

Give me the water that is gone
so that I may say to myself: "my body is not far from water."³
Set my face to the north wind,
at the edge of the water. 35
Perhaps then my heart will be assuaged in its suffering.

As for death, "Come" is his name:⁴
everyone whom he summons, they come to him at once,
their hearts terror-struck in fear of him. 40
No one looks toward him among gods and humans;
the great ones among them like the small.

His finger is not repulsed from anyone he wishes to touch.
He snatches the son from his mother,
while the old man wanders in his path. 45
All the fearful plead before him;⁵
he does not turn his face to them; he does not come to the
one who beseeches him.

He does not listen to the one who extols him;
he does not look at the one who gives to him
gifts of all sorts. 50

Oh all who reach this desert place,⁶ be fearful for me,
burn incense for me on the flame,
make libations at every festival of the West.

The scribe, one who makes live,⁷ wise man,
keeper of secrets in the house of gold and in Tjenenet,⁸ 55
the priest Harimhotep,
son of the priest Khaihap, true of voice,
born of Herankh.

3. Taimhotep imagines the effect of receiving a libation in the next world—a theme to which she returns—while also evoking an ideal location where there is both water and the coveted north wind, which brings cool air and makes the heat bearable. Scenes where the deceased receive libations by pools are common in the decoration of tombs and stelae.

4. Death is imagined as a malicious demon. This idea is known also from images.

5. Death is like a god who would hear prayers, but he does not heed them.

6. People were expected to visit the tombs of

their relatives and might also perform offering formulas at other tombs. Taimhotep addresses passersby in the necropolis. Making libations is the core ritual act that will guarantee water to the deceased.

7. This is a title of a sculptor. The last lines identify the person who made the stela and perhaps composed its text. He was a kinsman of Taimhotep.

8. The "house of gold" was a treasury and craft workshop attached to temples. Tjenenet was an ancient temple in Memphis.

THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

ca. 1900–250 B.C.E.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the greatest work of ancient Mesopotamia and one of the earliest pieces of world literature. The story of its main protagonist, King Gilgamesh, and his quest for immortality touches on the most fundamental questions of what it means to be human: death and friendship, nature and civilization, power and violence, travel adventures and homecoming, love and sexuality. Because of the appeal of its central hero and his struggle with the meaning of culture in the face of human mortality, the epic spread throughout the ancient Near East and was translated into various regional languages during the second millennium B.C.E. As far as we know, no other literary work of the ancient world spread so widely across cultures and languages. And yet, after a long period of popularity, *Gilgamesh* was forgotten, seemingly for good: after circulating in various versions for many centuries, it vanished from human memory for over two thousand years. Its rediscovery by archeologists in the nineteenth century was a sensation and allows us to read a story that for many centuries was known to many cultures and people throughout the Near East but has come down to us today only by chance on brittle clay tablets.

KING GILGAMESH AND HIS STORY

Gilgamesh was thought to be a priest-king of the city-state of Uruk in Southern Mesopotamia, the lands around the rivers Euphrates and Tigris in modern-day Iraq. He probably ruled around 2700 B.C.E. and was remembered for the building of Uruk's monumental

city walls, which were ten kilometers long and fitted with nine hundred towers; portions of these walls are still visible today. We will never know for sure how the historical king compares to the epic hero Gilgamesh. But soon after his death, he was venerated as a great king and judge of the Underworld. In the epic he appears as "two-thirds divine and one-third human," the offspring of Ninsun, a goddess in the shape of a wild cow, and of a human father named Lugalbanda. By some accounts, *Gilgamesh* means "the offspring is a hero," or, according to another etymology, "the old man is still a young man."

Gilgamesh was not written by one specific author but evolved gradually over the long span of a millennium. The earliest story of Gilgamesh appears around 2100 B.C.E. in a cycle of poems in the Sumerian language. Sumerian is the earliest Mesopotamian language. It is written in "cuneiform" script—wedge-shaped characters incised in clay or stone—and has no connection to any other known language. About six hundred years after Gilgamesh's death, kings of the third dynasty of Ur, another Mesopotamian city-state, claimed descent from the legendary king of Uruk and enjoyed hearing of the great deeds of Gilgamesh at court; the earliest cycle of Gilgamesh poems was written for these rulers. As in the later epic, in the Sumerian cycle of poems Gilgamesh is a powerful king and an awe-inspiring warrior. Gilgamesh's shattering realization that he will die and can attain immortality only by making a name for himself appears

already in this earliest version of the Gilgamesh story, where he exclaims:

I have peered over the city wall,
I have seen the corpses floating in
the river's water.
So too it will come to pass for me,
so it will happen to me . . .
Since no man can avoid life's end,
I would enter the mountain land
and set up my name.

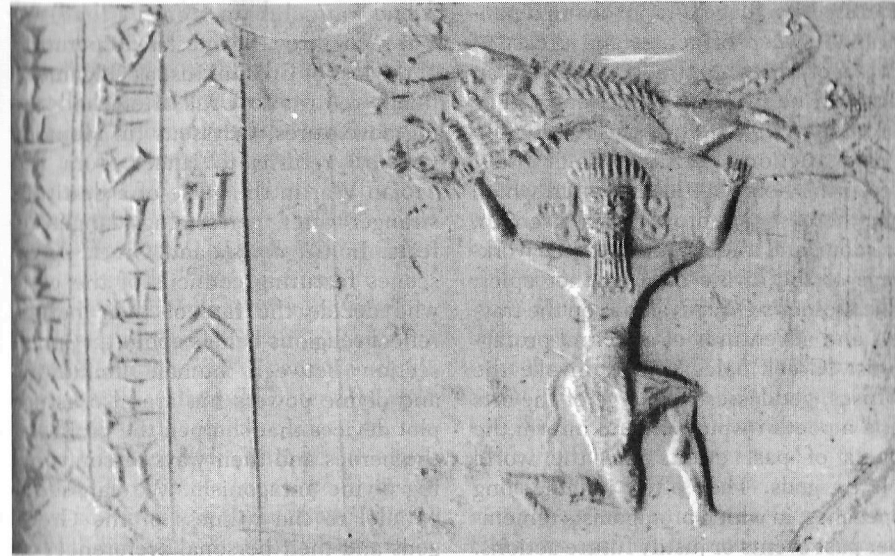
The Sumerian poetry cycle became the basis for the old version of *Gilgamesh*, written in Babylonian, a variant of the Akkadian language—a transnational written language that was widely used throughout the Ancient Near East. The traditional Babylonian epic version of *Gilgamesh*, which adapted the Sumerian poems into a connected narrative, circulated for more than fifteen hundred years. It was read widely from Mesopotamia to Syria, the Levant, and Anatolia and was translated into non-Mesopotamian languages such as Hittite, the language of an empire that controlled Turkey and Northern Syria in the latter half of the second millennium B.C.E.

The definitive revision of the epic is attributed to a Babylonian priest and scholar named Sin-leqi-unninni. He lived around 1200 B.C.E., and by his time King Gilgamesh had been dead for about fifteen hundred years. He carefully selected elements from the older traditions, inserted new plot elements, and added a preface to the epic. His version, included here in translation, is divided into eleven chapters recorded on eleven clay tablets. New fragments of *Gilgamesh* continue to surface from archaeological excavations; some pieces are still missing, and some passages are fragmentary and barely legible, but thanks to the painstaking work of scholars of Ancient Mesopotamia we can today read an extended, gripping narrative.

THE WORLD'S OLDEST EPIC HERO

The Gilgamesh of the epic is an awe-inspiring, sparkling hero, but at first also the epitome of a bad ruler: arrogant, oppressive, and brutal. As the epic begins, the people of Uruk complain to the Sumerian gods about Gilgamesh's overbearing behavior, and so the gods create the wild man Enkidu to confront Gilgamesh. While Gilgamesh is a mixture of human and divine, Enkidu is a blend of human and wild animal, though godlike in his own way. He is raised by beasts in the wilderness and eats what they eat. When he breaks hunters' traps for the sake of his animal companions he becomes a threat to human society and Gilgamesh decides to tame him with the attractions of urban life and civilization: for seven days Enkidu makes love to a harlot (prostitute), sent out for the purpose, and at her urging he takes a cleansing bath and accepts clothing and a first meal of basic human food-stuff, bread, and beer. Shamhat, the prostitute, leads him to the city of Uruk. Although he and Gilgamesh are at first bent on competing with each other, they quickly develop a deep bond of friendship.

Their friendship established, Gilgamesh proposes to Enkidu the first of their epic adventures: to travel to the great Cedar Forest and slay the giant Humbaba, who guards the forest for the harsh god Enlil. With the blessing of the sun god Shamash they succeed, and they cut down some magnificent trees that they float down the Euphrates River to Mesopotamia. But their violent act has its consequence: the dying giant curses them and Enlil is enraged. Their second adventure leads to a yet more ambiguous success, which will set in motion the tragic end of their friendship. Gilgamesh, cleansed from battle and radiant in victory, attracts the desire of Ishtar, goddess of love and warfare. Instead of politely



This modern impression of an ancient cylinder seal shows a bearded hero, kneeling and raising an outstretched lion above his head.

resisting her advances, Gilgamesh makes the fatal error of chiding her for her fickle passions and known cruelty toward her lovers, and heaps insults on the goddess. Scandalized by Gilgamesh's accusations, she unleashes the Bull of Heaven against the two friends, and it wreaks havoc in Uruk. After the heroic duo kills the Bull of Heaven, a council of the gods convenes to avoid further disaster. The gods decide that Gilgamesh and Enkidu have gone too far; one of them must die. The lot falls to Enkidu, because Gilgamesh is the king.

Enkidu's death brings Gilgamesh face to face with mortality. He mourns for Enkidu bitterly for seven days and nights and only when a worm creeps out of the corpse's nose does he accept that his friend is dead. Terrified that he too will die, Gilgamesh forsakes the civilized world to find the one human being known to have achieved immortality: Utanapishtim, survivor of the Great Flood. Like Enkidu in his days as a wild man, Gilgamesh roams the steppe, disheveled and clad in a lion-skin, and sets out on a quest to ask

Utanapishtim for the secret of eternal life. He braves monsters, runs along the sun's path under the earth at night, encounters a mysterious woman who keeps a tavern at the edge of the world, passes a garden of jeweled trees, crosses the waters of death, and finally arrives at the doorstep of Utanapishtim and his wife. Utanapishtim's dramatic account of their experience and survival of the flood resembles the biblical story of Noah and the Great Flood in Genesis. At his wife's request, Utanapishtim gives Gilgamesh the chance to attain immortality by eating a magic plant, but he is afraid to try it and a serpent steals the magic plant and gains the power of immortality for itself. In the end Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, empty-handed. Although in the final moments of the epic he proudly surveys the mighty city walls of his making, he is a profoundly changed man.

AN ANCIENT EPIC

The word *epic* is originally Greek and refers to a long poem narrating important historical or cosmic events in

elevated language and involving a panoramic sweep of action and a cast of protagonists who straddle the human and divine worlds. Some epics, like *Homer's Iliad*, tell of the foundation or destruction of civilizations or cities, featuring noisy battle scenes, in which the heroes can prove their strength, wisdom, and understanding of the workings of the divine order. Other epics, like *Homer's Odyssey*, focus on the travels and adventures of a central protagonist. Greek epics usually invoke the Muses, goddesses in charge of the arts and a poet's inspiration and inform the poets of past events and the world of the gods. They often include long speeches, in which protagonists remember past events or justify future actions. And they rely heavily on the repetition of lines with variation and on a rhetoric of parallels and contrasts. Scholars of Homeric epic have argued that repetition and formulaic expression helped the bards to remember and recite extensive storylines and point to the poems' oral and performative roots.

Gilgamesh shares a few fundamental features with Greek epic. True, there was no concept in Mesopotamia corresponding to the Western literary genre "epic," and *Gilgamesh* has no equivalent to the strict hexameter of Greek epic. A verse line in *Gilgamesh* is not defined by a fixed number of syllables or stresses but varies in length, which can only be inferred by context, such as patterns of parallelism. Still, in contrast to the literary works of other civilizations of the ancient world that had no epic, like China and East Asia, *Gilgamesh* can be considered part of a larger Near Eastern and Mediterranean epic tradition. Although *Gilgamesh* was only translated into cuneiform languages and never directly entered the epic repertoire of alphabet languages like Greek, it shared with the Greek tradition a number of classically epic motifs. In Achilles' mourning for his

friend Patroclus (in *Homer's Iliad*) we can recognize Gilgamesh's desperation at the loss of Enkidu. Just as Gilgamesh finally returns to Uruk after challenging adventures, Odysseus (in *Homer's Odyssey*) returns to Ithaca from the Trojan War in the guise of a destitute stranger after performing dangerous feats. In *Gilgamesh* and Greek epics, scenes featuring councils of the gods who decide the fate of their heroes reflect religious beliefs about the intersection between human limitations and divine powers but are also astute plot devices that sharpen the profile of the heroes and their ways of confronting divine antagonism. We can see a parallel to the wiliness of the Greek gods and their personal preferences in the opposition of Shamash and Enlil, in particular in Enlil's argument that Enkidu should be sacrificed and Gilgamesh spared.

In contrast to the orally rooted Homeric epic, *Gilgamesh* was from the outset conceived as a literary work. With its elevated style, geometrically parallel phrases, and moments of complex word play, *Gilgamesh* was addressed to the sophisticated ears and minds of scholars and members of the royal court. We know that it was used in Babylonian schools to teach literature. This hypothesis is further supported when we look at the nuanced use of speech registers in the epic's portrayal of its protagonists. Utanapishtim speaks in an obscure archaic style that befits a sage from before the Great Flood, and he has a solemn way of rolling and doubling his consonants. The goddess Ishtar appears in an unfavorable light, talking like a low-class streetwalker. In contrast, Shamhat, the prostitute who brings Enkidu to the city, speaks with unexpected eloquence and distinction.

Shamhat is a thought-provoking example of the several powerful female protagonists in *Gilgamesh*. Much of what Gilgamesh accomplishes is ultimately

due to women: his mother's pleas with the sun god Shamash allow him to kill Humbaba; the wife of the scorpion monster persuades her husband to give Gilgamesh entrance to the tunnel leading to the jeweled garden; and the mysterious woman he finds at the end of the world, the tavern keeper Siduri, helps him find Utanapishtim, whose wife persuades her husband to give Gilgamesh the plant of rejuvenation. In some of Gilgamesh's encounters there are touches of wit and parody. It is stunning to find this blend of epic grandeur and comic sobriety in the world's earliest epic. Part of the epic's subtlety is invisible today, because we know so much less about the historical and literary context of *Gilgamesh* than we know about the context of Greek epic. Still, the glimpses we get show the sophistication of the early Mesopotamian states and the art of literary narrative they developed.

Like Mesopotamian civilization and its cuneiform writing system, *Gilgamesh* eventually disappeared. In the seventh century B.C.E., when an invading force of ancient Iranian people called Medians sacked Nineveh, one of the capitals of the Assyrian Empire, copies of the epic written on clay tablets, which had been preserved in the palace library of Ashurbanipal, the last great Assyrian king (reigned 668–627 B.C.E.), vanished in the destruction. Although the epic did not disappear

completely and still circulated until the third century B.C.E., it was only rediscovered in the 1850s, when an English explorer, Austen Henry Layard, dug up thousands of tablets from the site at Nineveh. They were later deciphered at the British Museum in London, and when the young curator George Smith made the stunning discovery that this epic contained a version of the biblical story of the flood, which had hitherto been considered unique to the book of Genesis, this challenged conceptions about the origin of biblical narrative. *Gilgamesh* was suddenly propelled into the canon of world literature.

The Epic of Gilgamesh took shape many centuries before the Greeks and Hebrews learned how to write, and it circulated in the Near East and Levant long before the book of Genesis and the Homeric epics took shape. The rediscovery of the names of the gods and humans who people the epic and of the history of the cities and lands in which they lived is a gradual, ongoing process. And the meaning of the epic itself is tantalizingly ambiguous. Has Gilgamesh succeeded or failed in his quest? What makes us human? Can civilization bring immortality? Whatever we decide to believe, the story of Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu, of their quest for fame and immortality, speaks to contemporary readers with an urgency and immediacy that makes us forget just how ancient it is.

The Epic of Gilgamesh¹

Tablet I

He who saw the wellspring, the foundations of the land,
Who knew the ways, was wise in all things,
Gilgamesh, who saw the wellspring, the foundations of the land,
He knew the ways, was wise in all things,
He it was who inspected holy places everywhere,

1. Translated by and with footnotes adapted from Benjamin R. Foster.

Full understanding of it all he gained,
 He saw what was secret and revealed what was hidden,
 He brought back tidings from before the flood,
 From a distant journey came home, weary, at peace,
 Engraved all his hardships on a monument of stone,
 He built the walls of ramparted Uruk,²
 The lustrous treasury of hallowed Eanna!
 See its upper wall, whose facing gleams like copper,
 Gaze at the lower course, which nothing will equal,
 Mount the stone stairway, there from days of old,
 Approach Eanna, the dwelling of Ishtar,
 Which no future king, no human being will equal.
 Go up, pace out the walls of Uruk,
 Study the foundation terrace and examine the brickwork.
 Is not its masonry of kiln-fired brick?
 And did not seven masters lay its foundations?
 One square mile of city, one square mile of gardens,
 One square mile of clay pits, a half square mile of Ishtar's dwelling,
 Three and a half square miles is the measure of Uruk!
 Search out the foundation box of copper,
 Release its lock of bronze,
 Raise the lid upon its hidden contents,
 Take up and read from the lapis tablet
 Of him, Gilgamesh, who underwent many hardships.
 Surpassing all kings, for his stature renowned,
 Heroic offspring of Uruk, a charging wild bull,
 He leads the way in the vanguard,
 He marches at the rear, defender of his comrades.
 Mighty floodwall, protector of his troops,
 Furious flood-wave smashing walls of stone,
 Wild calf of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh is perfect in strength,
 Suckling of the sublime wild cow, the woman Ninsun,³
 Towering Gilgamesh is uncannily perfect.
 Opening passes in the mountains,
 Digging wells at the highlands' verge,
 Traversing the ocean, the vast sea, to the sun's rising,
 Exploring the furthest reaches of the earth,
 Seeking everywhere for eternal life,
 Reaching in his might Utanapishtim the Distant One,
 Restorer of holy places that the deluge had destroyed,
 Founder of rites for the teeming peoples,
 Who could be his like for kingly virtue?
 And who, like Gilgamesh, can proclaim, "I am king!"
 Gilgamesh was singled out from the day of his birth,
 Two-thirds of him was divine, one-third of him was human!

2. City-state ruled by King Gilgamesh. It was the largest city of Mesopotamia at the time and among its important temples featured Eanna, a sanctuary for the goddess of love and

warfare, Ishtar.

3. Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh's father, was an earlier king of Uruk. His mother was Ninsun, a goddess called "the wild cow."

The Lady of Birth drew his body's image,
 The God of Wisdom brought his stature to perfection.

He was perfection in height,
 Ideally handsome

In the enclosure of Uruk he strode back and forth,
 Lording it like a wild bull, his head thrust high.
 The onslaught of his weapons had no equal.
 His teammates stood forth by his game stick,
 He was harrying the young men of Uruk beyond reason.
 Gilgamesh would leave no son to his father,
 Day and night he would rampage fiercely.
 This was the shepherd of ramparted Uruk,
 This was the people's shepherd,
 Bold, superb, accomplished, and mature!
 Gilgamesh would leave no girl to her mother!
 The warrior's daughter, the young man's spouse,
 Goddesses kept hearing their plaints.
 The gods of heaven, the lords who command,
 Said to Anu:⁴

You created this headstrong wild bull in ramparted Uruk,
 The onslaught of his weapons has no equal.
 His teammates stand forth by his game stick,
 He is harrying the young men of Uruk beyond reason.
 Gilgamesh leaves no son to his father!
 Day and night he rampages fiercely.
 This is the shepherd of ramparted Uruk,
 This is the people's shepherd,
 Bold, superb, accomplished, and mature!
 Gilgamesh leaves no girl to her mother!

The warrior's daughter, the young man's spouse,
 Anu kept hearing their plaints.

[Anu speaks.]

Let them summon Aruru,⁵ the great one,
 She created the boundless human race.
 Let her create a partner for Gilgamesh, mighty in strength,
 Let them contend with each other, that Uruk may have peace.

They summoned the birth goddess, Aruru:

You, Aruru, created the boundless human race,
 Now, create what Anu commanded,

4. The sky god who is supreme in the pantheon but remote from human affairs. Uruk was known for its temples for Anu and Ishtar.

5. Goddess of birth.

To his stormy heart, let that one be equal,
Let them contend with each other, that Uruk may have peace.

When Aruru heard this,
She conceived within her what Anu commanded.
Aruru wet her hands,
She pinched off clay, she tossed it upon the steppe,
She created valiant Enkidu in the steppe,
Offspring of potter's clay, with the force of the hero Ninurta.⁶
Shaggy with hair was his whole body,
He was made lush with head hair, like a woman,
The locks of his hair grew thick as a grainfield.
He knew neither people nor inhabited land,
He dressed as animals do.
He fed on grass with gazelles,
With beasts he jostled at the water hole,
With wildlife he drank his fill of water.

A hunter, a trapping-man,
Encountered him at the edge of the water hole.
One day, a second, and a third he encountered him at the edge
of the water hole.

When he saw him, the hunter stood stock-still with terror,
As for Enkidu, he went home with his beasts.
Aghast, struck dumb,
His heart in a turmoil, his face drawn,
With woe in his vitals,
His face like a traveler's from afar,
The hunter made ready to speak, saying to his father:

My father, there is a certain fellow who has come
from the uplands,
He is the mightiest in the land, strength is his,
Like the force of heaven, so mighty is his strength.
He constantly ranges over the uplands,
Constantly feeding on grass with beasts,
Constantly making his way to the edge of the water hole.
I am too frightened to approach him.
He has filled in the pits I dug,
He has torn out my traps I set,
He has helped the beasts, wildlife of the steppe, slip
from my hands,
He will not let me work the steppe.

His father made ready to speak, saying to the hunter:

My son, in Uruk dwells Gilgamesh,
There is no one more mighty than he.
Like the force of heaven, so mighty is his strength.

6. A god of agriculture and war. Son of Enlil.

Take the road, set off towards Uruk,
Tell Gilgamesh of the mightiness-man,
He will give you Shamhat the harlot, take her with you,
Let her prevail over him, instead of a mighty man.
When the wild beasts draw near the water hole,
Let her strip off her clothing, laying bare her charms.
When he sees her, he will approach her.
His beasts that grew up with him on the steppe will deny him.

Giving heed to the advice of his father,
The hunter went forth.
He took the road, set off towards Uruk,
To the king, Gilgamesh, he said these words:

There is a certain fellow who has come from the uplands,
He is mightiest in the land, strength is his,
Like the force of heaven, so mighty is his strength.
He constantly ranges over the uplands,
Constantly feeding on grass with his beasts,
Constantly making his way to the edge of the water hole.
I am too frightened to approach him.
He has filled in the pits I dug,
He has torn out my traps I set,
He has helped the beasts, wildlife of the steppe, slip
from my hands,
He will not allow me to work the steppe.

Gilgamesh said to him, to the hunter:

Go, hunter, take with you Shamhat the harlot,
When the wild beasts draw near the water hole,
Let her strip off her clothing, laying bare her charms,
When he sees her, he will approach her,
His beasts that grew up with him on the steppe will deny him.

Forth went the hunter, taking with him Shamhat the harlot,
They took the road, going straight on their way.
On the third day they arrived at the appointed place.
Hunter and harlot sat down to wait.
One day, a second day, they sat by the edge of the water hole,
The beasts came to the water hole to drink,
The wildlife came to drink their fill of water.
But as for him, Enkidu, born in the uplands,
Who feeds on grass with gazelles,
Who drinks at the water hole with beasts,
Who, with wildlife, drinks his fill of water,
Shamhat looked upon him, a human-man,
A barbarous fellow from the midst of the steppe:

There he is, Shamhat, open your embrace,
Open your embrace, let him take your charms!

Be not bashful, take his vitality!
 When he sees you, he will approach you,
 Toss aside your clothing, let him lie upon you,
 Treat him, a human, to woman's work!
 His wild beasts that grew up with him will deny him,
 As in his ardor he caresses you!

Shamhat loosened her garments,
 She exposed her loins, he took her charms.
 She was not bashful, she took his vitality.
 She tossed aside her clothing and he lay upon her,
 She treated him, a human, to woman's work,
 As in his ardor he caressed her.

Six days, seven nights was Enkidu aroused, flowing into Shamhat.
 After he had his fill of her delights,
 He set off towards his beasts.
 When they saw him, Enkidu, the gazelles shied off,
 The wild beasts of the steppe shunned his person.
 Enkidu had spent himself, his body was limp,
 His knees stood still, while his beasts went away.
 Enkidu was too slow, he could not run as before,
 But he had gained reason and expanded his understanding.

He returned, he sat at the harlot's feet,
 The harlot gazed upon his face,
 While he listened to what the harlot was saying.
 The harlot said to him, to Enkidu:

 You are handsome, Enkidu, you are become like a god,
 Why roam the steppe with wild beasts?
 Come, let me lead you to ramparted Uruk,
 To the holy temple, abode of Anu and Ishtar,
 The place of Gilgamesh, who is perfect in strength,
 And so, like a wild bull, he lords it over the young men.

As she was speaking to him, her words found favor,
 He was yearning for one to know his heart, a friend.
 Enkidu said to her, to the harlot:

 Come, Shamhat, escort me
 To the lustrous hallowed temple, abode of Anu and Ishtar,
 The place of Gilgamesh, who is perfect in strength,
 And so, like a wild bull, he lords it over the young men.
 I myself will challenge him, I will speak out boldly,
 I will raise a cry in Uruk: I am the mighty one!
 I am come forward to alter destinies!
 He who was born in the steppe is mighty, strength is his!

[*Shamhat speaks.*]

 Come then, let him see your face,
 I will show you Gilgamesh, where he is I know full well.

 Come then, Enkidu, to ramparted Uruk,
 Where fellows are resplendent in holiday clothing,
 Where every day is set for celebration,
 Where harps and drums are played.
 And the harlots too, they are fairest of form,
 Rich in beauty, full of delights,
 Even the great gods are kept from sleeping at night!
 Enkidu, you who have not learned to live,
 Oh, let me show you Gilgamesh, the joy-woe man.
 Look at him, gaze upon his face,
 He is radiant with virility, manly vigor is his,
 The whole of his body is seductively gorgeous.
 Mightier strength has he than you,
 Never resting by day or night.
 O Enkidu, renounce your audacity!
 Gilgamesh is beloved of Shamash,
 Anu, Enlil, and Ea broadened his wisdom.⁷
 Ere you come down from the uplands,
 Gilgamesh will dream of you in Uruk.

[*The scene shifts to Uruk.*]

Gilgamesh went to relate the dreams, saying to his mother:

 Mother, I had a dream last night:
 There were stars of heaven around me,
 Like the force of heaven, something kept falling upon me!
 I tried to carry it but it was too strong for me,
 I tried to move it but I could not budge it.
 The whole of Uruk was standing by it,
 The people formed a crowd around it,
 A throng was jostling towards it,
 Young men were mobbed around it,
 Infantile, they were groveling before it!
 [I fell in love with it], like a woman I caressed it,
 I carried it off and laid it down before you,
 Then you were making it my partner.

The mother of Gilgamesh, knowing and wise,
 Who understands everything, said to her son,
 Ninsun the wild cow, knowing and wise,
 Who understands everything, said to Gilgamesh:

 The stars of heaven around you,
 Like the force of heaven, what kept falling upon you,
 Your trying to move it but not being able to budge it,
 Your laying it down before me,
 Then my making it your partner,
 Your falling in love with it, your caressing it like a woman,

7. Shamash was god of the sun and of oracles, overseeing matters of justice and right dealing; Enlil was supreme god on earth; Ea, a god of wisdom and magic, is known for his beneficence to the human race.