing her. Gilgamesh concludes his speech by stating that Ishtar will treat him as she treated her previous lovers. But these earlier encounters are simply illustrative; by themselves they do not prove anything. They simply exemplify and assert a belief that Gilgamesh already holds. Why, then, did Gilgamesh arrive at this conviction and assume that his relationship with Ishtar would end like the others? The motivation for the refusal is not immediately apparent. Nor have we been prepared for a refusal. If anything, we have been led to expect a positive response on Gilgamesh's part. Gilgamesh has just overcome a male monster, a guardian of a treasure; even if we give credence to the possibility that Gilgamesh might have some ambivalent feelings about killing a male and taking a female, still he should now want and be able to claim his reward and take Ishtar. Furthermore, the Gilgamesh that we have met thus far in the epic is surely not the kind of man to fear a challenge or to imagine himself vulnerable to that which might harm a lesser being. If anything, Ishtar's destructive treatment of some of her previous lovers should spur him on. He should be tempted by the challenge that she poses and believe himself able to enjoy her

providing only for the eye and tooth of the slave, he intended nothing more than to save himself the bother of running through the whole sequence. It has been noted that the "H[ittite] L[aws] 8, similar to Exodus, lists the blinding of a slave and the knocking out of his teeth" (Sh. M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant* [Leiden, 1970], p. 78, n. 4); this may perhaps be a necessary condition, but it is not a sufficient explanation for the formation of these verses. The composer understood "eye" and "tooth"—the first two entries of the standard list—as standing for the full list and left it to the reader to supply the rest of the list. Certainly, later readers have extended the mention of "eye" and "tooth" in these verses to include additional parts of the body. However, this shortcut has occasioned some misunderstanding, and to the writer's selection of "eye" and "tooth" has been imputed a significance that was probably not intended. So understandably the Babylonian Talmud *Qiddushin* 24^{a-b} and the Halakhic Midrashim (*Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. J. Z. Lauterbach [Philadelphia, 1935], 3:72–73; and *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Šimon b. Joḥai*, ed. J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed [Jerusalem, 1955], p. 177) followed by such medievals as Rashi *ad* Exod. 21:26 and the East European Rabbinic scholar Baruch Epstein (*Torah Temimah*); but also more recently and less understandably, e.g., M. D. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem, 1951) [Hebrew], p. 193; and B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 472–73: "A clear example of the new Hebrew stamp on old material emerges in the law which follows, vv. 26 f. If a master injures his slave, *whether in a serious way with the loss of an eye, or with the insignificant loss of a tooth*, the slave is to be freed. Obviously the law is seeking to prevent any kind of mistreatment toward slaves by lumping all injuries together without distinction" (italics mine).

without submitting to her powers. He can beat her at her own game. Moreover, the composer has not prepared us for knee-jerk misogyny; up to this point, at least, the relationship of Enkidu and Shamḫat has led us in the opposite direction. Finally, Ishtar is a goddess, and on the face of it, her offer does indeed seem attractive: status, power, wealth, and the goddess herself are Gilgamesh's for the taking.

Turning to Gilgamesh's speech, we notice immediately that it is rather long. It fills close to sixty of the seventy-nine lines of the section; by contrast, Ishtar's speech takes up only fifteen lines. Moreover his speech does not ramble as might a violent emotional response;⁸ for all its length and detail, it is organized in a clear and coherent fashion. Surely Gilgamesh's refusal could have been stated in a shorter and simpler form. The first section (nine lines), certainly the first two sections (two sections of nine lines each), should have sufficed to convey his refusal. And as regards the third section, what is achieved by listing more than, say, two lovers? To the extent that the opening rhetorical question could be limited to the first two lovers, so the recital could also be so limited. For that matter, the composer could have limited himself to the rhetorical frame of this third section; by itself, the frame manages to convey the unfaithfulness of Ishtar. Such observations indicate that we do not yet appreciate the full import of the individual sections of Gilgamesh's speech or the interconnection of the sections.

It is obvious, then, that we must provide an explanation for Gilgamesh's rejection of Ishtar as well as for the length, makeup, and purpose of his speech. The explanation lies—I submit—in the proposal itself. There must be something about Ishtar's offer that might disturb any man but would especially distress Gilgamesh, a being so very concerned about living and dying. There must be something about the offer that provokes the rejection, and Gilgamesh's speech must be a meaningful response, a response that takes off from the offer and returns to it. So in asking the question, Why did Gilgamesh refuse Ishtar's proposal and state his refusal in the form that he did? we are asking, What are the meaning and relation of her speech and his response?

II

We begin with the proposal. What did Gilgamesh see in Ishtar's offer that we have not seen? It is immediately evident that he is being offered something different from a normal marriage, for the animals that will

⁸ For a different opinion, see Jacobsen, pp. 201, 218–19.

draw his carriage are designated *ūmū* (line 12). They are supernatural beasts, animals that are not of this world. In fact, the marriage formula itself—*attā lū mutīma anāku lū aššatka*, “Be thou my husband, I will be thy wife”—points in the same direction and may well be a giveaway. Formulations of this sort in literary texts have served scholars as evidence for the existence and composition of the marriage formula.⁹ It has also been argued, correctly, I believe, that apparently both groom and bride recited separate marriage formulas—he said, “You are my wife”; she said, “You are my husband.”¹⁰ The marriage formula was mutual; the divorce formula, on the other hand, was unilateral—for example, “You are not my wife, I am not your husband.”¹¹ What seems to have been overlooked is that the marriage formula in the three literary passages that have been cited in support of the formula is also unilateral. Moreover, the identities of the speaker and addressee in these three texts must be noted and taken into account:

attā lū mutīma anāku lū aššatka,

so Ereshkigal, queen of the netherworld, to her future and forever spouse Nergal;

dam.mu hé.me.en ġá.e dam.zu hé.a
*attā lū aššatu anāku lū mutka,*¹²

so the demon Arad-Lili to a human female;

attā lū mutīma anāku lū aššatka,

so Ishtar to Gilgamesh in our text.

The unilateral formulation suggests finality and control. The use of this formulation rather than the mundane mutual and the contexts of these offers suggest that the proposal has its setting in the infernal regions, that Ishtar is inviting Gilgamesh to become her husband and thereby formally to join the denizens of the netherworld.

This interpretation finds confirmation in line 16. For in this line, Gilgamesh is addressed as an official of the netherworld. That he is

⁹ See S. Greengus, “The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (1969): 514–20, esp. 516–17.

¹⁰ See Greengus, pp. 520–22; and M. A. Friedman, “Israel’s Response in Hosea 2:17b: ‘You are my husband,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 202–3.

¹¹ Friedman, p. 202.

¹² For a recent edition, see S. Lackenbacher, “Note sur l’*ardat-lilī*,” *Revue d’assyriologie* 65 (1971): 126, lines 13–14. *attā* = *attī*; . . . -ka = . . . -ki; cf. Greengus, p. 516, n. 51.

being so addressed is strongly suggested by the occurrence of a similar line in an incantation directed to Gilgamesh. In this incantation, as elsewhere in Mesopotamian religious literature and ritual, Gilgamesh appears in his accustomed role as an important official of the netherworld.¹³ This Gilgamesh incantation is part of a well-known ritual.¹⁴ This ritual gives the impression of being far more complicated than it really is, in part because its purpose has not been adequately clarified.

¹³ For the netherworld role of Gilgamesh, see, e.g., W. G. Lambert, "Gilgamesh in Religious, Historical and Omen Texts and the Historicity of Gilgamesh," in Garelli, ed. (n. 2 above), p. 39 ff.; T. Abusch, "Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Literature: Texts and Studies. Pt. I. The Nature of *Maqlû*: Its Character, Divisions, and Calendrical Setting," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33 (1974): 259–61; and Jacobsen, pp. 209–12. The Gilgamesh incantation was edited by E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1931), p. 127, line 7–p. 130, line 9. (Contrary to Ebeling's description of these lines as forming three incantations: "*Gebet an Gilgamesh . . . Beschwörung gegen Zauberer und Zauberin . . . Rest einer Beschwörung an Gilgamesh*" [Ebeling, p. 122], all portions are part of one incantation.) For a partial translation, see M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* (Paris, 1976), pp. 428–29. As a result of the identification of new fragments and further joins (see next note), I have been able to put together a text of some eighty lines. Although there are now no gaps, every line of the incantation being extant wholly or in part, and we have a much fuller text of the incantation than that provided by Ebeling, some portions of the incantation are still fragmentary. This does not affect our use of the Gilgamesh incantation to elucidate GE tablet 6, line 16; the relevant line is set in a clear context and is well known: see Haupt, no. 53, line 9 = Ebeling, p. 127, line 15 = Lambert, p. 40, line 9. (The ten lines quoted by Lambert are also duplicated by E. Ebeling et al., *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur* [Berlin, 1953] [hereafter *LKA*], no. 89 obverse right col., lines 14–22.)

¹⁴ This ritual was edited by Ebeling, pp. 124–33. I am preparing a new edition of the ritual as part of my reconstruction and edition of the Mesopotamian witchcraft corpus. To facilitate study until such time as the edition appears, I note the following "bibliographical" information based on work done on this text up to 1975. Ebeling's edition is based almost exclusively on the Assur pieces (a) *KAR*, no. 227 and (b) *LKA*, nos. 89 (VAT 13656) + 90 (13657). The Assur tablets were or should have been used as follows: (a) *KAR* 227: obv. col. I = Ebeling, p. 124, line 1–p. 127, line 50; obv. col. II = p. 127, lines 1–12, p. 128, line 5*–p. 129, line 10*; rev. col. III = p. 130, line 27–p. 133, line 75. (b) *LKA* 89 + 90 (89 forms the upper portion of the tablet; 90, the lower portion): *Obverse*: 89 obv. left col. (poor photo) = Ebeling, p. 124, lines 3/4–ca. p. 125, line 25; 90 obv. left col. = p. 126, line 41–p. 127, line 65; 89 obv. right col., lines 1–7 (the section of *KAR* 227 obv. col. I that would have contained these lines is not preserved) were omitted by Ebeling—they are to be placed between p. 127, line 65 and p. 127, line 1 (2. Kol.); 89 obv. right col., lines 8 ff. = p. 127, line 1–p. 127, line 16; 90 obv. right col. (poor photo) = p. 128, line 1*–p. 129, line 23*. *Reverse*: 90 rev. right col. = p. 129, line 1–p. 131, line 33; 89 rev. right col. = p. 131, line 33–p. 133, line 70; 90 rev. left col., lines 1–4 = p. 133, lines 72–75; 90 rev. left col., lines 5 ff. and 89 rev. left col.: these lines were not included in *KAR* 227. 90 rev. left col., lines 5 ff. were omitted by Ebeling (but see W. von Soden, "Bemerkungen zu den von Ebeling in *Tod und Leben* Band I bearbeiteten Texten," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 43 [1936]: 267), but Ebeling did include 89 rev. left col. on p. 133 immediately after line 75. For the catchline, cf. O. R. Gurney et al., *The Sultantepe Tablets*, vol. 2 (London, 1964), no. 254 rev.(!) 22. **Nineveh**: (My identifications and joins of unpublished fragments were made on the basis of F. W. Geers's copies; all joins are confirmed.) The Kuyunjik copy of the ritual contained at least three tablets. They are (A) K. 9860 + 13272 + 13796: K. 9860 + duplicates and restores Ebeling, p. 125, line 21–p. 126, line 34. (B) K. 6793 + Sm. 41 + 617 + 717 + Haupt, no. 53 (Sm 1371 + 1877) (R. Borger and I independently joined Sm. 41 + Haupt, no. 53;

Therefore, while this is not the place to present a detailed treatment of the ritual, we should at least state succinctly our provisional understanding of its purpose before drawing the Gilgamesh incantation into our discussion of GE tablet 6. The goal of the ritual is to free the patient of witches (*kaššāpu u kaššaptu*) and of the evil (*mimma lemnu*) that they had brought upon the patient. This riddance is accomplished by having them conveyed to the netherworld by means of an *eṭem lā mammānāma*, a ghost that had previously been deprived of the rites of the dead. Accordingly, (1) the approval and support of Shamash, Gilgamesh, the Anunnaki, and the family ghosts are secured; (2) the ghost is accorded the rites of the dead and adjured to carry off the witches and the *mimma lemnu* to the netherworld; (3) and, finally, the witches and the evil are themselves adjured to depart.

In the incantation, Gilgamesh is addressed in his role of judge of the netherworld. He is invoked by such epithets as *šarru giṭmālu dayyān Anunnaki*, “perfect king, judge of the Anunnaki” (line 1)¹⁵ and *šatam erṣeti bēl šaplāti*, “administrator of the netherworld, lord of the dwellers-below” (line 3),¹⁶ and is said to render judgment in the netherworld (e.g., *tazzaz ina erṣeti tagammar dīna*, “you stand in the netherworld and pronounce final judgment” [line 5]). The hymnic introduction of this incantation concludes with the statement:

*šarrū šakkanakkū u rubū maḥarka kamsū
tabarri tēretišunu purussāšunu taparras*

[Lines 9–10]

To paraphrase the text: In the netherworld, Gilgamesh, you render judgment, and there kings, governors, and princes bow down before you in order to receive your pronouncements.

cf. R. Borger, “Das Tempelbau-Ritual K 48 +,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 61 [1971]: 80; K. 6793 + duplicates and restores Ebeling, p. 127, line 7–p. 130, line 10 (Haupt, no. 53 obv. 1–24 = Ebeling, p. 127, line 7–p. 128, line 30). (C) Sm. 38: Sm. 38 duplicates and restores Ebeling, p. 130, line 11–p. 131, line 28. *B* and *C* are definitely part of the same ancient copy of the text; probably also *A. Sippar*: Si. 747 duplicates and restores Ebeling, p. 131, line 38–p. 132, line 50. According to R. Borger, *Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur* (Berlin and New York, 1975), 2:57, *ad* E. Ebeling, *KAR* 227, Bm. 98638 is also a duplicate of our ritual (identification: W. G. Lambert). Important parallel texts include F. Köcher, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen* (Berlin and New York, 1963–), vol. 3, no. 231 || vol. 4, no. 332 and Si. 908.

¹⁵ For ease of reference, I follow the line count of the Kuyunjik text K. 6793 + ; simply see Haupt, no. 53, and cf. Lambert, p. 40.

¹⁶ *Hā’it kibrāti* appears at the beginning of line 3 in K. 6793 + immediately before *šatam erṣeti*. However, it is possible that it should be separated from the following *šatam erṣeti* and joined to the preceding line (*rubū muštālu rappu ša nišī hā’it kibrāti*). This division is supported by Assur MSS (*KAR*, no. 227 and *LKA*, no. 89 set *šatam erṣeti* at the beginning of a new line).

The line *šarrū šakkanakkū u rubū maḥarka kamsū*, “Kings, governors, and princes bow down before you,” recalls GE tablet 6, line 16. This is precisely the form of homage that Ishtar promises to Gilgamesh should he marry her, and she uses almost exactly the same words: *lū kamsū ina šaplika šarrū kabūtu u rubū*, “Kings, nobles, and princes shall bow down before you.” In all probability, the composer of GE tablet 6 drew the line from the incantation tradition. But even in the unlikely event that the opposite is the case and the epic is the source from which the incantation derived the line, the use of the line in the incantation would indicate that also the composer of the incantation presumably understood the line in the epic to refer to Gilgamesh's place in the netherworld and would thus lend the support of an ancient Mesopotamian reader to our interpretation. In any case, the line has the same force in the epic as in the incantation. Of course, Ishtar intended Gilgamesh to think that the power and status she was offering him were to be his in this world; in reality, she was offering him the obeisance of dead rulers in the netherworld. She seems to be offering him, in fact, the very role in the netherworld that was accorded to him by the Mesopotamian religious tradition.

We would now read Ishtar's address in the light of the following thesis: Ishtar's marriage proposal constitutes an offer to Gilgamesh to become a functionary of the netherworld. The details of her offer may be understood as referring to funeral rites and to activities that Gilgamesh will perform in the netherworld. The order in which the items are cited may even represent a continuous progression: Gilgamesh the king will wed Ishtar and go to his new home, the tomb, the netherworld; there he will be accorded the rites of the dead and exercise his infernal powers. Our text describes a funeral ritual. Obviously our text makes use of figures and forms drawn from the realms and rituals of marriage, food and fertility, sexuality, and perhaps even political activity. But the unifying and dominant image remains that of the grave and Ishtar as its symbolic representation.¹⁷ We may now review the proposal section by section.¹⁸

¹⁷ To view the text as a funeral ritual is not to deny that the text can be read on other levels as well: as a marriage ritual, as a fertility ritual involving the giving of food, as a sexual ritual involving intercourse. But since the funereal dimension of our text seems not to have been noticed and remains unexplored, and explains, moreover, many features of the text that have gone unexplained, I shall focus on this dimension and attend to the others as they serve the image of death. Love and death are closely associated—be the relationship one of identification, opposition, or ambivalence—and the text takes this association for granted; it is Gilgamesh who must decide how and where he will situate himself between the two.

¹⁸ I am not unaware that I cite evidence from different periods in support of my interpretation of the text. In itself, this does not invalidate the interpretation. The uneven

- a) Lines 7–9: Come, Gilgamesh, be thou (my) lover!
Do but grant me of thy fruit.
Thou shalt be my husband and I will be thy wife.¹⁹

Ishtar invites Gilgamesh to become her husband and therewith to depart this world and take up permanent residence in the netherworld. The formula spoken by Ishtar is the formula used to introduce a mate to the netherworld. It is one-sided and implies a lack of mutuality. Whether it will take effect depends on whether Gilgamesh provides some sign of acquiescence and places himself under Ishtar's control. A relationship will be established and Gilgamesh's status will be transformed, then, if he satisfies Ishtar's requests of lines 8–21 and voluntarily gives over for consummation the food—vigor—of the living (line 8)²⁰ and travels to (lines 10–12) and enters into (lines 13 ff.) his new home. Note that only in regard to these three actions is a second-person verb form of request or command used: *qīšamma*, “grant” (line 8), *lū šamdāta*, “drive” (line 12), *erba*, “enter” (line 13).

- b) Lines 10–12: I will harness for thee a chariot of lapis and gold,
Whose wheels are gold and whose horns are brass.
Thou shalt have storm-demons to latch on for mighty
mules.

Gilgamesh will be transported to the tomb by means of a chariot drawn by asses. The ceremonial and even supernal character of the

distribution of data aside, I recall an observation of M. P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (1932; reprint, New York, 1963), pp. 13–14: “In regard to these elements in Homer, derived from widely differing times and civilizations, scholars have divided themselves into two parties engaging in a tug of war. One party tries to put as much as possible in a time as late as possible; namely, into the developed Geometric and the Orientalizing periods, and to treat the elements which it is impossible to fit into this scheme as irrelevant survivals. The other party treats the elements which undoubtedly belong to a late age as irrelevant additions and takes Homer on the whole to be Mycenaean. It appears that neither of these two methods is the right one. We have to concede without circumlocutions that Homer contains elements from very differing periods and to try to comprehend and explain this state of things, not to obliterate it and get rid of it though artificial interpretations.”

¹⁹ With the exception of lines 15–16, the translation of lines 7 ff. at the head of each section is that of Speiser, *ANET*, pp. 83–84.

²⁰ The giving of food here has a twofold immediate connotation: the settling of a marriage gift by the groom and the surrender of the stuff of life. Food is both the source as well as the force of life. To give food is to give up one's life when the giver and the food are identified; to give is to spend oneself or to be consumed. Additionally, here, food and sexual force are fused, as are eating and sexual intercourse. The combination allows one to stand for the other or the two to be joined in mixed figures. In any case, to give food over to Ishtar effectively means to surrender the food that humans grow and eat in this world in exchange for the food that they are given once they are dead.

transport is indicated by the description of the chariot—a chariot of lapis and gold, whose wheels are gold and whose horns are amber—and the demonic nature of the animals that draw it: *ūmī kūdanī*²¹ *rabūti*, “wind demons, the great mules.” The transport is part of the funeral and will convey Gilgamesh to his new abode. In this way, then, Gilgamesh was to travel to the netherworld.²² Note Urnammu’s association with a chariot on his arrival in the netherworld (*The Death of Urnammu*, lines 74–75),²³ the chariots or wagons in the Early Dynastic tombs at Ur, Kish, and Susa,²⁴ the association therewith of asses at Kish,²⁵ and the mention of chariots and asses among burial offerings in presargonic texts.²⁶

²¹ For *kūdanu*, see *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (hereafter *CAD*), vol. K, pp. 491–92, and J. Zarins, “The Domesticated Equidae of Third Millennium B.C. Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 30 (1978): 14–15, and note the description of Enkidu: *ibrī kūdanu ʔardu akkannu ša šadī nimru ša šēri* / *Enkidu ibri kūdanu ʔardu akkannu ša šadī nimru ša šēri* (O. R. Gurney, “Two Fragments of the Epic of Gilgamesh from Sultantepe,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 8 [1954]: 93, lines 7–8 || Thompson [n. 2 above], tablet 8, col. 2, lines 8–9).

²² As with many burial offerings, the offer of a chariot may also have been intended to provide Gilgamesh with equipment that he had used during his lifetime and would need in the netherworld itself.

²³ S. N. Kramer, “The Death of Ur-Nammu and His Descent to the Netherworld,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 21 (1967 [1969]): 114, line 75.

²⁴ For Ur, see simply C. L. Woolley et al., *The Royal Cemetery*, Ur Excavations, vol. 2 (London and Philadelphia, 1934) (hereafter *UE 2*), pp. 64–65, 74, 78–80. For Kish, see P. R. S. Moorey, “A Re-consideration of the Excavations on Tell Ingharra (East Kish), 1923–33,” *Iraq* 28 (1966): 41–43, and “Cemetery A at Kish: Grave Groups and Chronology,” *Iraq* 32 (1970): 104, n. 96, and, esp., *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 103–10 and references there. P. Steinkeller informs me that G. Algazi, “Private Houses and Burials in the ‘Y’ Trench Area of Ingharra: Kish” (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1980), pp. 27–35, has reexamined the chariot burials at Kish. For Susa, see L. Le Breton, “The Early Periods at Susa, Mesopotamian Relations,” *Iraq* 19 (1957): 122 and n. 2; and M. E. L. Mallowan, *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3d ed., vol. 1, pt. 2 (Cambridge and New York, 1971), p. 274 and n. 2.

²⁵ See Moorey, *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933*, pp. 106–10 and references there. While donkeys (in this note I use this term without prejudice as to whether the equid is a donkey or hybrid) are shown drawing chariots on the “Standard of Ur” (*UE 2:266–73*) and a donkey mascot occurs on the rein ring in Grave 800 at Ur (*UE 2:78*; pl. 166; cf. the onager rein ring also associated with a chariot in a burial at Kish [Moorey, *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933*, p. 106–7]), the animals attached to the wagons in the royal tombs of Ur seem to have been oxen (see, simply, P. R. S. Moorey, *Ur ‘of the Chaldees’: A Revised and Updated Edition of Sir Leonard Woolley’s “Excavations at Ur”* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1982], pp. 61–76). Note that the animals found in Grave 800 that were originally thought to be donkeys (*UE 2:74, 78, 272*) were later identified as oxen (R. H. Dyson, Jr., “A Note on Queen Shub-Ad’s ‘Onagers,’” *Iraq* 22 [1960]: 102–4). The significance of the use of oxen rather than donkeys in the burials has been discussed. Moorey, *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933*, p. 107, suggests a practical reason for the preference for bovids at Kish. There is evidence of equid burials without chariots; P. Steinkeller draws my attention to the recent finds at Tell Madhhur (J. N. Postgate and P. J. Watson, “Excavations in Iraq, 1977–78,” *Iraq* 41 [1979]: 176) and Tell Razuk (Mc. Gibson et al., *Uch Tepe I* [Chicago, 1981], pp. 73–74).

²⁶ See D. A. Foxvog, “Funerary Furnishings in an Early Sumerian Text from Adab,” in *Death in Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster, Mesopotamia 8 (Copenhagen, 1980), p. 67 ff.

c) Line 13: In the fragrance of cedars thou shalt enter our house.

Gilgamesh will enter the tomb to the accompaniment of the fragrance of cedar (*ana bītini ina sammāti erēni erba*). Incense forms part of a funeral ritual.²⁷ Thus in a Neo-Assyrian funeral ritual (K. 164),²⁸ the corpse is laid out on a bed (*eršu*), a torch containing aromatic reeds is held (*ziqtu ša qanê ṭābi tanašši* [obv. lines 3, 19–20]), the corpse's feet are kissed (*šēpē tanaššiq* [obv. lines 6, 21]), and cedar is burnt (*erēnu tašarrap* [obv. lines 7, 21]). Note, further, the description of funerary rites in the inscription of Adad-Guppi. Regarding several Neo-Babylonian kings, she states: "I have been making funerary offerings for them, performing and instituting for them permanent incense offerings, abundant (and) of sweet smell."²⁹

d) Lines 14–17: When our house thou enterest,
Noble purificant priests shall kiss thy feet!
Kings, nobles, and princes shall bow down before thee!
The yield of hills and plain they shall bring thee as tribute.

As he enters his new residence (*ana bītini ina erēbika*), Gilgamesh will be greeted and receive the homage of priests and rulers. They will submit to him and present him with offerings or tribute, gifts that the living give to the dead and that the dead offer up in the netherworld. Here in the netherworld, Gilgamesh will rule over the rulers. As noted earlier, the similar line in the Gilgamesh incantation establishes this setting for our line 16: "Kings, nobles, and princes shall bow down before you."³⁰ This same netherworld setting applies equally well to line 15. This line is difficult, and the text should probably be emended. A plausible reading is *išippū* (<i>-šip-pu</i>)³¹ *arattū linaššiqū šēpēka*,

After hearing my paper at the AOS in 1983, P. Steinkeller informed me of his AOS (1980) presentation, "Early Dynastic Burial Offerings in Light of the Textual Evidence" and generously placed a copy at my disposal. Steinkeller discusses the Foxvog text and F.-M. Allotte de la Fuÿe, *Documents présargoniques* (Paris, 1909), no. 75. In both texts, equids and chariots are listed among the funerary furnishings.

²⁷ Is there any connection between this use of incense and its use in Adonis rituals? For its use in the latter and the Near Eastern connections thereof, cf. W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), p. 106, and reference in p. 192, n. 7.

²⁸ See W. von Soden, "Aus einem Ersatzopferitual für den assyrischen Hof," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 45 (1939): 42 ff.; cf. E. Dhorme, "Rituel funéraire assyrien," *Revue d'assyriologie* 38 (1941): 57–66.

²⁹ C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," *Anatolian Studies* 8 (1958), p. 50, col. 3, lines 1–4; translation of A. L. Oppenheim, *ANET*, p. 561.

³⁰ We interpret the line as referring to the homage by dead rulers. It may allude also to acts of homage accorded the dead Gilgamesh by living rulers; cf. Gadd, p. 52, lines 20–21.

³¹ *CAD*, vol. A/2, p. 239; cf. Labat (n. 2 above), p. 182.

“May the noble purificant priests kiss your feet.”³² The *išippu*-priests of line 15 certainly provide an apt parallel to the rulers of line 16; one notes the several priests and rulers that Enkidu encountered in the netherworld in tablet 7, column 4, lines 40 ff. and the appearance among them of the same *išippu*-priests (line 47). The kissing of the feet of line 15 takes place after death. The mention of the rite of kissing the feet of the corpse (*šēpē tanaššiq*) alongside incense in the epic and in the aforementioned Neo-Assyrian funeral ritual indicates that line 15 is set in a funeral context.³³ This is confirmed by the description of the funeral rites for Enkidu in tablet 7, column 3, lines 40 ff. and tablet 8, column 3, lines 1 ff.; there in addresses to Enkidu by Shamash (tablet 7) and Gilgamesh (tablet 8), we learn that Gilgamesh lays out the dead Enkidu on a litter (*māyyālu*) comparable, I should think, to the bed (*eršu*) of the Neo-Assyrian ritual, and that *malkū ša qaqqari unāššaqū šēpēka*, “Princes of the earth kiss your feet” (tablet 7, col. 3, line 44; tablet 8, col. 3, line 3). Kissing the feet in tablet 6, line 15, the bowing down in line 16, and the offerings of tribute in line 17 combine—individually or in combination—the meanings of acts performed at funerals and acts of obeisance accorded a ruler, here a master of the netherworld who receives the homage of his infernal subjects.

e) Lines 18–21: Thy goats shall cast triplets, thy sheep twins, etc.

With his settlement in the netherworld, Gilgamesh will become the possessor of vigorous herds, and they will become his embodiment.

³² The emended reading—however attractive—is not absolutely certain. It is possible that our interpretation of Ishtar’s speech provides an explanation for *sippu*. Lines 13–14 treat the act of entering into a chamber (*ana bītini ina erēbika . . .*). The entrance way is “the boundary. . . . Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world . . . [and] the rites carried out on the threshold itself are transition rites” (A. van Genep, *The Rites of Passage* [Chicago, 1960], p. 20). Since entering the chamber here in GE tablet 6 is the central act of the passing from the world of the living to that of the dead, one might well expect the very act of passing over to be concretized. The unemended form of line 15 can fulfill the terms of this requirement. Perhaps, then, we should retain *sippu* and view the door frame’s kissing of Gilgamesh’s feet as a rite of transition: the tomb is animated, and the dying Gilgamesh is greeted and drawn into his new home by its entrance way. Additionally, submission and acceptance of his rule by his new domain—a theme further developed by *lū kamsū*—could thus be symbolized. For the present, however, I think it wiser to follow the emended reading.

³³ Perhaps we should connect the kissing of the feet with the holding of the aromatic torch rather than with the burning of cedar, yielding the order: aromatics, greeting and submission, offering (GE tablet 6, lines 13, 15–16, 17) || [= parallels] K. 164: 3a = 19b–20a, 6a = 21a, 7a = 21b). Note that the burning of cedar in the funeral ritual may represent the beginning of a meal: “Elle procède maintenant à une série d’actions destinées à procurer au mort sa subsistance, jusqu’à la mise au tombeau: ‘Elle brûle du cèdre, dans du vin elle l’êteint; . . .’ Le cèdre est brûlé pour renforcer l’arome et la force du vin” (Dhorme, p. 61).

Perhaps this power is activated by the offerings of tribute (line 17). In any case, Gilgamesh will serve as a source of fertility, a power not unusual in one who resides in the earth.

Ishtar offers token and substance: honor, power, wealth. Here she intended to deceive Gilgamesh; she presented their marriage as if it were this-worldly whereas actually it would lead directly to his transferral to the netherworld. Such a stratagem requires that her words admit of more than one meaning. She takes advantage of the similarities of the behavior of, and the treatment accorded to, rulers of the living and rulers of the dead.³⁴ Even more important—perhaps central to the deception—are the similarities of a psychological, procedural, and symbolic nature between a wedding and a funeral.³⁵ One need only recall that just as divorce may serve as a metaphor for ridding oneself of a demon and resuming a healthy state, so marriage may serve as a metaphor for demonic possession and entering into a deadly state. And the epic itself is aware of the association, as we learn from Gilgamesh's treatment of Enkidu at the latter's death:

iktumma ibrī kīma kallati pānuš

He covered the face of his friend as if he were a bride.³⁶

In large measure these similarities derive from the fact that both marriage and death involve leaving one state and group and entering

³⁴ For example, such acts of submission to an overlord as kissing the feet and bowing; see *CAD*, vol. N/2, pp. 58–59; cf. M. Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda*, ed. M. T. Larsen, Mesopotamia 7 (Copenhagen, 1979), p. 311; and R. Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973), p. 308: "Bodily posture is important in many greeting conventions. One mode of showing respect is by sinking to the ground, conveying a depreciation of the self and symbolizing humility and recognition of superior status."

³⁵ Underlying this aspect of the deception may also be the fact that death was the original outcome of the marriage of priest-king and goddess. But for the present, this possibility is best ignored. While it would be a mistake to dissociate our text completely from the sacred marriage, we should also not overestimate the latter's importance. Of course, in the composition of the early part of GE tablet 6, the author may well have drawn on texts or traditions describing the sacred marriage. (See, most recently, J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* [Philadelphia, 1982], pp. 174–76.) I find it hard to believe that our composer was reacting to the actual religious institution. The ceremony provided him with the motif with which to operate. See below, nn. 71 and 68. My reluctance to treat the text as a response to an actual ceremony is not dependent on the dating of the text. But the reader will certainly sympathize with my reluctance if my late dating of GE tablet 6 is correct (see below, Sec. V) and we proceed on the assumption that already the kings of the first dynasty of Babylon did not practice the rite of the sacred marriage (see recently J. Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* [Ramat-Gan, 1981], p. 33, n. 48).

³⁶ For the text, see Gurney (n. 21 above), p. 93, line 13 (= Thompson [n. 2 above], tablet 8, col. 2, line 17). Our translation follows Jacobsen (n. 2 above), p. 203; so, too,

another, with the wedding and funeral facilitating the transition. Thus wedding and funeral ceremonies have ritual elements and structures in common;³⁷ in addition, each may contain rites and symbols normally associated with the other.³⁸ And in regard to funerals, we find not only that marriage rites may be used to represent separation from kin, the living, and joining a new family, the dead, but also that sexuality and fertility may form part of, or even dominate, the symbolism of funerals.³⁹

So the emphasis on marriage and fertility does not contradict our reading of Ishtar's speech as a description of a funeral; it is precisely what we would expect to find. Perhaps it is the purposeful ambiguity of Ishtar's proposal that has prevented the modern reader from discerning its meaning. But Gilgamesh was not deceived; he remarked the allusions to the netherworld and responded in kind. Our interpretation draws support, then, not only from the specific allusions that we have isolated and the coherence that our reading imparts to Ishtar's speech but also from Gilgamesh's response; his speech contains allusions to the grave to the extent even of identifying Ishtar with a tomb⁴⁰ and makes sense only if he is responding to an offer of death.

Furthermore, it is reassuring to notice that Ishtar's speech conforms to the scheme of a rite of passage: acts of separation, transition, and incorporation;⁴¹ this should be the case if a funeral—a rite of passage—is being described. Gilgamesh is asked to depart his present state, to cross a threshold, and to enter a new group: Gilgamesh is to leave the living (lines 7–9); the transition (lines 10–17) begins with the hitching up of the animals and ends with the entrance into the tomb, the crucial or pivotal acts being the entering (*erēbu*) and the attendant greeting; the journey will be completed when he is integrated into his new domicile and assumes his new role (lines 18–21).

The journey belongs to Gilgamesh alone. No one moves toward him; only he is seen moving. Everyone else remains stationary. They are already in the netherworld. The rulers—his future subjects—await

Schott and von Soden (n. 2 above), p. 67, and Labat (n. 2 above), p. 196. For a different translation, see Gurney, p. 95, followed by *CAD*, vol. K, p. 299.

³⁷ See van Gennep, and cf. the references there, p. 190.

³⁸ For weddings, see, e.g., H. Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew* (New York, 1950), pp. 171–72, 212 ff.; and I. Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (1896; reprint, Cleveland, 1958), pp. 187, 204–5. For funerals, see, e.g., van Gennep, p. 152; and M. Pope, *Song of Songs*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y., 1977), pp. 210–29.

³⁹ See R. Huntington and P. Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 12, 93–118; and Pope.

⁴⁰ See below, Sec. III.

⁴¹ For these rites, see van Gennep; and V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1967), pp. 93–111.

him; they will kiss his feet and sink down before him in submission when he joins them. He enters and they greet him; through their greeting a new relationship is established.⁴² Even Ishtar is there; she beckons him from the place whither he is asked to journey:

ana bītini . . . erba (ventive)
Enter here . . . into our home.⁴³
[Line 13]

She speaks from the tomb. Gilgamesh is asked to pass alone through the stages leading to death, to give up old relations and forge new ones. To join Ishtar is to die and become part of a new community. This separation and reincorporation find their most concrete expression in the giving and receiving of symbols of fertility. Gilgamesh's separation will take the form of the surrender of his cultivated fruit (*inbīka*) as a grant to Ishtar; his integration in the netherworld is represented by the grant to him of prolific and vigorous animals (*enzātika . . . -ka . . . -ka . . .*).⁴⁴

Here Ishtar is the tomb. Her nature and behavior in our text are characteristic of a type of early earth goddess who is both the source of fertility and life as well as the cause of death and the receiver of the dead. Ishtar gives and takes power. It may even be that the juxtaposition of Gilgamesh's entry into Ishtar's underground home (lines 13–17) and the granting of animals (lines 18–21) is due to the double role of the goddess as receiver of the dead and mother or mistress of animals and/or to the identity or conflation of cavern and animal birth hut.

Gilgamesh understood the nature of Ishtar's proposal. She invited him to assume the role that would eventually be his, to become a ruler

⁴² For greetings generally, cf. van Gennep, pp. 32–33; and Firth, pp. 299–327, esp. p. 301: "In general, greeting and parting conventions may be regarded as a mild variety of Van Gennep's *rites de passage*—what Elsie Clews Parsons characterized as *crisis ceremonialism*, 'ceremonial to signalize or allow of the passing from one stage of life to another.' . . . Following her lead, one might coin the term *teleic rites*, from the Greek concept of *telesis*, putting off the old and putting on the new. One can apply this term to greeting and parting behaviour, where the major stimulation is provided by the arrival or departure of a person from the social scene."

⁴³ A further indication of the fact that she is in the grave and beckons him there is the difference between her address to Gilgamesh and her address to Ishullanu. Below, we shall indicate that the Gilgamesh and Ishullanu episodes parallel each other; here, let it be noted, therefore, that, whereas Ishtar desires Ishullanu and comes toward him (*inā tattaššūmma tatalkiššu*), she desires Gilgamesh and asks him to come toward her (*inā ittašši rubūtu* ^d*Ištar: alkamma* ^d*Gilgameš . . .*): in the speech to Ishullanu, she is the subject of both *našū* and *alāku*; in the speech to Gilgamesh, she is the subject of *našū* while Gilgamesh is the subject of *alāku*.

⁴⁴ The significance of the sequence: fruit-animals and its relationship to Gilgamesh's response will be discussed below in Sec. IV.

of the netherworld. He could have viewed his washing and ceremonial dressing (lines 1–5) as a preparation of his body for burial. But he would not do so. In our epic, Gilgamesh appears sometimes as a character of unified will, sometimes as one whose will is divided between life and the absolute. One suspects that the Gilgamesh of tablet 6 would have seconded Achilles' response when he and Odysseus met in Hades in book 11 of the *Odyssey*:

“The soul of swift-footed Achilleus, scion of Aiakos, knew me,
and full of lamentation he spoke to me in winged words:
‘Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
hard man, what made you think of this bigger endeavor, how could you
endure to come down here to Hades’ place, where the senseless
dead men dwell, mere imitations of perished mortals?’

“So he spoke, and I again said to him in answer:
‘Son of Peleus, far the greatest of the Achaians, Achilleus,
I came for the need to consult Teiresias, if he might tell me
some plan by which I might come back to rocky Ithaka;
for I have not yet been near Achaian country, nor ever
set foot on my land, but always I have troubles. Achilleus,
no man before has been more blessed than you, nor ever
will be. Before, when you were alive, we Argives honored you
as we did the gods, and now in this place you have great authority
over the dead. Do not grieve, even in death, Achilleus.’

“So I spoke, and he in turn said to me in answer:
‘O shining Odysseus, never try to console me for dying.
I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another
man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on,
than be a king over all the perished dead.’”⁴⁵

But there is another side to Achilles, and he may actually believe that in death he finds greatness.⁴⁶ Gilgamesh, in any case, moves between the realism, adaptability, and wholehearted commitment to life of Odysseus and the idealism, inflexibility, and inner conflict yet final embrace of divinity and death of Achilles. In tablet 6, however, Gilgamesh is like that side of Achilles that wishes for life; he is also like Odysseus, who cannot abide a permanent relationship with a goddess

⁴⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.471–91, trans. R. Lattimore (New York, 1965).

⁴⁶ C. H. Whitman thinks that neither Achilles nor Odysseus is speaking a literal truth in the passage just quoted. Achilles, for his part, “is emphasizing the cost of his greatness, the incurable sorrow of being Achilles. He is saying, I have suffered the worst, and identified myself with it; you have merely survived. And Odysseus, for his part, says: you are very honored indeed, but you are dead; I am doing the really difficult and great thing” (*Homer and the Heroic Tradition* [Cambridge, Mass., 1958], p. 180). For the characters of Odysseus and Achilles, see Whitman, pp. 175–220 and 296 ff.

of death. And further support for seeing in GE tablet 6 an invitation to a human male by a lonely and sexually needy goddess of the underworld—the home of the dead—to enter her abode and cohabit with her, thus attaining ageless immortality but losing human life, may perhaps be provided by the parallel accounts of Calypso and Circe in the *Odyssey*; on the Mesopotamian side, we note also the story of *Nergal and Ereshkigal*. Like Calypso, Circe,⁴⁷ and Ereshkigal, Ishtar is a death goddess. And Ishtar appears again in this guise in our own text when she involves the Bull of Heaven in her conflict with Gilgamesh. In the present context her association with the Bull takes on added significance. For, if we are not mistaken, the Bull of Heaven is none other than Ereshkigal's spouse Gugalanna; and the death goddess Ishtar not only makes her home—like Ereshkigal—under the ground,⁴⁸ but even seizes Ereshkigal's husband. For when Gilgamesh refuses to join her, Ishtar takes the Bull both as a replacement for Gilgamesh and as a tool with which to destroy him; finally Ishtar succeeds only in depriving Ereshkigal of a spouse and driving even this male partner to death and destruction.

Thus while Gilgamesh could have viewed his washing and ceremonial dressing as the preparation of his body for burial, he chose instead to regard them as life-affirming acts. He believes with the writer of Proverbs that “her house is the entrance to Sheol, which leads down to the halls of death” (7:27), and he is not yet ready to make the journey. We begin to understand why Gilgamesh viewed Ishtar's provocative offer with something less than equanimity. She threatens to deprive him of that which he most values—life—and offers him the very thing he most fears—death.

III

With the insertion of the Gilgamesh-Ishtar episode into the epic, the original Old Babylonian epic was transformed. But before discussing

⁴⁷ Regarding Circe and Calypso, see, e.g., R. Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore, 1955), secs. 170.3 and 170.8 (2:367 ff.); and G. R. Levy, *The Sword from the Rock* (London, 1953), pp. 149 and 152.

⁴⁸ Having mentioned Ereshkigal, I would note that several further indications—perhaps vestiges—of Ishtar's chthonic character are the very act of descent to the netherworld in the *Descent of Inanna/Ishtar*, the subsequent loss of human and animal fertility, and Ishtar's threat in both GE tablet 6 and the *Descent of Ishtar* to raise the dead. By calling Ishtar a death goddess, I do not mean to deny her other aspects. (For presentations of Inanna/Ishtar, see, e.g., D. O. Edzard, “Mesopotamien: Die Mythologie der Sumerer und Akkader,” in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. H. W. Haussig [Stuttgart, 1962], 1:81–89; and Jacobsen [n. 2 above], pp. 135–43.) Rather, I simply focus on an aspect that has not been sufficiently noted and developed; note, moreover, that many if not all of her aspects (e.g., sexuality and aggression, war) relate directly or indirectly to death.

the transformation, we must make sense of Gilgamesh's answer. We turn directly to Gilgamesh's recital of Ishtar's previous affairs and of the harm she brought her lovers (later we shall deal briefly with the first two sections of his speech). The primary purpose of recounting these incidents is not simply that of pointing up her unfaithfulness or of rebuking her for treating her lovers in an unbecoming and even cruel manner. The recital is made up of six units; each tells the story of one lover: Tammuz, the *allallu*-bird, the lion, the horse, the shepherd, and Ishullanu the gardener. It may well be that individual stories go back to independent traditions.⁴⁹ But however anecdotal the recital may appear, it comprises more than just a simple or random series of unconnected encounters. Rather, as presently formulated and ordered, the six units form a scheme.

To understand the scheme, we must subject the recital to a detailed examination. The formation of the scheme depends in no small measure on the way the composer selected and set out his material. Accordingly, we may best begin our discussion by first isolating several features of the presentation; we organize our observations under the headings of style, order of lovers, and grammar.

Style: The first episode is short and lacks detail. Then, with one exception, the episodes become successively longer. In order of appearance, the number of lines devoted to each lover is two, three, (two), five, six, fifteen. The exception is the third unit, the account of the lion; this unit has two lines instead of the expected four. This deviation is due to an error of either textual omission or artistic commission, a conclusion substantiated also by the fact that the lion is the only lover of whom it is said neither that Ishtar established wailing for him nor that she struck him and changed his identity. Each story is less schematic and more detailed than the preceding one, with successive episodes providing increasing information on the interaction of Ishtar with her lovers. Moreover, whereas the first five stories are presented in simple narrative form, the style changes with the last lover; here dialogue is introduced into the narrative.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In addition to Tammuz-Ishtar compositions, note, e.g., the passages alluding to Ishtar's affair with the horse cited by M. Civil, "Notes on Sumerian Lexicography, I," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 20 (1966): 122.

⁵⁰ After observing and working out the stylistic features, I noted the following remark by C. J. Gadd: "In the celebrated speech of Gilgamesh rejecting with contumely the advances of Ishtar (Tablet VI, 24 ff.) the tale of her ill-fated lovers (45 ff.) is evidently rich in allusions to stories which would have been largely familiar to the ancient audiences. As the line of six victims of her love and her caprice goes on, the stories tend to increase in detail, and the sixth, Ishullanu, has a veritable 'idyll' of his own, embellished with narrative, conversation, intimate detail, proverbial allusions, and even a moral, each, no doubt, with a background in folklore" ("Some Contributions to the Gilgamesh Epic," *Iraq* 28 [1966]: 117).

Order: There is a pattern in the order of appearance of the lovers. We move from the nonhuman to the human and from a setting of nature to one of settlement.⁵¹ The first lover is Tammuz, the personification of new life in nature. The next three lovers are animals: bird, lion, horse. Each animal is closer to the human, has more in common or greater contact with human beings than the preceding one. This is true as regards geographical location, economic function, and physiology or, at least, human perception of animal anatomy and personality. In any case, settled society comes into contact more with horses than with lions, and more with lions than with birds off in the forest. Even when we reach the human lovers, the shepherd and Ishullanu the gardener, we are still progressing along the same axis. The shepherd is on a line toward the settlement but not yet there. His camp represents an outpost of the settled community, a way station between nature and culture. We need only remember the role of the shepherds' camp earlier in the epic: to such a camp Shamḥat brought Enkidu to familiarize him with civilized life and thence he took the road to Uruk. The shepherd stands, moreover, between the earlier animals and the later humans as suggested by the place of animals in his story: he cares for sheep, offers lambs to Ishtar, is turned into a wolf, and is attacked by his own dogs. With the gardener, we move into the settled human community and learn of human familial relations; in part, Ishullanu is presented in terms of his relationship with a father (Ishtar's) and a mother (his own). The next lover is Gilgamesh. He represents one further step in the progression; with him we have moved on to a city dweller with a well-defined social role. It is no accident that at the beginning of his episode, immediately prior to Ishtar's proposal, Gilgamesh is depicted donning royal attire, and that, immediately after his refusal, the first reference to him by a third party—Anu—is as *šarru*, "king" (line 89).⁵²

Grammar: Shifts in style and progression from one lover to the next give the impression of movement and change; at the same time, the episodes seem to be intertwined with one flowing into the next, and so the recital also has the appearance of sameness and constancy. This appearance is due, of course, to the occurrence of common elements in the several episodes and the recurrence throughout of the same dominant theme. It is due no less to the composer's manipulation of the resources of lexicon and grammar: through the use of language, he

⁵¹ In the discussion following my paper at the AOS, Ann Guinan noted the possibility that the text may also be organized along a vertical axis and move from above to below (bird—*dallalu*). Additionally there may also be a movement from the world of the dead to that of the living: Tammuz in the netherworld; the bird in the grove—a secluded place between the world of the living and the world of the dead; etc. Is this a vertical upward movement from the netherworld to the normal habitations of human beings?

⁵² See Frankena (n. 2 above), p. 121, line 24.

conveys the notion that acts and effects of the past are carried over and forward into the present, that events continue from their point of origin to the point where Gilgamesh and the audience are located. This sense of repetition and persistence is effected (1) by the repeated use of such verbs as *râmu*, “love” (lines 42, 48, 51, 53, 58, 64, 79), and *maḥāšu*, “smite” (lines 49, 61, 76); (2) by the use of adverbs of time (*šatta ana šatti* [line 47]) and distributive nouns (*7 u 7 šuttāti* [line 52]; *7 bēru* [line 55]); (3) by the use of durative and permansive verb forms in the description of the final state of several lovers: *izzaz*, variant *ašib*,⁵³ *išassi* (line 50), *uḡarradūšu*, *unaššakū* (lines 62–63), *elû*, *arid* (line 78); and, most of all, (4) by the systematic use of iterative /*tan*/ forms⁵⁴ throughout the section: *bitakkâ* (lines 47, 57)—*bakû* G-stem, *tan* form, infinitive; *taltīmīššu* /*taltīmī* (*taltimmiššu* / *taltimmi*) (lines 47, 54, 55, 56, 57)—*šâmu* G-stem, *tan* form, preterite;⁵⁵ *taltebber*<*ī*>⁵⁶ (line 49)—*šebēru* G-stem, *tan* form, preterite;⁵⁷ *tuḡtarrīššu* (line 52)—*ḥerû* D-stem, *tan* form, preterite; *tuttirriššu* (lines 61, 76)—*târû* D-stem, *tan* form, preterite;⁵⁸ *tattaššīšsumma* (line 67)—*našû* G-stem, *tan* form, preterite.⁵⁹

Our interpretation can be more easily followed if we preface our detailed presentation with a succinct statement of the manner and purpose of the scheme. The recital recounts a series of events each more finite in time and space than the preceding one and sets them out in a progression along past-present, nature-culture axes, each successive event beginning at a point closer to the time and place of the speaker. The purpose of the recital is to join Gilgamesh to the sequence but to place him at the very end, right at a point where something new may happen. Gilgamesh is set there so that he may be identified with and yet separated from those who precede him, so that his encounter with Ishtar may be located in the familiar context of enhancement, transformation, and loss but be so placed as to suggest that his encounter will end differently from the encounters of all previous lovers. The familiarity tells us that Ishtar's offer amounts to an offer of

⁵³ See n. 56 below.

⁵⁴ I note in nn. 55–59 below those instances where my grammatical analysis differs from that of W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, 1959–81) (hereafter *AHw*).

⁵⁵ *AHw*: Gt.

⁵⁶ *Taltebber*<*ī*> (line 49) is followed directly by the alternate readings *izzaz* and *ašib* (line 50). The /*ī*/ 2 f.s. affirmative of **taltebberī* was lost because of the /*ī*/ prefix of *izzaz*; hence *izzaz* is probably an earlier reading than *ašib*.

⁵⁷ *AHw*: G; the variant spelling *tal-te-eb-ber* excludes the analysis of the verb as a simple G.

⁵⁸ *AHw*: D.

⁵⁹ *AHw*: G; the variant spelling [*ta-at*]-*taš-ši-šu-ma* (Frankena [n. 2 above], p. 120, line 33 = tablet 6, line 67) excludes the analysis of the verb as a simple G.

death; Gilgamesh's appearance at the pinnacle tells us not only that he does not need or want her love, and the death that is attendant upon its acceptance, and that he will reject her offer, but also that he can withstand her anger and vindictive attack and emerge victorious.

This is only a summary and follows from our construction of the details that make up Gilgamesh's speech. With this summary in mind, we should therefore focus again on the features of style, order, and language and try to draw out the meaning and effect of these features: a natural backdrop is laid out, and a series of ever-recurring events is set in motion. The events start one after the other; as each succeeding event occurs for the first time, it joins a growing body of recurrent events that repeat throughout time until the present. (Suffice it to note the repeated use of the */tan/* iterative forms and the fact that the various episodes provide etiologies of recurring natural events.) Thus the wolf was not simply cut off from the sheepfold once upon a time in the distant past. Rather, once the shepherd is transformed into a wolf, he repeatedly and constantly tries to reenter, only to be expelled again and again. Obviously, succeeding events cover less time than preceding ones, so that, the earlier the event, the broader its duration; the later the event, the narrower its time span. Moreover, earlier events seem to range over more terrain than successive ones. I have tried to convey this sense by means of a graphic illustration (see fig. 1).

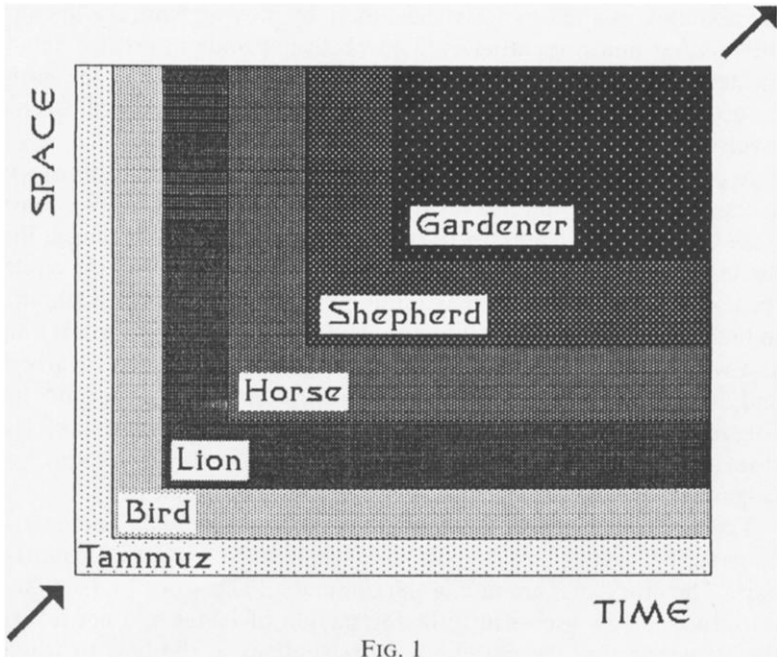


FIG. 1

There is a steady decrease in the temporal duration and natural space covered by each successive event, and attention shifts increasingly away from animals and the wild and toward humans and civilized life. Successive episodes appear closer in time to the present and in location to the civilized. As spheres become narrower, our focus becomes sharper; as the action comes closer to and operates more in the mode of the punctual now and the civilized here, the episodes become familiar and are presented in greater detail. Without giving up that which is common to the whole, we move from the universal to the particular, the particular being both an extension as well as the opposite of the universal; we move from the animal to the human, the country to the city, the mythological to the historical, the durative to the punctual.

The text creates the impression of duration or constancy by repetition, by the use of iteratives, and so forth. It also creates the illusion of movement from the past to the present. The characterization of Tammuz as the lover of Ishtar's youth (line 46) and the seriatim listing of lovers contribute to this impression but do not suffice to create it. Although we are never told explicitly that Tammuz was the first and the others were later, that the account is progressing from the past to the present, the text makes it clear that the events happen in the order in which they are mentioned: by starting with a schematic presentation, the text creates a sense of distance; then, by moving from the alien to the familiar and presenting each successive episode in greater detail, the text brings the story closer and closer to us. And as the story progresses, there is a growing awareness of change and sense of psychic involvement.

A circle is created with Gilgamesh touching his most distant predecessor, Tammuz, and his most immediate one, Ishullanu. We move from Gilgamesh to Tammuz to Ishullanu and back to Gilgamesh. But the text does more than just create a circle. Having created the circle, the text moves forcibly to break out of it, to move away from Tammuz, to build up to the story of Ishullanu, and then to use his story not only as a way of focusing again on Ishtar's original proposal to Gilgamesh and its meaning but also as a way of preparing the ground for Gilgamesh's eventual refusal and successful stand against attack. The story of Ishullanu and Ishtar leads us back into the larger story of Gilgamesh and Ishtar. In effect we have a story within a story.

The text moves from the mythological to the actual. Tammuz is Gilgamesh's mythic counterpart, but Ishullanu is his actual counterpart. The story of Tammuz is paradigmatic. The story of Ishullanu introduces a new aspect into the interaction of Ishtar and her lovers, thus transforming the paradigm. For Ishullanu is the first to whom

Ishtar is said to speak and the first to refuse her advances. The story of Ishullanu constitutes the first major break with the past. By presenting Ishtar's offer and Ishullanu's refusal and by the use of dialogue as a centerpiece to convey proposal and rejection, the story of Ishullanu and Ishtar becomes thematically and formally the direct literary precursor to the expanded account of Gilgamesh and Ishtar and to the extensive use of dialogue in that account.

Reading the recital of lovers is like traveling a road on which each way station is similar to and yet slightly different from the preceding one. Features are carried over from one story to the next; but the growing detail brings with it more and more change till finally we encounter in the Ishullanu story something really new and different. Here for the first time the text states that Ishtar raised her eyes and looked at the object of her desire (line 67) and recounts a verbal interchange between the goddess and the lover: inviting Ishullanu to make love to her, she suggests that they consume his vitality (lines 68–69); Ishullanu refuses, articulating his refusal in the form of two rhetorical questions (lines 71–74).⁶⁰

It is important to notice that the very features that set the Ishullanu scene off from those that precede it correspond to major features of the larger Gilgamesh-Ishtar episode:

1. Thus Ishtar's gaze of line 67 (*īnā tattaššīšumma*) corresponds to her gaze of line 6 (*ana dumqi ša dGilgameš īnā ittašši rubūtu dIshtar*).

2. Her desire to consume Ishullanu's strength in line 68 (*kiššūtaki*⁶¹ *ī nīkul*) corresponds to her request for Gilgamesh's vigor in line 8 (*inbīka yāši qāšu qāšamma*).⁶²

3. Ishullanu's first question (lines 71–73: *yāši mīnā terrešinni / ummī lā tēpā anāku lā ākul / ša akkalu akali pīšāti u errēti*) seems to correspond to the first section of Gilgamesh's speech (lines 24–32). In his question, Ishullanu picks up on the theme of eating introduced by Ishtar in line 68 and asks whether he should take up food that will spoil when he has already been fed; the food to which he refers is food that is offered to the dead and turns rotten. He does not want to eat the food of the dead. The text of the first section of Gilgamesh's speech (lines 24–32) is preserved in a fragmentary form; still it is at least possible that in these lines Gilgamesh picks up on Ishtar's request for a

⁶⁰ Although I do not agree with R. Labat's assessment of Ishullanu's response (Labat [n. 2 above], p. 183, n. 7: "Ishoullanou feint de ne pas comprendre"), I have no doubt of the correctness of his observation there that *ākul*—*akkalu* and *elpetu* in Ishullanu's response play, respectively, on *ī nī/ākul* and *luput* of Ishtar's offer.

⁶¹ For *-ki* understand *-ka*; the *i* is due to the following */ī/*.

⁶² Note the sound play between words in the corresponding lines 8 and 68: *qāšu qāšamma* (line 8) . . . *kiššūtaki* (line 68).

gift of food in line 8 and asks her whether it is not true that she has no need for the gifts—including food (lines 26–27)—that a bridegroom would bestow upon his bride and that by proposing to him she is in fact inviting him to lay out the offerings—including food—and appurtenances for his own funeral and burial.

4. Ishullanu's second and final question (line 74: *ša kuṣṣi elpetu kutummū*⁶³ a, "should reeds be my covering against the cold?") seems to correspond to the second section of Gilgamesh's speech (lines 33–41). Like lines 24–32, lines 33–41 are somewhat damaged and obscure; but even just *kutummīša* in line 36 and the mention of cold in line 33 suffice to indicate the existence of the connection with line 74. Ishullanu's remark in line 74 refers, I think, to grass as a covering of the grave or reed matting as a wrapping of the corpse; he does not want to be buried. In lines 33–41, Ishtar is addressed by nine destructive kennings. These nine entries refer similarly, I think, to the grave, its opening and lining, the covering of the dead, and funerary appurtenances. Even those entries that refer to parts of the burial also convey the notion of the grave as a whole. The individual parts adversely affect the corpse; in addition they also share in and add to the destructive force of the whole. In sum, the total grave described in these lines—the whole as well as the parts—does not preserve and house its inhabitant; rather it shrinks, squashes, and obliterates the dead body so that the corpse loses its form and is finally ground up into dust. Ishtar is a grave that may even betray the dead. Certainty is out of the question; but the interpretation here suggested at least makes some sense of most of the entries in lines 33–41 and lends a measure of coherence and unity to the list as a whole.⁶³

These correspondences highlight the importance of dialogue in the Ishullanu and Gilgamesh episodes. It is the dialogue between Ishullanu and Ishtar that is responsible for the length of the Ishullanu episode and for its increase in length over the preceding episode (6 → 15 lines); similarly the dialogue between Gilgamesh and Ishtar is responsible for the length of the Gilgamesh-Ishtar interlude and for the creation of an epic segment wherein a dramatic verbal contest takes over and pushes the straight narration of events into the background. Ishullanu and Ishtar acted and spoke like Gilgamesh and Ishtar. By reminding the

⁶³ *daltu*, line 34, opening of grave, the door that holds back or imprisons ([*ša i*] *kallū*) ghosts (*šāra u zīqa*) or the door that does not keep out ([*ša lā i*] *kallū*) the cold wind (cf. *šu-ri-pu*, line 33)—the dead are naked. *ekallu*, line 35, grave, netherworld. *pīru* . . . *kutummu*, line 36, cover of grave (cf. [?] *epera katāmu*, said of burying the dead) or of corpse. *ittū*, line 37, coating of grave. *nādu*, line 38, waterskin, travel provision for the dead. *pīlu*, line 39, lining of grave (cf. D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, Oriental Institute Publications, 2 [Chicago, 1924], p. 136, lines 18–19). *māt nukurti*, line 40, grave, netherworld. *šēnu*, line 41, footwear for the dead traveler.

goddess of the events that transpired between her and Ishullanu, Gilgamesh links the present with the past and recalls speeches from the past that prefigure and capture the meaning of the speeches presently being declaimed by Ishtar and Gilgamesh.

A systematic, line-by-line comparison of the two stories is instructive. All parts of the Ishullanu account seem to correspond to sections of the larger Gilgamesh account. The correlation between the two accounts is sufficiently high that we may even set out the shared elements in the form of an outline of the two stories (see table below).

OUTLINE OF SHARED ELEMENTS

| PLOT ELEMENTS | TABLET 6 (Lines) | |
|---|------------------|-----------------|
| | Ishullanu Story | Gilgamesh Story |
| a) The hero is presented playing his traditional role: Ishullanu, Gardener; Gilgamesh, King. ⁶⁴ | 64–66 | : 1–5 |
| b) The goddess sees and desires the hero. | 67 | : 6 |
| c) She requests his vigor, using the language of food. | 68 | : 8 |
| d) In return, she offers him a reward: the opportunity to enter her and dwell among the dead. ⁶⁵ | 69 | : 9–21 |
| e) The hero speaks. | 70 | : 22–23 |
| f) He refuses the goddess. He states that he has no need for the materials—especially food—meant for those who die. | 71–73 | : 24–32 |
| g) He calls Ishtar a grave. | 74 | : 33–41 |
| h) The goddess hears the speech. | 75 | : 80 |
| i) She reacts to the rejection. | 76–78 | : 81 ff. |

⁶⁴ Gardeners and kings are associated; cf. W. W. Hallo tablet and J. J. A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, Yale Near Eastern Researches, 3 (New Haven, Conn., 1968), p. 6. If some form of *dalû* is read in GE tablet 6, line 78 (see A. L. Oppenheim, "Mesopotamian Mythology II," *Orientalia*, N.S., 17 [1948]: 37 and n. 4, and reference there; cf. *CAD*, vol. D, p. 56, and vol. M/2, p. 58; and *AHW*, p. 1550), we note also the association of garden work (*nukaribbu*) and water drawing (*dalû*) in both the Ishullanu episode and *The Sargon Legend* (B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend*, American Schools of Oriental Research, Dissertation Series, no. 4 [Cambridge, Mass., 1980], p. 25, lines 8–12).

⁶⁵ Vagina (*hurdatni*, line 69) = house (*būini*, lines 13–14) = tomb. Here *hurdatu* and *bītu* are recesses in the ground and represent the place of burial. The linking of *hurdatu*

The stories are modeled on each other. Each story elucidates the other even if some details still elude our understanding and others have been grasped with only a minimum of assurance. The story of Ishullanu and Ishtar is a miniature; in it are condensed most of the important events and speeches of the story of Gilgamesh and Ishtar.⁶⁶ The Ishullanu-Ishtar episode is set into the Gilgamesh-Ishtar episode as a small room with a window is set into and looks out on a larger room that is similar to but not quite identical with it.

For much of their course the two stories correspond and run parallel to each other. But we must now note that, for all the similarities, there are also some important differences. Ishullanu's speech corresponds only to the first two sections of Gilgamesh's speech (lines 24–32, 33–41); the third section, the recital of stories of Ishtar's previous lovers (lines 42–79), finds no echo in Ishullanu's speech.

The third section seems to be a purposeful addition to a more basic bipartite rhetorical form. This recounting of Ishtar's previous lovers looks to the past and tries thereby to point up the significance of Gilgamesh's present encounter with Ishtar. The very act of reciting these stories, the similarity of Gilgamesh's story to these others but

and *bītu* explains the otherwise inexplicable */-ni/*, “our” of *hurdatni*: *bītu* and, by analogy, *hurdatu* are treated as “our”—our chamber, our vagina.

⁶⁶ Even granting that Ishullanu and Sukalletuda may be parallel or related personages (cf., e.g., Gadd, “Some Contributions to the Gilgamesh Epic” [n. 50 above], pp. 117–18; J.-M. Durand, “Un commentaire à TDP I, AO 17661,” *Revue d'assyriologie* 73 [1979]: 164–65, esp. 165, n. 45; W. W. Hallo, “Šullanu,” *Revue d'assyriologie* 74 [1980]: 94), for purposes of this essay, I did not find it particularly useful to draw upon the tale of *Inanna and Šukalletuda* (for this composition, see simply S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 3d rev. ed. [Philadelphia, 1981], pp. 70–74 and 353). Instead, I have explored the relationship of the Ishullanu-Ishtar and Gilgamesh-Ishtar stories and tried to understand the place of the Ishullanu story in the larger Gilgamesh one. In retrospect, I can say that this approach has yielded good results. I should also note that I have not invoked the Sumerian *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven* (MSS listed by C. Wilcke, “Politische Opposition nach sumerischen Quellen: Der Konflikt zwischen Königtum und Ratsversammlung: Literaturwerke als politische Tendenzschriften,” in *La voix de l'opposition en Mésopotamie*, ed. A. Finet [Brussels, 1975], p. 58, n. 69) partly because I have followed A. Falkenstein's (“Gilgameš. Nach sumerischen Texten,” in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, vol. 3, fascicle 5 [Berlin, 1968], p. 361) interpretation of the text. (So, too, e.g., Wilcke, p. 58; and Tigay [n. 35 above], pp. 174–75; contrast S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, p. 189, and *From the Poetry of Sumer* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979], pp. 74–75). In any case, my intention has been to explore certain aspects of the dialogue between Ishtar and Gilgamesh in the Akkadian epic and to provide an internally coherent interpretation thereof. If anything, C. J. Gadd's remark regarding a comparison of the *Šukalletuda and Inanna* and Ishullanu and Ishtar stories (“Some Contributions to the Gilgamesh Epic” [n. 50 above], p. 118: “If the comparison has any point it lies perhaps in the opposite conduct of the characters, especially of the goddess”) seems to apply equally well to the relation of *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven* to GE tablet 6. Thus, where Ishtar offers dominion to Gilgamesh in the Akkadian version, she denies him dominion in the Sumerian version.

especially to Ishullanu's, and Gilgamesh's own assertion that Ishtar will treat him as she has treated the others (line 79) all link Gilgamesh with the others and set out the background against which and the terms in which Ishtar's original proposal is to be viewed. The Ishullanu episode forms the culmination of Gilgamesh's speech. This episode directs attention back to Ishtar's original proposal to Gilgamesh and holds the proposal up to full view; it then recalls and recapitulates Gilgamesh's lengthy response and leads up to and asserts the final contention that everything—her offer, the gift she requests, her nature, her past history—indicates that, should he accept her offer, she will treat him as she has treated the others and deprive him of that which he values above all else. Here perhaps for the first time Gilgamesh speaks clearly and unambiguously and tells Ishtar—and the text tells us—that he understands the meaning of her proposal and that, for the time being, he has decided that he must refuse her.

What I find so remarkable about Gilgamesh's recital of lovers is how the "already" and the "not yet" come together; how retrospect and anticipation combine to create meaning and emotional effect.⁶⁷ In what purports to be a mythological context, we witness an awareness of dynamic time, of past and future, and an understanding of history and change. Having been forced back into the past by the recital of lovers, a sense of identification is created; as we move forward a sense of familiarity grows, but with it comes the expectation that also change is built into reality and that in the future something new will happen. The recital thus also directs our gaze to the future, and here we learn how different Gilgamesh is. The very fact that Gilgamesh is the only lover to show awareness of the existence and experience of preceding lovers and to recount their story, and the gradual but increasing emergence and accumulation of change in the successive stories of the lovers prepare the way for something new. As we come to the end of Gilgamesh's speech, we begin to realize that the encounter is not over; the speech will be followed by a confrontation, and the conflict between Ishtar and Gilgamesh will be carried well beyond the Ishtar-Ishullanu one.

Gilgamesh ends his account of Ishtar's treatment of her lovers, and his speech as a whole, with the sentence: *u yāši taramminnima kī*

⁶⁷ Compare D. Daiches, *A Study of Literature: For Readers and Critics* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1948), p. 83: "Literature, like music and unlike painting and sculpture, is dependent for its effect on the time dimension: a literary work of art expresses its meaning over a period of time, and at each moment—William James's 'specious present' where the 'already' continuously merges into the 'not yet'—retrospect and anticipation combine to set up the required richness of meaning."

šâšunu tu[. . .] (line 79). Alluding to the consequences of not refusing her offer, he makes a negative assertion in the form of what is either a question or perhaps, rather, a positive hypothetical statement of a condition unacceptable to him. He intends to say that they will not be lovers and Ishtar will not control his being. Here Gilgamesh anticipates the future by relating the past to the present; he intends his remark to conclude the episode. This last statement does indeed close the discussion, but, far from ending the encounter, it carries it into a wider arena. For while there is nothing left to be said between them, a reaction on the part of Ishtar is still called for and anticipated. (Note that Ishtar's reaction to Gilgamesh is introduced by a line—80—similar to one—75—that introduces her reaction to Ishullanu.) And Ishtar takes her cue from Gilgamesh's account of her lovers and his final assertion. This assertion has an effect opposite from the one intended, for it suggests to Ishtar the very plan of action that it was meant to avoid. She will treat his last question as if it were a statement and thereby transform a negation into an affirmation of the hypothetical condition. Even though Gilgamesh made no concession to Ishtar and entered into no relationship with her, thus not permitting her to "love" him, she will treat him as she had treated the others. To be sure, she will not follow her original plan of just gaining control over him and determining his destiny; now she will try to attack and destroy him. She had offered him a home in the netherworld; with his refusal she will transform death into an act and state of destruction.

Having been told how Ishtar has treated her previous lovers, we now expect an account of how she will treat Gilgamesh. A new chapter is opened, and our gaze is directed beyond the speech. The meeting of Gilgamesh and Ishtar must now be abandoned. She must respond to his speech; but by the logic of the situation further talking as well as the kind of one-on-one action appropriate to the Ishullanu episode are now excluded. She must move away from Gilgamesh and from the speech situation that has prevailed until now. Her response must originate elsewhere and involve additional forces; the action moves forward. Gilgamesh's refusal will have enraged Ishtar even more than Ishullanu's, and she must initiate an even stronger reprisal. Yet we are led to anticipate and hope for a victory on Gilgamesh's part even though Ishtar will mount an attack greater than any she mounted previously. Such is our expectation for several reasons; if nothing else we expect Gilgamesh to be victorious because in the evolving scheme of interactions between Ishtar and her lovers, victory is the most obvious variation on the proposal-rejection-defeat pattern of the Ishullanu episode. But until the fight we cannot be certain of the outcome. The tension is further stretched and suspense heightened by

the length of the subsequent dialogue between Ishtar and Anu and Anu's initial resistance.⁶⁸ Finally the fight takes place and Gilgamesh triumphs. This is what we have been led to believe will happen, and this constitutes one of the greatest differences between Gilgamesh and Ishullanu: whereas Ishullanu was the first to refuse Ishtar and Gilgamesh is now the second, Ishullanu was not able to withstand Ishtar's reprisal, but Gilgamesh is able to withstand the attack and emerge victorious.

IV

Although Gilgamesh has vanquished Ishtar, he will eventually learn that resistance is ultimately futile; death is part of life, though it may feel so very alien. In tablet 6, he is not yet ready to accept a new identity and assume a role in the netherworld. He is dominated most of all by the fear of loss. By modeling the Ishullanu account on sections of the Gilgamesh account and highlighting the similarities in their encounters with Ishtar, the composer has indicated that, like Ishullanu, Gilgamesh understood that acceptance of Ishtar's offer would lead to loss. Gilgamesh could not accept Ishtar's offer of marriage because he understood that to accept was to die, that Ishtar wished to deprive him of his life. He realized that Ishtar intended to deceive him by presenting their marriage as if it were this-worldly, whereas it would in fact lead directly to his transferral to the netherworld.

Recognizing in her offer the hidden promise of becoming a lord of the dead, he refuses and recounts the story of her previous lovers; their story exemplifies the treatment he can expect: first *enhancement*, then *transformation*, and finally, *a loss of self leading to frenzied but futile attempts to regain that which had been surrendered*. Ishtar is attainment but also attenuation; Ishtar is the opposite of what one values. To love her is to surrender one's identity. The free become domesticated; insiders are expelled; the settled are forced to wander; the living die;

⁶⁸ In view of my interpretation of Ishtar's proposal, Anu's statement that Ishtar provoked Gilgamesh and has only herself to blame for his response makes perfectly good sense; it is congruous to and follows from her proposal and Gilgamesh's refusal to accept his new role. Accordingly, I cannot agree with C. Wilcke's opinion that the Akkadian version does not recount Ishtar's act of instigation (Wilcke, p. 58: "An aber verweist sie darauf, dass sie selbst die Antwort Gilgameš's herausgefordert habe, was aber in dieser akkadischen Version nirgends berichtet war.") In reaction to Wilcke's interpretation of *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven*, J. S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore, 1983), p. 13, n. 41, argues that it is understandable that Inanna of the Sumerian text would refuse Gilgamesh the right to judge in Eanna: "If, as in the Akkadian version, Gilgamesh had refused to do his duty to Inanna, then she had every right to keep him out of her temple." I cannot agree with Cooper's interpretation of the Akkadian text if his remark is intended to say that GE tablet 6 is simply an account of nothing more than Gilgamesh's refusal to enter into the rite of the sacred marriage.

and humans are turned into animals. Stability and balance are lost and are replaced by discontent, distress, and agitation. In proposing marriage, Ishtar offers to enhance Gilgamesh's identity while at the same time depriving him of it. Her proposal to Gilgamesh is an offer of power; it is also an offer to transform his living self into his dead self.

In tablet 6 the new identity that Ishtar offers or tries to impose is still conflict-ridden and untenable. Were Gilgamesh to accept it here, it would remain alien, and he, like the previous lovers, would constantly seek to regain that which he had lost and to return whence he had come. Such futile attempts to escape their new identities underlie the behavior of the other lovers. This is most evident and touching in the account of the shepherd turned wolf, for he will always try to rejoin the sheepfold and will always be chased away by the shepherds with whom he had once been almost identical and by the dogs with whom he is now almost identical. The similarity of the adversaries brings home the realization that absolute separation from those with whom one was and is closest is often the most distressing part of stepping over boundaries that divide the world into realms that touch but may not mingle; once one has taken the step one cannot turn back, even though the distance seems so very small. The contrast provided by Enkidu is instructive. In tablet 1, Enkidu at first acted like Ishtar's lovers and tried to rejoin the animals; he quickly understood that he could not and with Shamhat's help, he accepted and played his new role. But Ishtar is not Shamhat. Ishtar's demands on her lovers, their sense of loss and of being used, and the alienness of their new roles render Ishtar's lovers unable to assume their new identities wholeheartedly. And Gilgamesh can only assume his new role when he is prepared to accept his new identity wholeheartedly, for otherwise he will not be able to fulfill the functions of initiator, counsellor, and arbitrator of the dead.

For the composer of the epic, a limited, orderly, and, above all, civilized existence is the most that one can hope for. Only civilization provides accomplishments and forms that make life worthwhile; the building of cities, the transmission of culture, and the enjoyment of this life are the only values of normal human life. Yet precisely because he is civilized, Gilgamesh has the most to lose. The list of lovers makes us realize that Gilgamesh is civilized. His position at the very end of the list—and the image of Gilgamesh as king—place him at the very pinnacle of civilized life. The closer the lover is to culture, the greater the sense that a relationship with Ishtar leads to a loss of what one prizes and the greater the realization that one has very little to gain and much to lose from the relationship. Gilgamesh has the most to

lose—certainly more than any of the other lovers—because he is the most civilized and for him it is life, humanity, and a civilized existence that are at stake. Ishtar wishes to kill Gilgamesh and he resists courageously. From lover to lover there has been an increase in foresight and self-awareness and a growing belief that one can control one's own life. And Gilgamesh will refuse Ishtar and resist her offer to enter the netherworld until he himself can define his new identity and grow into it.

Here I must emphasize that it would be an oversimplification to say that Gilgamesh refused Ishtar's proposal only because he recognized it to be an attempt to transform him into a lord of the netherworld. He also recognized therein a form of death that was repugnant to him. For Ishtar wished not only to kill him but also to turn him into an animal; she wished to change him from a live, civilized man into a dead, wild animal. The prospect of death is all the more frightening when it is seen to involve not only the loss of life but also the loss of human form. Death, then, is the complete antithesis to human life, for everything that is familiar—our identity, our physical and social forms, our relations, and so forth—is lost. Death is absolutely alien. Perhaps death is less dread and its acceptance easier when it is thought to share some similarity with the life we know in this world, when for Gilgamesh the king it is not the total destruction or reversal of the civilized community.

Underlying the interaction between Gilgamesh and Ishtar, then, are the issue of mortality and the question of the form and nature of death. In tablet 6, life and death still stand in stark contrast to each other and have not yet joined to form a continuum. The sense of life and death as balanced but conflicting opposites finds expression in a structured thematic design that draws together Ishtar's proposal and Gilgamesh's account of the lovers, again demonstrating the close connection between the two and confirming our reading of the proposal and our construction of the account as an apposite and reasoned response.

The design centers on the themes of fruit and animals, and these elements are set out in an inverted order. The end of Gilgamesh's speech recalls the beginning of Ishtar's speech. Ishtar's proposal begins with the request for Gilgamesh's fruit (*inbu* [line 8]) and then progresses toward and ends with the offer of animals (lines 18–21). In the ensuing account of lovers, Gilgamesh first mentions the animals and then draws away from them and links up with Ishullanu the gardener; his recital progresses from animals (lines 48–63) to fruit (lines 64–66). The layout follows a chiasmic arrangement, with Gilgamesh's recital reversing and offsetting Ishtar's offer:

- A) Fruit
 B) Animals
 B') Animals
 A') Fruit

In our text fruit and animals function as opposites, with fruit connoting the cultivation of crops, human society, and order, and animals connoting wild nature, the netherworld, and destruction. Were Gilgamesh to have accepted Ishtar's offer, he would have granted her his fruit, entered the netherworld, received the fertility of animals, and become the source of animal life. Thus he would have been transformed into an animal or an animal spirit and taken on an identity similar to that of the animal lovers who accepted Ishtar's advances. But Gilgamesh refuses to offer up his fruit and to assume an animal identity. Hence he first mentions the animals but then dissociates himself from them and draws abreast of Ishullanu, he of the date orchard. Ishullanu thought that he could bestow his fruit on Ishtar without becoming her lover and suffering transformation into an animal. But Ishullanu miscalculated and was turned into an animal, and Gilgamesh must now move even beyond him. He must not only not accept Ishtar's love but also not give her his fruit, for only thus can he save himself from being transformed into an animal. Gilgamesh has shifted the arena from the animal back to the human cultivator; in this way he has thus far successfully opposed Ishtar and her wish to possess him.

Gilgamesh believes that only by holding tight to this course will he succeed in frustrating Ishtar's design and saving himself. But if he will not die and become an animal, she will forcibly impose death and animals. She now reverses the direction of the movement that Gilgamesh had instituted and turns back to the animals. But this reversal in movement is headed not toward animal fertility but, rather, toward the destruction of both animals and nature as a whole. Her move signals the opening of a new chiasm that inverts the prior one.

The direction of the prior chiasm is reversed. But also the design is altered and expanded. Ishtar does more than just counter Gilgamesh by simply moving in a direction opposite to that of his last move; that is, she does more than just reintroduce animals (as she previously had done by transforming the shepherd into a wolf and the gardener into a *dallahu*). Her move shifts the conflict to another plane, with higher stakes. She moves beyond Gilgamesh and thus expands the conflict. Ishtar now treats Gilgamesh as an animal that is to die at the hands of another and larger animal. The regression and expansion are achieved

by Ishtar's introduction of the Bull of Heaven—an animal⁶⁹—as Gilgamesh's counterpart and substitute. We are shocked but not surprised to discover that Ishtar ends up turning even this divine creature into a dead animal.

The composer extends the chiasmic design and the thematic treatment of fruit and animals and creates a new and larger structure. The themes of fruit and animals are translated to a broader—almost cosmic—sphere of activity. Properly speaking, the Bull may represent either fertility or sterility—at one time he spent, I suspect, half the year in this world and the other half in the netherworld; here, in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, he is the exemplar of destruction. With the appearance of the Bull, the story of Ishtar's proposal and Gilgamesh's rejection is expanded and made part of a larger conflict between death, disorder, and sterility represented by the Bull, and life, order, and fertility represented by the gardener-king Gilgamesh. Even if Ishtar's use and misuse of the Bull is a continuation of the scheme presented by Gilgamesh whereby Ishtar's lovers are either animals or are turned into animals, everything now takes place on a larger scale and in a broader arena. The protagonists now loom larger than life. The Bull is the reverse of life and the powerful extension of death; Gilgamesh is the opponent of death and the powerful assertion of life. The two stand in conflict, each invading the territory of the other in ways that are unacceptable if not impossible in an ordered nature.

The game is no longer played by the same rules as before. Once Gilgamesh threatens to destroy the natural order by refusing to die and take on an animal identity, Ishtar herself moves outside the normal pattern and makes use of an animal⁷⁰ in an attempt to destroy Gilgamesh and the civilized, human identity he is trying to retain. But now the natural order is no longer in the ascendancy; actions and their outcome will depend less on custom and brute force, on the predictable sequence of natural events, and more on the strength of personality of the protagonists. And Ishtar discovers that far from destroying

⁶⁹ Given that the main opponent of Gilgamesh and Enkidu in tablet 6 is an animal, it is worth noting that their earlier opponent, *Huwawa*, seems to be a tree spirit. Elsewhere I hope to amplify my remarks about the Bull of Heaven. Here I should mention that I very much regret that I am unable to shed new light on the animal identity of *Ishullanu*.

⁷⁰ Her use of the Bull deviates from the standard pattern. One can gain some appreciation of the difference simply by noting the different roles accorded the Bull here and the dogs in the account of the shepherd; the shepherd was turned into a wolf by Ishtar and the dogs simply reinforce that identity. Moreover, there the dogs represent the civilized community, while here the Bull threatens to destroy it. Obviously the composer is not unaware that the several stories share but expand and alter the role of animals.

Gilgamesh, she enhances his social status and reputation and contributes to the destruction of the Bull. The Bull represents the old order; and now it is the power of personal will, exemplified by Gilgamesh's refusal and even by Ishtar's subsequent coercion of Anu, that is decisive.

Gilgamesh's refusal and Ishtar's response result in and represent the destruction of the old order. At one time, for at least part of the year, Gilgamesh was the husband of Ishtar and the Bull was the husband of Ereshkigal. Ishtar's proposal to Gilgamesh is a reflex of an earlier *hieros gamos*; the mourning over the slain Bull (tablet 6, lines 165–67) is a reflex of an earlier seasonal funeral rite. In tablet 6 the marriage of Ishtar and Gilgamesh is rejected,⁷¹ and the Bull is killed with finality, never again to descend and rise with the seasons. Seasonal cycles give way to the assertions of will and decisions of divine and human individuals; in turn these must be integrated into a cosmic order defined and characterized by more complex human organizations. This world and the next will now be organized and ruled in accordance with the forms of civic and imperial order.⁷²

Gilgamesh will accept death when the netherworld is made over into an organized city, when death has assumed a familiar and even comforting guise. It is true that the fear of dying is only a little less sharp when the best life and the best death are depicted as organized cities. But death, then, is not wholly alien, for civilization—paradoxically and ambivalently—is then a corridor to death, and the state of death is seen as both the attainment and the attenuation of civilized existence. Death has been civilized. We witness the transformation of

⁷¹ I do not wish to be misunderstood as saying that tablet 6 is a parody of the sacred marriage; contrast J. van Dijk, "La fête du nouvel an dans une texte de Šulgi," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 11 (1954): 88 and n. 46. Also see nn. 35 and 68 above. Nor is my interpretation to be compared with Böhl's position; for Böhl—in the words of Diakonoff (n. 5 above), p. 65—"The subject of the Akkadian epic is a conflict between the highly ethical religion of Šamaš and the immoral religion of Ištar. . . . The heroes reach the highest point of their ethical elevation when Gilgameš refuses the love of Ištar." See simply Diakonoff's sensible critique (*ibid.*) of this position.

⁷² Whatever else they represent, Gilgamesh's rebuff of Ishtar and the literary movement from nature to city in the order of the lovers also seem to represent a distancing (I hesitate to say divorce or alienation) from nature and a view of humanity as separate from nature. One detects a rejection of that self-definition that views the Human/King as being a part of nature and as doing no more than playing a role in the natural order. In its stead, there is a strong sense of human self-consciousness, a sense of self as a being distinct from nature. If we are dealing with the consequences of actual social change, it would be tempting to relate this stance to the growing rift between the urban center and its natural hinterland and to the emergence of a clear sense of separation. For the arbiters of Mesopotamian literary culture in the second and first millennia (and perhaps for the urban populace as a whole), this process of physical and psychological distancing seems to have found expression in a concomitant decrease in importance of natural deities in general, and the mother-goddess in particular.

the netherworld from a wilderness wherein the goddess dwells with male animals to an orderly society wherein men retain their human forms. Here Gilgamesh will function as a divine official of an infernal extension or replica of a civilized political organization. For Gilgamesh will accept death when he can carry over his civilized identity into the netherworld and need not enter it in the form of an animal,⁷³ when he is able to translate Ishtar's offer into an opportunity to transmute the kingship of Uruk into the kingship of the netherworld.

V

Gilgamesh must eventually die. But in tablet 6, he is not yet ready to accept a new identity and assume a role in the netherworld. He has not yet accepted the limits on his person or realized that the loss of his mortal life is inevitable. Thus far, we have investigated some of the forms of expression and symbolism associated with Gilgamesh's refusal and even touched on the social and cultural dimensions thereof. In this section, we wish to look at Gilgamesh's dilemma from the perspective of living and dying and to use the refusal as a point of departure for the further clarification of some of the psychological struggles and meta-physical implications of the essential Gilgamesh, the man and the god.

Although Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar's offer, he already senses that he will eventually have to come to terms with death. For we are told that Gilgamesh knows things that Ishullanu did not know: by amplifying Ishullanu's laconic remarks in great detail in the first two parts of his speech and, most of all, by then presenting an account of Ishtar's lovers in the third part of the speech, Gilgamesh indicates that he—in contrast to Ishullanu—understands that his own encounter with Ishtar is not an isolated event but part of the unfolding of the established order of things. What is at stake is more than just the loss of a mother's care for the sake of a sexual relationship; rather, it is the surrender of his human life in order to take up his permanent place in a divinely determined cosmic order. Ultimately, Gilgamesh will come to accept the existence and interconnection of the realms of the living and of the dead and will learn that, while immortality and human life cannot go together for him, he is partially divine and can hold onto eternal life by accepting death and becoming a god of the netherworld; his place as an immortal is among the dead and not among living humans or gods of the above.

In tablet 6, then, the seeds of change have already been sown. To appreciate the dimensions of the transformation that is set in motion in

⁷³ Compare the changing forms of Ereshkigal's husbands. The theriomorphic Gugal-anna ("the Bull of Heaven") is replaced by the anthropomorphic Nergal.

tablet 6, we must look beyond this tablet. But to properly understand the relation of the events of tablet 6 to those of the following tablets, we must first consider the place of tablet 6 in the epic, for not only does tablet 6 occupy an important place in the epic, but it also affects and changes the meaning of the work. The impress of this episode on the epic and the transformation it effects in the overall meaning are more readily perceived when it is noticed that the events recounted in tablet 6—Ishtar's proposal, Gilgamesh's refusal, and the killing of the Bull—probably did not belong to the earliest Akkadian version of the epic.⁷⁴ The secondary nature of the episode is suggested, first of all, by the fact that the episode as a whole is functionally equivalent to the battle with *Ḫuwawa* insofar as both describe a battle with and a victory over a supernatural and divinely mandated power and supply a rationale for the death of Enkidu. One of these two incidents is superfluous. Obviously we must give precedence to the expedition to the cedar forest, for it and not the Akkadian precursor of tablet 6 is a documented part of the Old Babylonian version; moreover Enkidu's part in the killing of *Ḫuwawa* provides the more plausible reason for the divine decision to cut short his life.⁷⁵ The extraneous character of our episode is intimated furthermore by the dissonance of its tonal quality; for example, whereas elsewhere in the epic all significant female characters are depicted sympathetically and positively,⁷⁶ Ishtar's image, qualities, and behavior in tablet 6 are destructive and negative. Especially in view of our judgment that tablet 6 is a later addition to the epic, it is no wonder that our novel interpretation of the Ishtar-Gilgamesh interchange leads us to a somewhat different understanding of the relation of tablet 6 to the rest of the epic and of the meaning of the latest version thereof.

The original epic treats the perennial problem of death. When death is only vaguely sensed, Gilgamesh turns reality on its head and deceives himself: he imagines that he will die heroically, thereby assuring his own immortality, and his friend Enkidu will live and serve as a vehicle to transmit his fame (Old Babylonian Yale tablet [cf. Speiser, *ANET*,

⁷⁴ Of course, many scholars are of the opinion that this episode is part of the Old Babylonian epic; so, e.g., Jacobsen (n. 2 above), pp. 213–14. At least some of the text of tablet 6 seems to have been part of the Akkadian epic by the time of the writing of E. Weidner, *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1922), no. 12, and this latter tablet provides the *terminus ante quem* of the inclusion of our episode.

⁷⁵ See also Tigay (n. 35 above), pp. 48–49 and n. 36.

⁷⁶ I have in mind Shamhat, Ninsun, the Scorpion woman, Siduri, and Utnapishtim's wife. All are solicitous mother figures, but a mother need not be beneficent; note the goddess of death in tablet 12, lines 28–31, 46–53, 58–61 || 65–68 || 72–75 (cf. tablet 7, col. 4, lines 50 ff.).

pp. 78–81] col. 4, lines 5 ff.). But reality requires that Enkidu die and that Gilgamesh remain alive—alone and afraid. Through the death of Enkidu, loss is experienced and death becomes actual. Gilgamesh, bereft, depressed, and fearful, seeks a way to remain alive forever. First he roams like a wild man, and then his journey takes on direction. Finally he resigns himself to death and regains a sense of the meaning of life.⁷⁷ From being a hero who thought he could escape death, he resumes the identity of a king, yet becomes Everyman: he accepts the inevitability of death and the satisfactions of a limited life; he learns to take pride in realistic if monumental creations, man-made structures whose extent may be limited by divine and natural spheres that surround and intersect the area of the city, but which manage, all the same, to draw together the human and the divine, the civilized and the natural (tablet 11, lines 303–7; tablet 1, col. 1, lines 9–21).

This form of the epic (without tablets 6 and 12) presents an account of the man Gilgamesh. Put somewhat differently, we may say that it is the story of a powerful human being and his struggles with and acceptance of the inevitability of death.⁷⁸ For Gilgamesh the hero cannot accept his limited existence; he tests and tries to overcome his human form by recourse first to the heroic mode and then to the fantastic-psychotic mode. Initially he substitutes fame for life in the hope that fame is larger and more enduring than life. Future glory, however, is not as powerful as present experience. With the death of Enkidu, he becomes a human again, but Enkidu's death also renders his human life intolerable. He strips himself of his human form and tries to take on the appearance of a god. In both attempts, Gilgamesh substitutes absolutes for the compromises and limits of human life; rather than accepting mortal-human reality, he seeks first the fantasy of the future and then that of immortality-divinity. The quest is

⁷⁷ On Gilgamesh's approach to death, cf., e.g., Jacobsen (n. 2 above), pp. 202–4, 217; G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Berkeley, 1970), pp. 144–45. As regards Gilgamesh's reaction to Enkidu's death, his identification with his dead friend, and his flight from reality, compare the opening pages of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." When confronted with his own impending death, Enkidu reacts in much the manner that we would expect of him. I have found it useful to compare his reaction to the stages of reaction to death noted by E. Kübler-Ross in her various publications (see, e.g., the chart prepared by M. Imara in the work of E. Kübler-Ross, ed., *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1975], p. 161). His reaction is not out of proportion and is readily understandable. Certainly, by comparison with Gilgamesh, he rapidly regains his equilibrium and accepts his death. In part, the difference between Enkidu and Gilgamesh is due to differences in range of emotion and relationship to reality: Enkidu's range is much narrower, and he is essentially a pragmatist; Gilgamesh's reaction to the inevitability of death is prodigious.

⁷⁸ Some of my formulations in this paragraph have not been uninfluenced by Whitman's statements regarding Achilles (Whitman [n. 46 above], pp. 181–220).

possible because he is a hero and is part god. Even so, he fails, for there are limits to both his heroic nature and his divine nature, and he must surrender the absolutes of omnipotence and immortality. He accepts a limited existence as the king, builder, and custodian of his city and resigns himself to death.

The original epic deals with the human condition. Gilgamesh the man has learned to die; but this is not enough, for he is also a god and he must learn to die as a god: Gilgamesh the human must die and Gilgamesh the god must become a lord of the netherworld. With the addition of tablet 6, the epic is transformed: from being a work that treats the problem of mortal aging and death—a fate that entered the world after the flood—of a giant and thereby of Everyman, it becomes a work that additionally seeks to define the place of the god Gilgamesh in the cosmic order. In its new form, it prepares the god for his death and sets out his divine role in the netherworld.

Ishtar invites Gilgamesh to become her husband and to take his honored place in the netherworld. Gilgamesh refuses. Far from being a compensation for the loss of eternal life,⁷⁹ the offer of a position in the netherworld heightens the sense of loss and imbues the work more than ever before with a tragic vision. Truly, now Gilgamesh is a tragic figure: he possesses both the nature and powers of a god and might expect to remain in the land of the living; yet now he must also come to terms with the fact that, though he is a god, he cannot enjoy immortality among the gods of the living. He is an immortal, but he is both a man and a god and as such he is destined to die and assume his ordained place in the netherworld. His is the immortality of a god of the netherworld.

Gilgamesh's rejection of Ishtar constitutes an attempt to hold onto his humanity, for by refusing to marry her he tells us that he does not wish to substitute the role of a dead god for that of a live human being; he thinks that he can hold onto life and, at the very least, postpone his death and perhaps even push it off long enough so as to render it no longer inevitable. But his refusal—in this recension—has as one of its consequences the death of Enkidu, for now the gods decide to kill Enkidu “because the Bull of Heaven they have slain and *Huwawa* they have slain.”⁸⁰ Gilgamesh's attempt to remain a man causes the death of Enkidu, which loss then forces Gilgamesh (tablets 8 ff.) to shed his humanity and to try to take on the form of an undying god. But just as

⁷⁹ Contrast Lambert (n. 13 above), p. 51; and Tigay (n. 35 above), p. 35.

⁸⁰ The mention of the slaying of the Bull before the killing of *Huwawa* may be due to the fact that tablet 6 is an interpolation. Possibly the order also suggests that the redactor considered the slaying of the Bull to carry an equal if not greater weight of responsibility for the gods' decision to kill Enkidu.

this form of delusion and apotheosis could not work for Gilgamesh the man, it cannot work for Gilgamesh the god. He returns to his human state and thence accepts the particular divine identity/destiny ordained for him. Gilgamesh the man must die, and Gilgamesh the deity must become a god of the netherworld.

Gilgamesh's fate is to die. He resists his fate in both versions and on both levels of his being: the man Gilgamesh of the earlier version thinks he can become a god and thereby escape death. The god Gilgamesh of the later version thinks he can remain a human and thereby escape death. The conflict has its roots in the notion that Gilgamesh is part god and part man. In the earlier version Gilgamesh cannot accept his humanity and thinks he can be a god—he learns that he cannot be a god and must die as a human being. In the later version, Gilgamesh cannot accept his divinity and thinks he can be a human; he must learn that he is neither a normal human being nor a god whose immortality can be enjoyed among the living. Rather, he is a god who must prepare for death and for his role in the netherworld.

But now the reader of the epic is left to wonder: if in any case Gilgamesh will eventually die, why in tablet 6 is he not allowed to accept Ishtar's offer and proceed to the netherworld, instead of being subjected to both the toil and suffering described in tablets 7–11 and the detailed information about the netherworld in tablet 12? Furthermore, the reader asks, when Gilgamesh does eventually die, will he have forfeited his special place in the netherworld by his initial refusal of Ishtar's proposal, or will some form of the original offer remain in effect?

Obviously Gilgamesh must refuse Ishtar if tablet 6 is to be integrated into the epic and not impede the movement of the work. But this is not a sufficient explanation, for ancient redactors have been known to interpolate episodes that are literary blind alleys. Gilgamesh's refusal does more than just advance the action; as indicated earlier, Gilgamesh must redefine Ishtar's offer so that death takes on more familiar human and social forms. But the refusal serves yet another important purpose. We now recall that Ishtar's proposal to Gilgamesh was an invitation to Gilgamesh to abandon, to renounce, a familiar role and to assume a new role that carried with it new rights and obligations as well as a new relationship to the world and the community.

In order that the passage from one state to the other be successful and that Gilgamesh understand the new norms according to which he will have to live, *there must be both a change of being as well as the acquisition of new knowledge.*⁸¹ Prior to the events precipitated by the

⁸¹ For this aspect of rites of passage, cf. Turner (n. 41 above), pp. 93–111; and A. F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York, 1966), pp. 127–30.

death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh was neither prepared nor qualified to undertake his new office in the netherworld, the office of instructor and counsellor of the dead and arbitrator and administrator of the netherworld.⁸² He was not yet ready to make a wholehearted commitment to his new role. Death would have left him feeling constrained and distraught, and he would have sought ways to leave the netherworld; certainly if his own initiation were not complete he would not be able to initiate and guide the newly dead. First, Gilgamesh must undergo the series of experiences recounted in tablets 7–11 in order to be able to accept his own death; only then can he help the dying accept their own deaths. Only after he has been transformed, has undergone a change of being, will Gilgamesh be prepared to accept the offer of a role in the netherworld.

Thus far we have witnessed a change of being in Gilgamesh, but we recall that a rite of passage possesses “in addition to the separation-transition-incorporation form . . . another formal property: a combination of instruction and executive command. The rite of passage includes both some statement, or reminder, of how to play the expected role, and then a directive to commence its performance.”⁸³ This brings us to tablet 12.

Gilgamesh's acceptance of a limited human life is suggested by his experiences in tablet 11 and is expressed clearly in his statement of pride in the construction and compass of Uruk (tablet 11, lines 302 ff.). Of course the acceptance of death is implied in tablet 11. But the more overt acceptance of death and of the role of administrator of the netherworld finds expression only in tablet 12. It is well known that tablet 12 is a late addition to the epic, and that the manner of its addition is mechanical. Here we must emphasize, therefore, that tablet 12 was not added simply because the epic dealt with death and a late editor wished to append and preserve one more Gilgamesh text regarding death. The addition is purposeful and speaks to the heart of the late recension; as such, an organic connection exists between tablets 1–11 and 12.⁸⁴ The addition of tablet 12, while probably not

⁸² For Gilgamesh in this role, cf., e.g., Kramer, “The Death of Ur-Nammu . . .” (n. 23 above), pp. 114–15, lines 94, 142–43; and M. E. Cohen, “Another Utu Hymn,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 67 (1977): 14, line 77. Also see n. 13 above.

⁸³ Wallace, p. 130.

⁸⁴ For a similar opinion, see Tigay (n. 35 above), pp. 106–7; and Levy (n. 47 above), pp. 141–42. After completing this paper, I was pleased to notice that A. Draffkorn Kilmer, “A Note on an Overlooked Word-Play in the Akkadian Gilgamesh,” in *Zikir Šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. G. van Driel et al. (Leiden, 1982), pp. 130–31, has also come to the conclusion that tablet 12 is not simply a mechanical addition, but serves a special function.

coterminous with the insertion of tablet 6, is bound up with and is a consequence of the new configuration created by the inclusion of tablet 6.⁸⁵

Tablet 12 presents a vision of the netherworld and of the shades of the dead. Instruction is one of the main functions of this vision. To be sure, it is true that a vision of the netherworld already appeared in tablet 7, but the two are different and do not serve quite the same purposes.⁸⁶ In tablet 7, column 4, Enkidu's vision of the netherworld provides a clear indication (as do so many of Enkidu's dreams) of what is happening: for Enkidu and Gilgamesh, it announces the death of

⁸⁵ Tablet 12 (for this designation, see the two colophons in Thompson [n. 2 above], pl. 58) contains an Akkadian translation of the latter part of *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* (hereafter *GEN*) (see A. Shaffer, *Sumerian Sources of Tablet XII of the Epic of Gilgamesh* [Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1963]). This tablet begins in the middle of Gilgamesh's plaint over the loss of his *pukku* and *mekku*. Beginning tablet 12 in the middle of this speech creates an impression of clumsy and insensitive redaction, an impression that may have to be modified somewhat in light of A. Draffkorn Kilmer's suggestion (p. 130) that "the redactor of the canonical version has pulled together the preceding eleven tablets by adding the *pukku/mekku* story, Tab. XII, as a kind of inclusio." Especially in view of the way tablet 12 begins, I find W. G. Lambert's suggestion (personal communication, 1984) that our tablet 12 might represent the second tablet of a two-tablet version of *GEN* not unattractive. However, this suggestion does not warrant the conclusion that the editor who added this second tablet did not possess the first tablet and simply wished to preserve the stray second tablet. I would argue, to the contrary, that the redactor chose to ignore the first tablet and to incorporate only the material of the second tablet. In view of the fact that tablet 12 parallels parts of tablet 7, it is surely not a coincidence that tablet 12 derives from an account (*GEN*) that contains a preceding section that parallels parts of our tablet 6. Both *GEN* and *GE* tablets 6–7 have accounts of an interaction between Gilgamesh and Ishtar followed by Enkidu's rash behavior, his vision of the netherworld, and his death. But whereas animosity and conflict characterize the relationship between Gilgamesh and Ishtar in tablet 6, the relationship of Gilgamesh and the goddess in *GEN* is supportive and sympathetic. *GE* tablet 6 and the Inanna-Gilgamesh episode of *GEN* are mutually exclusive, and the redactor of the twelve-tablet version suppressed the beginning of *GEN* perhaps because it was superfluous, but mainly because it contained a positive rather than a negative account of the relationship of Gilgamesh and Ishtar. By adding tablet 12, the redactor has superimposed the new configuration: tablets 6 + 12 (which now supersedes tablets 6 + 7). In any case, the fact that the description in tablet 12 of Enkidu's descent to the netherworld and subsequent report to Gilgamesh is drawn verbatim from a composition in which these events follow upon an interaction between Gilgamesh and Ishtar tends to support my impression that the redactor intended the reader to associate the events of tablets 12 and 6 (and surely, then, Enkidu's instruction of Gilgamesh about the netherworld in tablet 12 supports our interpretation of tablet 6 as a proposal that Gilgamesh enter the netherworld).

⁸⁶ Here I would note that such visions serve various purposes. For one, they help the living to accept the death of those whom they love. They allow the mourner to recall the departed and to realize that the relationship with those who have died is not sundered so long as the survivor can conjure up images of the departed and the feelings associated therewith; at the same time, the vision informs the living that those who have died belong to an absolutely different realm and must be given up. For another, visualizing a concrete destination may help those in the process of dying to accept their end.

Enkidu. It also contains a further message for Gilgamesh. The vision in tablet 7 focuses on the presence in the netherworld of princes and priests. At this point in the work Gilgamesh has attained the heights of heroism, kingship, and public acclaim and defines his identity in social terms. The vision informs Gilgamesh that even those who exercise power and privilege must die. This is a message of supreme importance for Gilgamesh the man; it contains nothing for Gilgamesh the god. In tablet 12, on the other hand, Enkidu's report of what he saw in the netherworld centers on the fate of ordinary men. And this difference is accentuated by the fact that tablet 12 occurs in a work that now includes and revolves around tablet 6 and the account of Gilgamesh's struggle to accept the cosmic role of lord of the dead. Tablet 12 has much to say to and about Gilgamesh the god; for the sake of these messages tablet 12 was added to the epic.

Tablet 12 gives the signal that Gilgamesh has accepted the inevitability of even his own death, for he insists on knowing the order of the netherworld (tablet 12, lines 86 ff.), and Enkidu tells of the death and afterlife of all who have lived. Moreover, by providing a description of the rules that obtain in the netherworld, the text indicates that Gilgamesh is readying himself to assume the divine infernal roles and responsibilities that had been offered him in tablet 6 and that, in spite of his earlier refusal, he has not lost the opportunity; Ishtar's offer stands, albeit in the new social form that Gilgamesh has imposed upon it: the office is reserved for Gilgamesh, and he may accept it whenever he goes to his own death. The recital confirms Gilgamesh in the role of administrator of the netherworld.

But most important of all is the instructional value of Enkidu's report. The essence of Enkidu's message is not a vision of glory or dread but, rather, a simple description of the norms and procedures that govern life in the netherworld. These are the rules that Gilgamesh will be obliged to administer; only when he has been initiated into and mastered the ways of the netherworld will he be able to initiate the dead in their new stations and guide them in the ways of the netherworld.

Tablet 12 was added, then, to express the notion that all who live must die, to reinforce Gilgamesh's acceptance of death, to proclaim that he will serve as a lord of the netherworld, and to communicate to him the rules of the netherworld. Now we finally have renunciation and assumption. To become lord of the netherworld Gilgamesh must undergo a transformation: a change of being and the acquisition of knowledge. When Ishtar proposed to him in tablet 6, he had not yet grown nor been initiated; he was not ready to pass from the living to

the dead. Gilgamesh underwent the spiritual transformation in tablets 7–11; in tablet 12 he acquired knowledge.

In the earlier epic, it was sufficient for the man Gilgamesh to accept limited human life and the inevitability of human death. In the new recension and construction created by the addition of tablet 6, the god Gilgamesh must undergo a transformation of state and incorporate the knowledge appropriate to his new state in order to become the ruler of the netherworld. Tablet 12 informs us that his transformation and transition are complete.

* * *

There are many ironies in the epic. The final irony—and the message of the work—is implicit in the rules and the objects of the rules that dominate Enkidu's recitation in tablet 12 and form the core of knowledge that Gilgamesh must master. On the whole, the characters who dominate Enkidu's vision are not heroes but ordinary men, and it is their everyday deeds that determine their place in the netherworld. Gilgamesh's discovery that the treatment of men in the netherworld depends on ordinary deeds must surely remind the god Gilgamesh of Gilgamesh the man; it recalls Siduri's advice to Gilgamesh: joy and meaning are to be found in the simple pleasures of life. So Gilgamesh the god learns what Gilgamesh the man already knows: Gilgamesh must reconcile himself to and live with his basic humanity in order to be a man in this world and a god in the next.

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