UNDERSTANDING GILGAMESH:

HIS WORLD AND HIS STORY

by

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SUMMARY

Understanding Gilgamesh – brokenly – is to understand life brokenly. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is the narrative of life. It records the full cycle of the nerve and aplomb of youth, of the doubt and crisis of midlife, of the acceptance and quiescience of maturity. Moreover, this understanding is a broken understanding. It starts with the clay tablets that are broken in a literal sense of the word. Further, the narrative is a narrative of broken-ness – the story ends in tears. A man has lost his last chance of obtaining life everlasting. Yet he manages to recuperate despite his failure.

The first part of this thesis examined the *world of Gilgamesh.* Initially he was known as the Sumerian king Bilgames. He makes his appearance in the form of oral compositions that are recited or sung in the royal courts of kings during the Sumerian period: sheer entertainment, nothing really serious. At his side is his loyal servant Enkidu who supports his master in everything he does.

Akkadian gradually ousts Sumerian as vernacular, yet the latter continues to dominate as the language of culture and court. Bilgames survives the reign of the Sargonic dynasty, and even revives during the glorious Ur III period of Shulgi and of Ur-Nammu. Sumerian Bilgames-poems are recorded in writing.

However, by the time that Hammurapi draws up his legal codex, the Sumerian Bilgames is known as the vibrant Akkadian king Gilgamesh. His servant Enkidu is elevated to the status of friend. Together they defy men, gods, monsters. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh goes even further in search of life everlasting. He reaches Uta-napishtim the Distant in order to learn the secret of eternal life.

The optimism of the Old Babylonian Kingdom is replaced by the reflection and introspection of the Middle period. Life is difficult. Life is complex. The *Gilgamesh Epic* is once again re-interpreted and supplemented by a prologue and an epilogue: both begin and end at the same place, at the walls of Uruk. Here Gilgamesh looks back and forward to his life and contemplates about the meaning of life in general.

The second part of this thesis dealt more specifically with the *story* – the literary aspects of the *Epic.* Genette's theory illuminated several interesting literary devices with regards to the rhythm and pace of the narrative. However, much of the reflective nature of the *Epic* was also revealed. There were moments of *looking forward,* and *looking backward*: after Gilgamesh broke down in tears at the end of the *Epic,* he suddely gained perspective on life. Somehow a broken narrative focused into a meaningful whole that may just make future sense.

Jauss's theory illuminated why Gilgamesh refuses to be forgotten, why he is once again alive and well in the twenty first century. Although he was buried in the ruins of Nineveh for a thousand plus years, he is suddenly back on the scene – and not for academic reasons only. Not only scholars of the Ancient Near East take an interest in the old *Epic,* but also people from all sectors of life. Somehow Gilgamesh seems to respond to questions that are asked even by those who understand nuclear physics – but who grapple with the paradox of living meaningfully.

Understanding Gilgamesh – brokenly – understands life.

LIST OF KEY TERMS

Epic of Gilgamesh, Sumerian, Akkadian, Babilonian, Cuneiform,
Literary approaches, Structuralism, Gérard Genette, Narrative discourse,
Hans Robert Jauss, Reception-aesthetics,
Quest for life eternal, Gilgamesh, Enkidu, Ishtar, Sîn-lēqi-unninni, Uta-napishtim

OPSOMMING

Om Gilgamesj te verstaan – gebroke – is om die lewe as gebroke te verstaan. Die *Epos van Gilgamesj* is die narratief van die lewe. Dit verhaal die volle siklus vanaf die durf en selfversekerdheid van die jeug, die twyfel en krisis van die middeljare tot by die aanvaarding en berusting van volwassenheid. Dit begin by die kleitablette wat letterlik stukkend is. Maar verder is die narratief ook ‘n narratief van gebrokenheid – die verhaal eindig in trane. ‘n Man het sy laaste kans om die ewige lewe te bekom, verbeur. Tog slaag hy daarin om te herstel, ten spyte van sy mislukking.

Die eerste gedeelte van hierdie tesis het die *wêreld van Gilgamesj* ondersoek. Oorspronklik was hy bekend as die Sumeriese koning Bilgames. Hy verskyn in die vorm van mondelinge gedigte wat voorgedra of gesing is in die koninklike howe van konings in die Sumeriese periode: blote vermaak, niks wat regtig ernstig opgeneem word nie. Aan die sy van die koning is sy lojale dienskneg Enkidu wat sy meester ondersteun in alles wat hy doen.

Geleidelik verdring Akkadies Sumeries as spreektaal, maar laasgenoemde domineer as die taal van kultuur en van die hof. Bilgames oorleef die regeringstydperk van die Sargon-dinastie, en herleef selfs gedurende die glorieryke Ur III-periode van Shulgi en Ur-Nammu. Die Sumeriese Bilgames-gedigte word neergeskryf.

Teen die tyd wat Hammurapi sy wetskodeks opteken, staan die Sumeriese Bilgames bekend as die lewenskragtige Akkadiese koning Gilgamesj. Sy dienskneg Enkidu se status word verhef tot dié van vriend. Saam daag hulle mense, monsters en gode uit. Wanneer Enkidu sterf, gaan Gilgmesh selfs nog verder op ‘n soektog na die ewige lewe. Hy bereik Uta-napishtim die Veraf-Een in ‘n poging om uit te vind wat die geheim van die ewige lewe is.

Die optimisme van die Ou Babiloniese Koninkryk word vervang met die nadenke en selfondersoek van die Middel-periode. Die lewe is moeilik. Die lewe is ingewikkeld. Weer eens ondergaan die *Gilgamesj Epos* ‘n her-interpretasie en word voorsien van ‘n proloog en ‘n epiloog: albei begin en eindig op dieselfde plek, op die mure van

Uruk. Van hier af kyk Gilgamesj terug en vooruit na sy lewe en hy dink na oor die sin van die lewe oor die algemeen.

Die tweede gedeelte van hierdie tesis het meer spesifiek gehandel oor die *verhaal* self – die narratiewe aspekte van die *Epos.* Genette se teorie het etlike interessante literêre aspekte uitgewys wat betref die ritme en die pas van die narratief. Maar ook het die peinsende stemming van die *Epos* aan die orde gekom. Daar was oomblikke van *vooruitskouing* en *terugskouing*: nadat Gilgamesj in trane uitbars teen die einde van die *Epos,* kry hy skielik perspektief op die lewe. Skielik fokus ‘n gebroke narratief tot ‘n betekenisvolle geheel wat dalk net in die toekoms mag sin maak.

Jauss se teorie het aangetoon waarom Gilgamesj weier om vergete te raak, waarom hy weer eens springlewendig is, selfs in die een en twintigste eeu. Alhoewel hy vir meer as twee duisend jaar lank begrawe gelê het in die ruïnes van Nineve, is hy skielik weer terug op die toneel – en nie slegs weens akademiese interesse nie. Navorsing met betrekking tot die Ou Nabye Ooste is nie die enigste rede waarom kundiges in die ou *Epos* belang stel nie, mense vanuit alle sektore van die samelewing word daardeur aangespreek. Op die een of ander wyse reageer Gilgamesj op vrae wat gevra word selfs deur diegene wat alles weet van kernfisika – maar wat worstel met die paradoks van ‘n sinvolle lewe.

Om Gilgamesj te verstaan - gebroke, is om die lewe as gebroke te verstaan.

LYS VAN SLEUTELTERME

Assiriologie, die Gilgamesj-epos, Sumeries, Akkadies, Babilonies, Spykerskrif, Literêre benaderings, Strukturalisme, Gérard Genette, Narratiewe diskoers, Hans Robert Jauss, resepsie-estetika,
Soektog na die ewige lewe, Gilgamesj, Enkidu, Ishtar, Sîn-lēqi-unninni, Uta-napishtim

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When I started working on this thesis in 2000, I wished to take an Akkadian text as my point of departure, not an English or any other translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* The only Akkadian text I had at my disposal was that of Simo Parpola (1997) which consists of the cuneiform signs as well as their transliteration. My own translation of the *Epic* is based on this rendering. Towards the end of my research work, Andrew George's edition of *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, volumes I and II* appeared in 2003 – last year. This is a major work of intense research of more than sixteen years, which substitutes more or less all other research that has been done on *Gilgamesh* up to now. Besides the scholarly exposition of the evolution of the *Epic,* a critical examination of the many extant sources and a discussion of various other aspects, George's two-volume edition also includes a transliteration and a translation of the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.*

The translation I did according to Parpola's version does not differ significantly from that of George, however, the references to some of the lines in the tablets do. This is mainly due to the way that Parpola reconstructed the text. Parpola's text is not a critical edition of the *Epic.* The aim is to provide an *up-to-date-reconstruction of the Standard Babylonian version of the Epic that can be profitably used both in teaching and research* (Parpola 1997:ix). For this purpose different tablets and fragments from different periods are included, as well as elements from earlier versions especially where these may fill in some major gaps in the Standard version.

Parpola may be criticised for *smoothing out the folds* too easily, thereby creating a misleading impression of the original text. Nevertheless, it provides a sufficient basis for a sensible translation of the *Epic,* therefore I use it as point of departure in this thesis. Thus, where I do refer to tablets and lines, I

do so according to Parpola's 1997-edition. Furthermore, the concern of my research is the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the story it tells: source-critical issues -- for example the merits of the different sources, variant readings and other matters so forth -- will not be discussed.

My earlier MA-thesis (*Gilgamesh sien die Diepte: van Skande tot Eer,* 2000; see also the article by De Villiers & Prinsloo 2002:23-43) is based on Parpola's edition and it includes an Afrikaans translation of many of the relevant passages. Therefore this thesis requires the basic minimum of translations: the best and most recent English translation is of course that of George (2003). His earlier work, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1999), is also excellent, but does not include an Akkadian transliteration as well.

After the completion of this thesis I plan to translate the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in Afrikaans as this had not been done yet, and also had I been requested to do so by some of my professors, colleagues and friends who seem interested.

1. MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH

Recently there seems to be a renewed interest in the ancient world and its civilizations. Documentary programmes on television feature Ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, Israel, ancient civilizations of the Far East, Mexico, and also of Mesopotamia. All these civilizations had stories: some are lost forever, some left their remains in the form of artifacts. With the help of archaeology some stories can be re-told, albeit only partly.

Stories from the ancient world become available to the modern – or post-modern – world of science and technology in various stages of broken-ness. The worlds of these stories are mostly strange, far remote and fascinating. The film-industry seizes the opportunity to elaborate imaginatively on stories – both history and fiction – from the ancient world: some movies are indeed worth while seeing, others border on the bizarre.

Recently the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is receiving its due share of attention as one of the *ancient stories* that captures modern imagination. A Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* (Hansen: 16 November 2001) states: *Het oeroude Gilgamesj-epos beleefd een opvallende wedergeboorte. In Duitsland lijkt – misschien door toedoen van meestervertaler Raoul Schrott – zelfs sprake van een hype.* It seems as though the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is reborn in a stunning way. *De Volkskrant* proceeds with a brief summary of the *Epic* and evaluates it as follows: *De afwezigheid van een zingevende god maakt Gilgamesj paradoxaal genoeg tot een hoogst modern werk. En literair is het bepaald opwindend: het fraaie verhaal, de prachtische beelden, het gedreven ritme, de effectieve herhalingen (het wemelt van letterlijk herhaalde regeles die juist daardoor een eigenaardige kragt krijgen).* Gilgamesh discovers the meaning of life not by means of any divine revelations, but in a very human way. This is one of the reasons that the ancient *Epic* appeals to its modern recipients. Furthermore, the review in *De Volkskrant* refers to the exciting literary composition of the *Epic:* an important issue that will also be addressed later in this thesis.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is not one of those treasured texts that were read throughout the ages – like the Bible, for example. On the contrary! During the time of king Ashurbanipal of the Neo Assyrian Empire, many copies of the *Epic* were made and kept in the royal libraries of Nineve. However, after the city was sacked by the Babylonian Median alliance (ca 612 BCE – see George 1999: xxii-xxiii), the clay tablets were also badly damaged and broken. Fortunately they were not completely destroyed, but the old *Epic* was gradually forgotten, until archaeological excavations started during the middle of the nineteenth century in that region.

The first critical edition of the *Gilgamesh Epic* appears in 1930 – that of RC Thompson. Many sources were not yet discovered by the time. Nevertheless, that was the beginning of an interest that was taken in an age old tale that

recently became something of a *hype* indeed! What would be the reasons for this hype?

Thus, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* certainly deserves to be investigated by research.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

At least two aspects of the *Gilgamesh Epic* have to be investigated: the context and the text, or in other words, the sources and the discourse. It is necessary to research these two areas for a more comprehensive understanding of the *Epic* as a whole, since there are many gaps in scientific work due to the one-sided nature of present studies.

There are many translations available of the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.* Reference has already been made to the most recent and excellent English translation of George (2003). This is a literal translation, containing all the appropriate critical apparatus. Quite the opposite is the translation by Danny Jackson (1992) which is not actually a translation, but a *poetic paraphrase.* It captures the mood and the feeling of the *Epic,* and renders the flow and the plot of the narrative, but does so in English that is rather far removed from the Akkadian text.

Reference has also been made to the German translation of Raoul Schrott (2001) (see above). *De Volkskrant,* besides providing a summary of the *Epic,* furthermore reviews two recent Dutch translations: one by Theo de Feyter and another by Herman Vanstiphout. Most probably the *Epic* is translated in other modern languages as well.

Yet, does a *translation* of the *Epic* into a language that one can understand, guarantee that one also *understands the Epic?* Some of the translations do provide some background – like those of George and Schrott – but the

emphasis is on the *Epic* and its relevant historical and socio-cultural context. The scope of this thesis is wider: it aims to illuminate also the ideas and world views of the Ancient Near East that found their way into the *Epic*. An investigation of the various relevant sources is the first research problem that this thesis will address.

Furthermore, reference has also been made to the literary composition of the *Epic* (see above). As far as *genre* is concerned, the term *Epic* poses a problem. The ancients themselves were not aware that the story of *Gilgamesh* would later be called an *Epic.* Even more serious for recent research is whether the *Epic* should be addressed as *poetry* or *prose.* Surely, the literary medium appropriated in the *Epic* is *poetry*, yet it tells a story that displays the same qualities as *narrative prose.* The literary composition of the *Epic* is the second aspect that this thesis will examine in some detail, since the genre position is not clear.

Accordingly the following hypothesis is proposed:

3. HYPOTHESIS

The hermeneutical dimensions of the Epic of Gilgamesh will benefit by a thorough examination of its (i) extra-textual sources and reception, as well as its (ii) internal textual narrative discourse.

4. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The following angles will be pursued:

4.1. to read the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as a narrative;
4.2. to investigate the sources of the *Epic* (religious, historical, political social, cultural, ideological) and its reception in modern times;
4.3. to investigate the discourse - the literary composition of the *Epic*;

4.4. to contribute towards a deeper understanding of the world and the story of the *Epic of Gilgamesh.*

5. METHODOLOGY

The *Gilgamesh Epic* is, just like the Bible, an ancient text. The Bible is translated into most known languages and is one of the Books that are the most widely read over the whole world. No-one questions this matter. Judaism accepts the Old Testament as its Holy Scripture, Christianity regards both the Old and New Testament as God's revelation. Yet biblical scholars are intensely aware that there are vast differences between the world of the Bible and the world of today: to *understand* the Bible requires more than understanding the words. One must also have some understanding of the social system and customs that were part of the world in which the Bible originated (Malina 1993:1-3). Furthermore, besides the fact that the Bible is accepted as the *Word of God* by believers, this *Book* is also appreciated for its *literary communicative* aspects (see Tolmie 1999:6).

As regards methodological approaches to the Bible, Sternberg (1985:14) suggests they *fall under no more than two heads:* source-oriented and discourse-oriented inquiries. Because the *Gilgamesh Epic* also falls into the category of *ancient texts,* this thesis will follow the approach suggested by Sternberg (above).

5.1. Source-orientated inquiry

Source-orientated inquiry looks into the world behind the text. Usually some specific dimensions are addressed. These may be, for example, the *religious* convictions that were prevalent at the time of the text: what did the *religious picture* of the world look like? what were the beliefs? did religion change as time passed? was there religious conflict? – and so forth. A *historical* inquiry would ask *historical* questions: these pertain to the history of the people or

nation, for example: what were the major events or crises in the *history* of the people? The *language system* may also be examined: what are the underlying *linguistic nature* of the text? And lastly there are the so-called *geneticist* questions: these look into the origins and development of a text: what material found its way into a text? how did it originate – orally, for example – how was it transmitted? what concepts and ideologies are reflected, where do they come from? – and so forth (Sternberg 1985:15).

These are the type of questions that will be addressed to the *Gilgamesh Epic* in the first part of this thesis.

5.2. Discourse-orientated analysis

A discourse-orientated analysis focuses on the text itself. It aims at understanding the text as a *pattern of meaning and effect* (Sternberg 1985:15). The text and its immanent structures are examined, but also the meaning that these structures convey to the recipient is sought after. In this regard Sternberg (1985:15) questions: *Are the operative rules, for instance, those of prose or verse, parable or chronicle, omniscience or realistic limitation, historical or fictional writing?*

5.2.1 Epic: poetry or prose?

Earlier on (see section 2 above) it was mentioned that one encounters certain problems in ascertaining the *genre* of the twelve tablets that recount the adventures of Gilgamesh. It is called an *Epic:* thus, it resembles a narrative – it tells of events that happened, yet it is written in the style of poetry. Thus, an *epic* may be determined as *narrative poetry* (Roodt & Pieterse 1992:102).

The question that follows is: according to which rules should the operative rules in the text be analysed – those of *poetry,* or those of *prose*?

Damrosch (1987:39) states: *The major narrative forms in Mesopotamian literature of the second millennium BC were poetic epic and prose chronicle.* An *epic* displays poetic features: rhythm, parallelism, chiasmus and so forth. Furthermore, *epics* were meant to be performed in some way or another, either sung or chanted publically. Usually an *epic* deals with the adventures of a mortal hero – say for example a king – but also incorporates mythic material from the world of the gods, or of the interactions between humans and gods.

The term *chronicle* refers to *common forms of recording historical events. Chronicles* deal with the recording of historical events, for example the military exploits of kings. The style is straightforward prose, recounting only what is necessary and display little or no interest to portray the character of the king nor to give insight into his emotions or motivations of behaviour (Damrosch 1987:39). Thus, what is important to a *chronicle* is the political or military achievements of a specific king or a dynasty. Deep existential issues, the meaning of life, the limits of existence are matters that are left to an *epic.*

Thus, the difference between *chronicle* and *epic* is with regard to form: *chronicles are written in prose and epics are in verse* (Damrosch 1987:63). But, the question remains: should an *epic* be analysed according to *poetic* or according to *narrative* structures?

Fokkelman (1999:171) makes the following observation: narrative prose is considered to have a plot, a series of events*, actions and speeches that obey the chronological order.* Even the so-called disruptions in the chronological order serve to affirm this matter. Poetry, on the other hand, does not need any plot or events – often a poem is simply the expression of a poet's innermost feelings. This distinction between *prose* and *poetry* is quite obvious in the Bible: biblical narratives are written in *prose,* prayers, reflections, and so forth are written in *poetry.* Even the long dialogue section

within the book of Job is framed by *narrative prose* that actually tells the story.

In this regard Israel differed from her neighbours: they told their stories of men, gods and monsters in verse (Fokkelman 1999:172). In fact, it appears that Mesoptamian literature preferred poetry over prose for narrating events of cosmic, universal nature (Nemet-Nejat 2002:65).

So, is the *Epic of Gilgamesh poetry* or *prose?*

Actually, it is both: it is a narrative in verse form. This thesis chooses to consider it as a *narrative.* Although the literary style is poetic, the *Epic* recounts events that follow chronologically one after the other. Yet the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is not a *chronicle:* the deep, innermost feelings of the hero are reflected unashamedly, movingly. These exploit the possibilities of poetic expression, but reaches beyond personal experience. It becomes a *narrative* in the true sense of the word.

Therefore, I shall treat the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as a *narrative* and conduct research into *textual discourse* by means of a *narrative* analysis.

6. PREMISES

As I stated earlier on, my major references are the works of Andrew George (2003) and Simo Parpola (1997). Tigay (1982) has worked extensively on the *Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*: however, many new discoveries have been made since. In a certain sense George's 2003 edition is an updating of Tigay's work, nevertheless, the latter is also taken into consideration. For historical archaeological matters the work of Kuhrt (1995) served as a primary source for information.

I was fortunate enough to visit the British Museum towards the end of 2003

and see the fragmented state in which the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is today. One can but admire the work that Professor George and his colleagues are doing. Even the better preserved tablets are badly damaged. I had the image of a huge jig-saw puzzle of which most pieces are missing. Furthermore the cuneiform writing as such is very small, with my glasses I could barely make out any signs. Only then I realised the many hours of hard work, dedication and scholarly precision. This makes anyone who attempts to work on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* feel very humble indeed.

With regard to a *discourse analysis* I relied on Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980) as point of departure, mainly because this work of his is considered as one of the most prominent exponents of *structural narratology.* Other theorists like Bal (1978) and Rimmon-Kenan (1983) use most of his insights, occasionally criticising, occasionally elaborating on them. However, they do not propose any revolutionary new contributions.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the way in which ancient literature was composed, differed vastly from modern literary composition. Ancient literature was also structured according to certain patterns, for example, the number of times that the name of someone occurred in a text was extremely important. Seven, or a multiple of seven was a significant number in ancient texts and usually indicated that the person who carried this name was important. Thus Assurbanipal's name appears 49 times (7X7) in the so-called *Vassal Treaties of Eshahaddon (VTE)* (Steymans 2003: 108-109). But more often than not, it is impossible to count the names of characters in very ancient texts like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* for the simple reason that the text is so broken.

One may object to reading an ancient text by means of modern reading strategies. Yet these are the only strategies recently available: even if one is able to apply some ancient receptive strategies to ancient texts, one does so

from a recent point of departure.

To sum up: ancient texts are usually available only by means of secondary sources: either transliterations or even worse, translations. With regards to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* most translations correspond to the overall plot: a flight from death or a quest for life eternal – whichever perspective one may choose. But the actual words in which this plot is worked out, differ in the many different translations.

Ancient readers were not aware of what is today known as literary *genres. Epic* is a *coinage of convenience,* remarks George (2003:3) which designates a *long narrative poem describing heroic events that happen over a period of time.* So, once again one may question whether the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is an *epic* in the true sense of the word: Gilgamesh is not really a hero, in fact, in the second half of the *Epic* he becomes something of an anti-hero.

Besides *heroic epics,* many *epics* are also *national* by nature. *National epic* implies for George (2003:33) *a long narrative composition that…relates to the origin or identity of a people.* The aim of an *epic* is usually to shape an awareness of a national identity. Once again the *Gilgamesh Epic* does not quite fit the picture. *There is nothing of war in the Epic of Gilgamesh, only heroic combat between individuals and between men and monsters, and the grim struggle with death. No great crisis in the life of Babylonia takes the center stage, only great crises in the life of a man* (George 2003:33). This is what the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is all about.

Far from pretending to be exhaustive, this thesis wishes to initiate communication between ancient wisdom and post modern mind. *Understanding Gilgamesh: his world and his story* aims toward this process of communication.

7. CONTENTS

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CHAPTER 7 : THE *GILGAMESH EPIC* AND JAUSS'S THEORY

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CHAPTER 8 : CONCLUSION

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Akkadian text: transliteration and translation

CHAPTER 2

THE STANDARD BABYLONIAN GILGAMESH EPIC

Introduction

Why is it necessary to give an exposition of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* at all?

Jimmy Loader (2003:315) refers in an article to the *motif of the tower* that occurs in the *Gilgamesh Epic* (Tablet VI, lines 60-62 – his footnote). Unfortunately this is not the case: tablet VI of the *Gilgamesh Epic* deals with Gilgamesh's rejection of Ishtar's marriage proposal. Furthermore, no tower is built in the *Gilgamesh Epic,* definitely not Esagila, as Loader states in the same breath in the same sentence.

So, an important reason for this exposition is that not everybody who reads this thesis, not even renown scholars, may be aquainted with the contents of the *Epic,* except perhaps in very broad terms. Quite often the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is confused with the Babylonian *Epic of Creation – Enuma Elish.* [Marduk is rewarded with the building of a palace in this *Epic*.] And although the *Gilgamesh Epic* does refer to the creation of one man – Enkidu – it is not concerned with how the world, the animals and humans came to be.

Otherwise the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is known for its parallel with the Biblical recount of the Deluge. This is part of a partial fact. The *Gilgamesh Epic* does contain the Babylonian Flood-narrative, but this happens to be written on only one of the twelve tablets, namely tablet XI. Also, this Flood-narrative is in fact an older *Epic* in its own right, namely the *Atrahasis Epic.* This older *epic* is incorporated into the *Gilgamesh Epic* for a particular purpose, which will become clear in the course of the discussions within this thesis.

Therefore, before entering into a discussion of the *sources* and the *discourse* of the text, as a point of departure I shall now give a detailed exposition of the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* in the form of a coherent narrative.

However, it should be kept in mind that the extant sources of the *Epic* are anything but neat and coherent – on the contrary! All the tablets are damaged to a greater or lesser degree. At some places it is impossible to even guess what may have been recorded. The edition of George (2003: Volume II) indicates the fragmentary state in which the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* appears today. The exposition that follows gives a false impression of a beautiful easy-flowing story. More likely it is a matter of *cut 'n paste* – episodes that cohere are strung together, the gaps are pleated. So, I apologise to the scholars who are struggling to make sense from the sources at their disposal. To their knowledge I am very much obliged, however, I state again – I do not aim at another critical edition of the *Gilgamesh Epic.* The purpose of this thesis is twofold: (i) to illuminate the context of the origins and development of the *Epic;* (ii) to highlight its narrative moments.

Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* is the final product of a narrative that went through many evolutionary phases. Almost 1300 years separate the beginning from the end. There were the first short Sumerian *Bilgames* poems, the *Old Babylonian Epic,* the *Middle Babylonian* one, and then finally the *Standard Babylonian Epic* as it is known today. These processes of transmission will be attended to in the following chapters.

At this stage the familiar literary terms will be appropriated. No explanations are given concerning strange names or deities at this stage. These will be dealt with in following chapters.

1. The narrative

Tablet I

The opening lines of the *Epic* are a prologue, an introduction to the narrative as well as a brief summary of it. The narrator is anonymous. He – most probably he – proclaims the worldwide glory of someone who saw the Deep,

who shall be remembered for his wisdom, who disclosed a secret and who brought back reports of what had been before the Deluge. But this one's path was long and difficult, a road less traveled, a way of many trials and tribulations. He nevertheless completed the journey, he became wiser than any on earth, and he engraved what he had learnt on a stela for the sake of posterity. What the reader is about to read, are these very words. A clue is given to who this person may be: he also built the rampart of Uruk-the-Sheepfold where holy Eanna, the sacred storehouse is.

The narrator addresses an open invitation to whoever is paying attention to draw closer, to have a look at these remarkable walls, to take hold of the threshold of ancient times, to come closer to Eanna, the abode of Ishtar. Future men or kings will not parallel this structure. Now the narrator extends his invitation: he invites his recipients to climb the walls of Uruk, to walk around, to survey its foundations that were laid by the Seven Sages and examine its brickwork of fired bricks. From these walls the view on the city and its surroundings is excellent: a date-grove, a clay pit and the temple of Ishtar. Uruk comprises a large area of cultivated as well as uncultivated ground.

Now the narrator urges his recipients to go right into the heart of the city itself. He or she is to search the copper tablet box, unlock its bronze clasp, open up the door to its secret, pick up the tablet of lapis lazuli and then read it out aloud: this is the story of Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh is lauded as a king who surpassed all other kings, whose heroic deeds attest to his fearless conduct. He was the trustworthy one in battle who formed the vanguard as well as the rear, he opened passages through mountains, dug wells and he restored the many cult-centers that were destroyed by the Deluge. Gilgamesh also crossed the wide sea to the sunrise, exploring the whole world in search of life, a search that led him to Uta-napishtim the Distant.

Although he is called an *offspring of Uruk*, he seems to have been of mixed parentage: his father was the mortal Lugalbanda and his mother immortal Ninsun, Lady Wild Cow. Two thirds of him was god, one third human. He was a most handsome figure; his impressive appearance was planned by Bēlet ilī herself.

The narrative proper starts abruptly and rather shockingly. Instead of a wise, admirable king, Gilgamesh is portrayed as an arrogant, even brutal figure that tyrannises his people day and night. The nature of his harassment is not stated explicitly, but provides enough reason for the women of the city to complain bitterly to Aruru. They remind her repeatedly that she created this king with his unbridled energies that he is now abusing to their detriment. And they pray that she now creates his double, his match, and one to occupy the restless king in order for his subjects to have some peace and quiet in their lives.

Aruru obliges, washes her hands, pinches off some clay and casts it onto the steppe – and Enkidu comes into being. He is a primitive, beast-like creature, very strong and very hairy, ignorant of humans, language and country. But he is quite harmless. He is happy to eat grass with the gazelles and to frolic with the beasts at the water hole.

A hunter spots Enkidu on three consecutive days. The hunter does not know about his benign nature and is frightened out of his wits by the savage appearance of the creature. Dumbstruck with fear and deeply worried he returns home together with his herds. Eventually speech returns to him and he relates to his father all that is happening on the steppe. There is a terrible creature out there that frightens him and interferes with his hunting activities.

His father advises him to go to Uruk and to relate his troubles to Gilgamesh. Then he is to go back to the steppe, but he must take Shamhat the prostitute

along with him. On approach of the savage the prostitute must take off all her clothes. The beast will see her, go for her and the herd, with which he grew up on the steppe, will spurn him. The hunter does as he was told: he repeats his troubles to the king and the king gives him exactly the same advice as his father did: Shamhat the prostitute is the answer.

The hunter and the prostitute proceed and undertake their three-day journey toward their destination. For another three days they sit down and await the arrival of the savage. Then, when he is eventually spotted, the hunter very briefly instructs the prostitute what she is to do and vanishes completely from the scene. Shamhat calmly does as she was told: she takes off her clothes and bares her sex, unafraid. Enkidu responds eagerly and they engage passionately in a lovemaking session that lasts six days and seven nights. Satiated by her pleasures, Enkidu wishes to return to the steppe and to his herd, however, as soon as the animals see him, they become aware that something had changed and they run away. Enkidu comes to the shocking realisation that his knees have become weak; he is unable to run fast enough after his former friends to keep up with them. But although his physical strength decreased, he gained intellectual insight and he returns to the feet of Shamhat to learn.

Shamhat completed her task to make a man out of a beast successfully. Now she is also ready to tell Enkidu what his real purpose in life is: he is to meet king Gilgamesh of Uruk. Enkidu is all too eager to proceed, but his purpose in mind is probably the one he was created for: he wants to challenge Gilgamesh to prove that the one who was born on the steppe is the stronger. But Shamhat gently reprimands him, reminding him that the three great gods, Anu, Enlil and Ea love Gilgamesh. And she adds, long before now, Gilgamesh had had two strange dreams and called his mother to reveal their meaning.

In the first dream the many stars of the heaven appear above Gilgamesh. Something like a bolt from Anu falls upon him. He tries to lift and to roll it, but it is too heavy for him. The crowd of Uruk gathers around it, kissing its feet. Then Gilgamesh himself discovers that he loves it like a wife. He caresses the object. Now he can lift it up and he places it before Ninsun's feet. Ninsun makes it his equal.

The clever Ninsun repeats Gilgamesh's words, explaining as she goes along. Her son is about to make a friend, one who will become a trustworthy comrade whose strength is reliable in all circumstances. She declares this friend as an equal to her son.

Gilgamesh has a second dream and relates it to his mother once again. This time it is an axe that lies in the town square of Uruk. A large crowd gathers around it. Gilgamesh loves it like a wife, picks it up and sets it down at his mother's feet. She makes it his equal. And Ninsun yet again repeats the dream, yet again explaining its significance in the same manner as before: a loyal and dear comrade who is also able to give good counsel is about to appear on the scene.

Tablet II

The opening lines of Tablet II records briefly that Enkidu and Shamhat was making love for six days and seven nights and that – apparently during this time – Enkidu forgot where he was born. Shamhat suggests that they proceed towards Uruk and Enkidu agrees. She takes him by the hand and leads him towards their first stop: a shepherds' camp. The shepherds immediately recognise the resemblance between the stature of Enkidu and the god-like body of Gilgamesh. They immediately organise a party, which later during the night becomes quite raucous due to Enkidu's overindulgence.

For the first time Enkidu encounters prepared food and drink. Bread and beer is put before him and he does not exactly know what to do with it. Once again Shamhat comes to the rescue and assures him that it is quite safe. Kings and gods consume bread and beer. And, just like with his first sexual experience he cannot stop once he started. He eats seven times from the bread, downs seven mugs of beer and becomes quite intoxicated, singing loudly. But his hairy body is washed with water and anointed with oil and at last he turns into a full human being. In return to the hospitality of the shepherds, he provides a service: while they sleep, he guards their flocks and scares away the wolves and the lions.

Now the time has come for Enkidu and Shamhat to depart for Uruk. As they enter the city they notice some excitement. They approach a young man and question him on the matter. He explains to Enkidu that a wedding is about to take place, however, Gilgamesh the king of Uruk has the privilege of coupling with the bride to be before the groom does so. On hearing these words Enkidu becomes enraged. He and the prostitute hurry towards the town square where all the action is taking place.

The crowd gathers around Enkidu, kissing his feet. But Enkidu, still very upset about the king's immoral conduct finds his way to the wedding house and obstructs Gilgamesh's path dramatically by putting his foot in the doorway. The king and the stranger from the steppe tackle each other like two young bulls – the fight is on. The walls shake. Gilgamesh is kneeling, his foot on the ground. Enkidu's anger subsides and he acknowledges magnanimously that Enlil destined Gilgamesh the king of the people. They kiss and form a friendship.

Gilgamesh introduces his new friend to his mother Ninsun. Her remark that he has no biological parents, as he is one who was born on the steppe seems to upset Enkidu. On hearing these words he becomes morbidly depressed. Concerned about his friend's tears, Gilgamesh asks him the reason for his

despondent state. Enkidu explains that the strength he once had has left him and now he has become weak: apparently easy-going city life is catching up. But Gilgamesh has the solution: a good adventure, preferably a death-defying one is just the answer to Enkidu's problem. Why do they not go down to the Cedar forest where the ferocious monster Humbaba dwells, and challenge him in his domain? And should they perish, at least they would have succeeded in establishing their name forever. What could be better?

But Enkidu is rather panic stricken at this suggestion. Gilgamesh only heard about Humbaba, but he, Enkidu had actually seen him during those wild days when he roamed the steppe with the beasts. His warning is repeated several times: from afar one can hear the rumbling noises that Humbaba makes, his voice equals the noise of the Deluge, his mouth is Girru the fire god, and his breath is death. But worst of all, Enlil appointed this monster for the sole purpose of protecting his Cedar Forest from unwelcome intruders.

Gilgamesh ridicules Enkidu's fears – he is simply talking nonsense. He reminds his friend of his past. After all, Enkidu was born and bred in the wild, lions and stray men were afraid of him. What had become of his courage? So, now they must hurry to the forge and require that the craftsmen make large axes in their presence. The request is carried out.

Gilgamesh addresses the townsfolk of Uruk, the elders and the young men of the city. He is about to take an unknown road and engage in an unknown combat. He asks for their blessing. He promises that he will celebrate the New Year Festival twice a year if he returns. Apparently the young men egg him on. However, Enkidu does not share the enthusiasm of his friend and of the young men of Uruk: he turns for support to the elders and repeats the horrors of Humbaba. The elders take Enkidu's warning seriously and reprimand their king for his youthful lightheartedness. They repeat Enkidu's words to Gilgamesh.

On hearing these words, Gilgamesh looks with a laugh at his friend...

Tablet III

Unfortunately Tablet III is badly broken. The broad outlines of the narrative can be constructed; most of the detail is lacking.

Apparently the elders of the city realise that they are unable to stop their young king in his tracks. They bid him farewell and plead that he does not rely on his strength alone, but that he trusts his faithful companion Enkidu. To Enkidu they entrust the safety of the king and wish them a safe return.

Before their departure Gilgamesh urges Enkidu to go with him to the temple of Ninsun. To his mother he repeats that he is undertaking an unknown journey and is about to engage in an unknown combat. He asks her blessing and wishes to return in time for the festivities.

Most of Ninsun's reply to Gilgamesh is missing, apparently she goes through some rituals, washing and anointing herself. Then she climbs up to the rooftop and places offerings, probably incense before Shamash. And she accuses him of creating a restless heart in her son, Gilgamesh. This is the cause of his dangerous mission. She reminds the god of the dangerous journey and the unknown battle that lies ahead for Gilgamesh and Enkidu. She also reminds him that Humbaba is the evil thing that he himself hates, and that the two youngsters are about to let him disappear from the earth. She requests the protection of Shamash and Aya the bride, as well as thirteen winds that may blind Humbaba in order for Gilgamesh's weapons to conquer him. The rest of Ninsun's words are lost.

Eventually the goddess rises, smothers the incense-burner, she comes down from the rooftop and summons Enkidu. She tells him that although she did not give birth to him, she names him now after Gilgamesh's offerings, the various

priestesses and hierodules of the temple, and she hangs the appropriate symbols around his neck. By these gestures Ninsun has adopted Enkidu as her son.

Tablet III ends by having Gilgamesh and Enkidu perform some rituals before their departure. Just before they leave the city, the elders once again speak to Enkidu, asking him to take care of the king.

Tablet IV

Tablet IV narrates the journey towards the Cedar Forest. This happens in five stages which occur in exactly the same manner: Gilgamesh and Enkidu cover vast distances in a very short time, what should be done in a month and a half, they do in three days. They pitch camp, perform certain rituals in order to provoke a dream – which turns out for Gilgamesh to be a nightmare. He wakes up every time shivering with goose pimples all over him and speaks to his friend Enkidu who sooths him every time. Enkidu tells Gilgamesh that his dream is a good omen and that things will turn out for the better. This happens five times successively.

Just before entering Humbaba's region, and now very close to the Lebanon, Gilgamesh becomes tearful and reminds Shamash of Ninsun's prayer way back in Uruk. Shamash takes note and urges the two heroes to stand firm against Humbaba, and to tackle him before he has time to armour himself fully. On hearing Humbaba's roar, Enkidu is the one who trembles fearfully, and now Gilgamesh is the one who tries to encourage him. With words of bravado he reminds his friend of their great achievements previously.

The tablet ends with Gilgamesh and Endidu standing at the border of the forest.

Tablet V

Gilgamesh and Enkidu have reached the Cedar Forest and now they pause at its entrance to admire the height and the beauty of the cedars. They catch their breath, as it were.

Unfortunately the description of their venture into the forest and their first encounter with Humbaba is very badly damaged, either completely lost or consisting of isolated words only. The next coherent lines are Humbaba's speech. He insults Gilgamesh and Enkidu rudely, calling Gilgamesh a fool and describing Enkidu as the son of a fish, a turtle who knew no parents. He threatens to kill Gilgamesh and to feed his flesh to the birds. But Enkidu encourages Gilgamesh not to loose heart and to strike his mighty blow.

Action. They tackle the monster. The earth bursts and they shatter the mountains of Sirara and the Lebanon. Sadly enough it seems that Humbaba is gaining the upper hand. Gilgamesh and Enkidu stare death in the face. But then Shamash intervenes. He remembered Ninsun's request. And he raises the thirteen winds that blind Humbaba, handicap his movements and allow the weapons of Gilgamesh to conquer the monster.

Humbaba pleads for his life desperately. He praises Gilgamesh. He promises him all the trees he wishes to decorate his palace with. But Enkidu is not impressed. He advises Gilgamesh to turn a deaf ear and to do away with the monster on the spot. For this insensitivity Humbaba wants to kill Enkidu, but he also knows that his release lies with Enkidu: Enkidu is the one who can influence Gilgamesh. Nevertheless, Enkidu remains hard. Before Enlil finds out Humbaba must be disposed of. Indeed, those great gods, Enlil in Nippur and Shamash in Sippar are going to be very angry once they realise what had happened. Furthermore, by doing this, Gilgamesh shall fulfill his initial wish: to establish his name forever as the one who slay Humbaba.

It dawns upon Humbaba that he had lost. He curses Gilgamesh and Enkidu. He wishes them both a premature death – Enkidu first and Gilgamesh next. But with a merciless stroke of his axe Gilgamesh finishes off the monster. He is beheaded and his body is mutilated. Now the two heroes are free to venture deeper into the Cedar Forest.

They start by opening the veil of the dwelling of the Anunnaki – the great gods of the Netherworld. Then they proceed to cut off as many trees as they wish. Enkidu suggests that they use the wood to make a large door and install it at Nippur. They bind together a raft, and proceed towards their destination with Humbaba's head as trophy.

Tablet VI

Gilgamesh returns to Uruk as a hero. But he needs to do something about his filthy appearance. So he washes off the grime of battle and clothes himself into the appropriate robes of state. And in the process he becomes so attractive that the great Ishtar herself, the patron goddess of Uruk, the goddess of love and war, falls madly in love with him the moment she sees him. Shamelessly she proposes to the king. She promises him everything a man can wish for: sex, wealth and power.

However, Gilgamesh seems alarmed, even panic-stricken at this thought. He answers Ishtar. He knows his mythology. He insults her. He reminds her of her previous lovers whom she sentenced to some or other miserable existence. Worst of all, he knows the same macabre fate is awaiting him. He spurns the goddess.

Ishtar retaliates. Livid with rage she ascends to the heavens. She accuses Gilgamesh by her father Anu and her mother Antum. She throws a temper tantrum that would put any two year old to shame. Her father, Anu realises that his daughter probably provoked the king; however, his soothing words

only enrage her furthermore. She demands another monster: the Bull of Heaven to smite Gilgamesh in his palace. If her father refuses, she threatens to break down the doors and the bolts to the Netherworld and allow the dead out to eat the living. Anu warns her that the Bull can cause severe damage to the crops of Uruk – after all, he grazes in heaven – but Ishtar remains adamant. Anu gives up. He places the lead rope of the Bull in her hands. Ishtar and the Bull proceed towards Uruk.

The Bull causes damage as far as it goes. By its first snort a large pit is opened and a hundred met fall into it. This happens again, and another hundred men disappear. When it snorts a third time, again a pit is opened, and now Enkidu appears to be one of the victims. But Enkidu, hero that he is, jumps up, grabs the Bull by its horns, throws foam into its face and calls his comrade Gilgamesh to take on another fight. The people of Uruk witness a spectacular show as the two heroes slay yet another monster. Gilgamesh finishes it off by stabbing it with his sword into its thick neck. He and his friend take out its heart and set it before Shamash, prostrating themselves in a gesture of worship and honour.

But Ishtar is not impressed. She goes up to the walls of Uruk, throwing another temper tantrum. She jumps and dances, she curses Gilgamesh and she bemoans the death of her beloved pet. Enkidu becomes so irritated by her words that he tears off the right flank of the Bull and hurls it into her face. He threatens to disfigure her just like he and Gilgamesh did with the Bull and to drape its intestines around her arms. Then Ishtar calls together all her different cultic personnel to mourn the tragic and brutal death of the Bull.

Gilgamesh on the other hand calls together all the craftsmen of the city to come and admire his trophy: the width and the thickness of the Bull's horns. And he brings an anointment offering to Lugalbanda. The horns he hangs in his chamber.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu wash their hands in the Euphrates, take hold of each other and joyfully and triumphantly they proceed through the streets of Uruk. A paean is sung for the two heroes. And afterwards Gilgamesh throws a great party for all and everyone in his palace that carries on until everybody more or less passes out.

Enkidu has a dream – an ominous one – a nightmare. He wakes up rather disturbed, arouses his friend and asks worriedly: why are the great gods in counsel?

Tablet VII

Enkidu relates his dream to Gilgamesh. The great gods Anu, Enlil, Ea and Shamash are in counsel. They discuss the events of the recent past. Gilgamesh and Enkidu had killed both the Bull of Heaven and Humbaba. The general feeling among the gods is that they had overstepped their boundaries. They pushed their luck too far. Their time has run out. One of them must die. Enlil decides on Enkidu, however, Shamash tries to intervene, but without success. The die is cast. And Gilgamesh and Enkidu are overcome by sadness.

Indeed, Enkidu becomes very ill. Apparently delirious with fever he launches a series of angry curses, starting with the door as though it is a human being. Gilgamesh becomes anxious and suggests that he intercedes on behalf of his friend at the great gods. He also promises to fashion a statue from priceless gold. But Enkidu laments that everything is useless. Once Enlil made up his mind, there is no turning back. Enlil's decisions are final. However, Enkidu does turn to Shamash, requesting some more curses: one on the hunter who saw him the very first time, and one on Shamhat the prostitute who introduced him to civilisation. But Shamash intercedes for Shamhat. He reminds Enkidu that civilised life was not so bad: he got to know the food of gods and kings, he was clad in beautiful garments, and best of all, he met his

faithful comrade Gilgamesh. Shamash furthermore predicts that Gilgamesh shall honour him after his death, he shall mourn him and neglect his appearance, and clad only in the skin of a lion, he shall roam the steppe.

Somehow the words of Shamash seem to calm Enkidu down, and he withdraws his curse on Shamhat. However, he becomes increasingly ill. He has a pain in his stomach. He lies alone. Then he summons Gilgamesh and tells him of a terrible dream he had the previous night: the heavens shouted and the earth answered. Somewhere in between was he, Enkidu. A young man with a dark eagle-like face seized him. He had hands like the paws of a lion, nails like the claws of an eagle. He bound Enkidu and led him away, deeper and deeper into the realm of the Netherworld until they reached the center, the abode of the Queen – Ereshkigal. In short, Enkidu had a vision of being dragged off into hell.

He pleads desperately that his friend may not forget him – ever. Then for twelve consecutive days Enkidu's illness becomes worse and he calls deliriously and anxiously to Gilgamesh.

Tablet VIII

Gilgamesh starts preparing the mourning rites for his friend. He calls all and everyone to mourn for Enkidu: the townsfolk of Uruk, the trees, the wild animals and the rivers. He claims that he himself shall weep bitterly over his friend like a wailing woman.

Yet, when Enkidu finally passes away, Gilgamesh is reluctant to accept the fact. He notices a strange kind of sleep that has seized his friend. Enkidu is not responding. He feels his heart but there is no heartbeat. Only then he realises that Enkidu had died. Gilgamesh covers the face of his friend like a bride, circles around him like an eagle, like a lioness whose cubs fell into a pit. He shears his head and rips off his garments as though they are soiled.

At the crack of dawn Gilgamesh calls upon several craftsmen to assist him in making a statue of his friend. Once again he promises his friend that everyone shall honour him and mourn his death: he vows that he shall become dirty and roam the steppe, clad only in the skin of a lion. Thereafter he starts preparing and collecting the various treasures to accompany his friend to the Netherworld in order to please the deities and demons down there. These gifts are described in considerable detail, ending with the last rite: Gilgamesh opens the door of his treasury, fetches a large table of precious wood and fills a bowl of lapis lazuli with honey. A likewise dish he fills with butter. Apparently these are decorated and displayed to the Sun god.

Tablet IX

Gilgamesh has sunken into a deep and dark depression. He is now wandering the steppe in an unkempt state, weeping bitterly over his friend. He is timid and bashful, petrified that he may die like Enkidu. He becomes obsessed by thoughts of death and dying, terrified of Death itself. The lions that he once slaughtered fearlessly, now frightens him. He prays to Sîn. And then, as though he tries to find a way out of his own obsessive circular reasoning, he makes a decision to take the road to the son of Ubara-Tutu.

That night he has dreams which apparently gives him new courage for life. Once again he takes up his axe and his sword and starts using them. Eventually he reaches the Twin Mountains where the sun rises and sets every day. Their tops touch the heavens and their foundations reach into the Netherworld. The terrifying scorpion-man and his wife guard their entrance.

Initially Gilgamesh is scared when he sees them and covers his face in terror. But he manages to gather himself and approaches them. The scorpion-man and his wife appear more inquisitive than aggressive, or perhaps they only feel sorry for Gilgamesh on seeing his haggard appearance. However, they

do recognise that he is partly god, and they ask who he is and where he is going. He explains that he is on his way to Uta-napishtim, his forefather who stood in the assembly of the gods and adds that he himself is in search of everlasting life.

The scorpion man tries to tell Gilgamesh that this mission is an impossible one. Never before has anyone transgressed the path through the mountains. For twelve double hours the darkness is thick, and there is no light. But Gilgamesh stresses that he has no other option. For him there is no turning back.

At last the scorpion-man agrees that Gilgamesh may proceed. Without hesitating any longer, Gilgamesh takes the path of the sun. He needs to complete the journey through the Twin Mountains before the sun does, or everything was in vain.

This means a race against time. For eight double hours he rushes forth through a thick darkness that does not allow him to see before him or to look backwards. At the ninth double hour he feels the North wind on his face, however, he cannot see anything yet. He carries on through the next double hour, but only at the eleventh double hour he realises that he had completed the murderous journey in time. The sun is behind him. After twelve double hours he sees light. He advances towards the brilliance and finds himself in a stone paradise: stone trees bearing leaves and fruit of precious stones.

Catching his breath, Gilgamesh starts to walk around in this beautiful garden. But his presence is not unnoticed.

Tablet X

Siduri is a barmaid who lives at the seashore. Her potstands and her brewing vats are made of gold and she covers herself in veils. She spots Gilgamesh

from afar. His tattered appearance arouses her suspicions and she thinks to herself that he may be a robber or a murderer. And she bolts her door.

However, having come this far, Gilgamesh refuses to take no for an answer. He threatens to break her lock and her door if she does not open up. He is quite capable of doing so. Siduri obliges, but nevertheless remains cautious: if he was really the one who slay Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven, why does he look so bruised and battered?

Gilgamesh gives a very long explanation: the reason for his haggard appearance is the death of his beloved friend with whom he performed several other heroic deeds. And before Siduri has time to respond, he asks her the way to Uta-napishtim. If this fails, he is destined to roam the steppe for the rest of his life. But Siduri warns him: no one but Shamash has crossed the ocean for it is blocked by the Waters of Death. However, if Gilgamesh is really eager, he can find Urshanabi the boatman of Uta-napishtim in the midst of the forest, picking *urnu.* And most important, he has the Stone Things with him.

On hearing this, Gilgamesh takes hold of his axe and his sword and tries to overcome the unsuspecting Urshanabi with his force. He seizes the boatman, breaks the Stone Things and casts them into the sea. However, Urshanabi appears only mildly surprised, not in the least frightened, and asks Gilgamesh exactly the same question as Siduri did. And Gilgamesh gives him the same lengthy reply that he had given the barmaid: the death of Enkidu is the reason for this whole effort.

However, it appears that Gilgamesh has destroyed his last chance of crossing the Waters of Death with his own hands: without the Stone Things it is impossible to do so. Consequently Urshanabi instructs him to take his axe, to go down to the woods and to cut a number of wooden punting poles in the

place of the Stone Things: at least, these may help. Gilgamesh obliges immediately and he and Urshanabi get into the boat.

The journey that normally takes a month and a half they complete in three days. On reaching the Waters of Death, Urshanabi warns Gilgamesh that his hands are not the touch the water, its very drops are lethal. He may only use the wooden punting poles that he had cut.

Just like Siduri, Uta-napishtim spots Gilgamesh from afar and wonders by himself why the Stone Things of the boat is broken. He comes to the conclusion that the person who is approaching must be a stranger. Very interesting would be the recording of the encounter between Gilgamesh and Uta-napishtim, but these lines are completely lost in the text. However, Gilgamesh's long explanation about his dear friend's demise is repeated. Then he carries on to tell Uta-napishtim about his decision to see him in his distant abode, about his toils and tribulations thus far. At last he expresses the sincere wish that his depression may come to an end.

Uta-napishtim answers Gilgamesh in a very long monologue. He compares Gilgamesh to a fool who is unable to distinguish between nonsense and sound advice. The hard fact is that the gods had destined humans for death from the moment they created them. Gilgamesh is only exhausting his mind and his body by resisting this. Life goes on in all its spheres, death approaches silently and strikes suddenly, just like the great gods had decided. The time of death is known by the gods only, not by humans.

Tablet XI

Gilgamesh refuses to accept Uta-napishtim's reply. After all, on first sight Uta-napishtim does not really look any different from other human beings: how come that he had managed to be granted eternal life by the great gods?

Utanapishtim decides to disclose a secret to Gilgamesh: the secret of the Deluge. Long time ago the great gods decided to bring about a flood that would wipe out all life from earth. However, Ea split on them. He whispered into a reed hut where the man of Surripak, son of Ubara-tutu happened to be, instructing him to break down his house and load all his possessions into a ship. Uta-napishtim was quite happy to do so, but he saw an obstacle in his way: what was he to say with regard to the inquiries of the town folk into his strange behaviour? No problem, said Ea, his loyal servant could explain that Enlil was angry with him, so he would rather go down to the abyss to stay with his lord Ea. However, the people of Surripak could be certain that fowl, fish and food would shower them. More than plenty.

Consequently Uta-napishtim built a large ship that was as long as she was broad, just like Ea instructed him. He loaded his possessions, his family and kinsmen, some craftsmen and some animals. To Puzur-Enlil the boatman who sealed the boat, he gave his palace with all its goods.

Soon after, at the crack of dawn the terrible storm broke, wiping out everything in its way. So appalling was its destruction that even the great gods became terrified of what they had done. They rushed up back to the heavens, cowering like dogs before the entrance. First they wailed and they cried, later on they became dumbstruck, desperately clinging onto one another.

The storm lasted for six days and seven nights. On the seventh day a quietness came. Uta-napishtim opened the porthole of his ship. On seeing the absolute devastation, he broke down and cried. Eventually his ship came to rest on Mount Nimus. For seven days the ship remained there. On the seventh day Uta-napishtim released a dove, but it returned because it could find no resting place. Then he released a swallow, but the same thing happened. At last Uta-napishtim let out a crow. The bird circled and flew away, because it realised that dry land was not far away.

On setting his feet onto firm earth, Uta-napishtim brought an offering in the direction of the four winds. The gods, now famished through lack of human offerings for such a long time, smelled the sweet aroma coming from Uta-napishtim and like flies they swarmed around him and his offering. Bēlet-ilī took a vow never to forget what has happened. However, Enlil was forbidden to come to the gathering because he was the one who had brought about the Deluge. But of course Enlil did not stay away, and appeared very angry indeed because some life seemed to have escaped the destruction. Nintur blamed Ea for this, but Ea pleaded innocent. He insisted that it was Enlil who originated the flood, at the same time diplomatically suggesting that a better way to diminish human population would be by means of wild animals, famine or pest. After all, he did not disclose the secret of the gods: Atrahasis had a dream in which he saw it all.

And Enlil was impressed. On hearing these words he went into the ship, he took Uta-napishtim and his wife by the hand and declared them immortal, just like the gods. Then they were taken away to live forever at the mouth of the river. But, at the end of this long story Uta-napishtim reminds Gilgamesh: his situation was unique, Gilgamesh's case is quite different. There is not going to be another Deluge.

However, Gilgamesh does have a slight chance of obtaining life eternal. If he manages to resist sleep for six days and seven nights, he will live forever. Eagerly Gilgamesh accepts this challenge. However, as soon as he squats down on his hunches, sleep blows over him like a mist. Uta-napishtim's wife feels sorry for the poor bloke and urges her husband to touch Gilgamesh in order to wake him up. But Uta-napishtim, having saved mankind from extinction also knows its deceitful nature. He orders his wife to prepare food for Gilgamesh, to put it down at his head and to mark off the days that he sleeps on the wall. Gilgamesh seems to sleep through it all. He wakes up, only to find the food at his head in stages of progressing decay. And he must

face the music: he is going to die. Desperately he asks Uta-napishtim if there is no other way out, but Uta-napishtim has had enough of the intruder.

Uta-napishtim informs his boatsman Urshanabi that he is also no longer welcome. He instructs him to wash Gilgamesh, to clad him in clean garments and to take him back to where he came from. Urshanabi obliges and he and Gilgamesh embark the ship. As they are about to sail, Uta-napishtim's wife intercedes for Gilgamesh once again, reminding her husband that their visitor has come a long and weary way. At least he deserves a parting gift. And Uta-napishtim decides to disclose yet another secret to Gilgamesh: at the bottom of the abyss grows a thorny plant. This plant will prick Gilgamesh's hands, but this plant also contains rejuvenating powers. Although everlasting life is not guaranteed, old age and death may be postponed somewhat.

Gilgamesh ties heavy stones onto his feet and sinks down to the bottom of the abyss. Almost drowning he manages to retrieve the precious shrub. With bleeding hands he rises to the surface. However, he is skeptical: Uta-napishtim appears to have many tricks up his sleeve. He tells Urshanabi that he will take it back to Uruk and first test it on the old people of the city to see if it really works. Only then will he dare to use it.

After twenty double hours they stop to eat. After thirty double hours they pitch camp for the night. Gilgamesh goes down to bathe in a pool of clear water. His precious gift he places rather carelessly on the edge of the pool. A snake smells it, silently creeps up. Gilgamesh is just in time to see the creature sailing away, discarding its old skin and emerging young and new. The plant did work after all – but for the wrong customer.

Gilgamesh breaks down and cries. He bemoans his fate to Urshanabi. He is tired, he has exhausted himself only for the benefit of the lion of the earth. All that remains is for him to return to where he came from.

So, Gilgamesh and Urshanabi return to Uruk. But strangely enough, on their return Gilgamesh does not seem downcast and deflated. In fact, he seems almost proud. He instructs the boatsman to go up onto the walls of Uruk, and he echoes the words of the narrator in the very beginning of the epic: do inspect closely the brickwork and its foundations, have a good look at the immediate surroundings, the city, the orchards and quarries, and the house of Ishtar.

Tablet XII

Gilgamesh has lost his toy – a ball that fell down to the Netherworld. His servant Enkidu responds to his lord's wailing and offers to go down and fetch it. Gilgamesh gives him several instructions on what he must not do in order to return unharmed: not dress himself in an clean garment, not anoint himself with sweet oil, not hurl or throw a stick, not carry a staff, not wear sandals, not make a noise and many more. But Enkidu ignores these instructions and the Netherworld seizes him.

The king, the son of Ninsun weeps bitterly for his servant Enkidu. He goes first to Enlil and then to Ea with his sorrow, but none of the two gods responds to his cries. Eventually he turns to Shamash who then brings up the shade of Enkidu from the Netherworld. Gilgamesh and Enkidu hug and kiss each other, overcome by the moment of reunion. Then Gilgamesh goes ahead and asks Enkidu many questions about the conditions in the Netherworld. It appears that those who have descendants that remember them are the happiest: many soothing offerings are brought to them. Those who died in honour on the battlefield are equally well cared for. Those who have no provider of funerary offerings really have a raw deal, they exist on the leftovers that are thrown away.

The tablet ends rather abruptly.

Remarks

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a strange and moving story. It recalls remote times, remote places and remote people who are not really fully human. It vibrates with a universal fear for death, no matter how religious or skeptical one may be. There is no hero, only an anti-hero. He starts off as a rogue and ends as a failure. The manner in which he eventually recuperates remains an open-ended question.

From the exposition above it should be clear that the last tablet, Tablet XII seems out of place. Most scholars agree that this tablet poses a problem to the flow of the narrative. They also agree that the narrative should end at the end of Tablet XI, with the return of Gilgamesh and Urshanabi to Uruk. Tablet XII, its addition and its purposes will be discussed in a following chapter.

The second part of this thesis considers only Tablets I – XI as the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.* The reason should be clear: Tablets 1 – XI is a coherent *narrative* with events that have bearing on one another. Furthermore, the *narrative* begins and ends at the same place: on the walls of Uruk, thereby framing the events with a neat *inclusio.*

The following chapter is looking at the *story behind the story* – the *sources* of the *Epic.* Where did it all start? Where did Gilgamesh come from, and what did his world look like? Thus, the next chapter pertains to the historical, cultural and ideological background of the *Epic.*

CHAPTER 3

THE SOURCE HISTORY OF THE *EPIC OF GILGAMESH*

Introduction

The *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* has a long and intricate history. Everything happened long before it was written down. Memories of a time that had passed were clouded by romance and fear, excitement and horror: the glory of the ancient time was yearned for, yet issues of the present age were equally important and needed to be addressed.

The *Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* does not efface the past, neither does it colour a rosy future. The *Epic* clings to the past: even for its Babylonian recipients the Sumerian background belonged to the past. However, this background is appropriated creatively, masterly, brilliantly to convey a powerful message for the present.

In the following chapter the history of the transmission of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* will be discussed, its origins, adaptations and final transformations. It will appear that the *Standard Version of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* never let go of its concepts and ideologies of the remote past, therefore these will also be taken into account, from the very beginning.

1. The Sumerian past

1.1. General background

The Sumerian culture started to flourish during the *Old Sumerian Age*. This period covers the three *Early Dynasties*, usually abbreviated as *ED I, II* and *III.* The *Old Sumerian Age* lasts roughly from 2900 – 2340 BC (cf Boshoff & Scheffler 2000:25-26; Kuhrt 1995:27; Postgate 1994:22; Edzard 1967:54-55).

Researchers and archaeologists are fascinated by the Sumerians and their exceptional high level of civilisation, even today. With regards to language, Sumerian is apparently unrelated to any other known tongue (Schrott 2001:8). In spite of the efforts of some scholars to prove that Sumerian has features in common with the Dravidic language and culture of the Indus Valley, decisive evidence is lacking (Saggs 1962:33). The only point on which everyone agrees is that Sumerian is definitely not a branch of the Semitic languages, therefore the Sumerians were also not ethnically related to the rest of the Semitic speaking peoples who lived in the vicinity of southern Mesopotamia.

Much later myths were told about this strange and fascinating race. These myths refer to them as the *Black-headed people who came from the sea,* and the legendary *Seven Sages* – as though they were the ones who imported civilisation (Schrott 2001:8). This captured the imagination of many people. There are a number of popular theories proposing that the Sumerians were actually aliens who came from outer space to earth to plant civilisation here.

Most probably the real picture is quite simple. Many different peoples inhabited the south of Mesopotamia for many ages. Archaeologists discovered remains of cultural activity dating to the sixth millennium BC, the so-called Samarran 'culture' (cf Kuhrt 1995:21-22). For the next three thousand years people came and went and left their remains. The theory that the Sumerians were highly civilised immigrants or that they were the only race on the scene, must thus be refuted. Most probably the Sumerians inhabited the south of Mesopotamia together with other ethnic groups of which one other group certainly was Semitic (Kuhrt 1995:23).

The first Sumerian poems on Bilgames and the later Standard Babylonian Version seem to intertwine myth, fact and fiction that continued to be

meaningful well after their initial composition. Some concepts and ideologies that prevailed since Sumerian times will now be pointed out.

1.2. Cities

The Sumerians start to dominate the scene when the Uruk III/Jemdet Nasr period phases out and the age of the *Early Dynasties* dawns. This transition is indicated by a marked cultural change: for some reason or another people preferred to live in cities (Postgate 1994:24). Once again, this did not happen suddenly. The process of urbanisation started earlier, gained momentum and by the time of 2500 BC more than 80% of the population lived in cities of more than 40 ha (Kuhrt 1995:31-32). Some well-known Sumerian cities were Eridu, Badtibara, Sippar, Larak and Shuruppak – according to the Sumerian King List these cities existed before the Deluge. After the cataclysm Kish, Uruk, Ur, Adab, Umma and Lagash are prominent (cf Postgate 1994:28).

In this regard two cities deserve attention. The first city is Nippur. At a certain stage Nippur became the most important city in Sumerian theology (Postgate 1994:33). The temple of the god Enlil was in Nippur and he was considered as the god who legitimised kingship. No one could claim kingship unless Enlil approved. The Standard Babylonian Epic retains this theology after the initial fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu and Enkidu acknowledges the legitimating of Gilgamesh's kingship by the god Enlil.

The second city is Kish. According to the Sumerian King List Kish was the first city in which kingship was established after the Deluge (cf Kuhrt 1995:29). Although it was pointed out that the Sumerian King List does not contain historical truths, the title *King of Kish* did seem to be of special significance. Even kings who were not the actual kings of Kish chose to call themselves *King of Kish* (cf Kuhrt 1995:41-42). This underlines the power of a very old tradition that was preserved for a very long time.

So, to continue, the Sumerian age was marked by the uprising of many cities. The Standard Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* encloses its narrative by the *walls of Uruk,* as it were. And indeed, three types of architectural structures became typical of the Sumerian urban culture: temples, palaces and city walls (Pollock 1999:175-176). Cities were enclosed by sturdy walls, and every city had its own king and a tutelary deity who was worshipped in its temple (Postgate 1994:26). Visitors from outside as well as city-dwellers inside were filled with awe and admiration by the spectacular exterior of the majestic constructions.

But this was not all. City-walls did not only protect the inhabitants of the city, they were also a visual display of power. Some scholars attribute Gilgamesh's tyranny over his people in the Standard Epic to his building activities, especially as he is credited for building the city walls of Uruk in later inscriptions (cf George 1999:xlvii). This may be the case. Sumerian urban culture do seem to reflect a religious and political elite whose image was further boosted by ordinary people who undertook large building projects apparently quite obediently.

However, the prevailing ideology was that all work was done in honour of the gods or in aid of the community (Pollock 1999:179). Sure enough, a degree of coercion may have been involved, but the ideology that inspired people to work should not be overlooked. The significance and the ideology of city-walls that were established during the Sumerian times seem to persist right through to the time of the Standard Epic.

Approximately thirty-one of these city-states were scattered over the southern area of Mesopotamia (Postgate 1994:34). Although they were individual units, every one with its own king, officials, and internal government and so forth, they shared certain common features: language and religion. And although these cities functioned individually, it became necessary to co-operate from

time to time due to political or economic reasons. However, all too often conflict destabilised relationships and cities waged war against one another.

The Sumerian poem of *Bilgames and Akka* reflects something of this relationship between city-states. Indeed, the battle between Uruk and Kish may really have taken place as both cities were important during the third millennium and Enmebaragesi was a historical Sumerian figure. But what could the reason for battle be? The poem simply states: *To empty the wells* (see George 1999:143-146). A possible interpretation is for George that these words should be taken figuratively as referring to the seemingly endless consequences of surrender and the loss of independence. Schrott (2001:12) on the contrary chooses a literal, rather tangible explanation: Uruk had the best sources for fire clay, the most sought after building material in the Ancient Near East. Furthermore, the captivated Akka in his closing speech lauds Uruk as the *smithy of the Gods* (George 1999:148). Schrott (2001:12) also interprets this as reference to the smithy/blacksmith who used copper and bronze to furnish tools as opposed to the primitive stone age customs of the previous era and some of the adjacent peoples in the Ancient Near East. If Schrott is correct, the whole poem speaks of cultural innovation, of a new urban lifestyle.

Indeed, the whole idea of the *triumph of culture* and *city life as an ideal form of living* seems to be reflected in the recount of the *Creation of Enkidu* in the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (Westenholz & Westenholz 2000:443; Damrosch 1987:94; see also Westerman 1994:58). Modern readers of the *Gilgamesh Epic* often conceive of Enkidu as some kind of *noble savage,* but in reality the Babylonians themselves were not actually impressed with wild nature. Mesopotamian literature describes the *primitive man* as *savage, animal like* (Tigay 1982:202), and the wilderness where he lived, was a place where evil spirits, animals and robbers dwelled. Thus, Enkidu in his primitive, uncultivated state was not idealised by the Mesopotamian civilisation.

In describing Enkidu, his creation and later on his humanisation, the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* contrasts *Nature* over against *Civilisation,* by means of contrasting *the steppe/wilderness* over against *Uruk* (Westenholz & Westenholz 2000:443; Damrosch 1987:94). In fact, Enkidu is portrayed as being hostile to human culture: he pulls out the traps that the hunter had set. The wilderness – nature - Enkidu – is an inferior, boring way of existing. Excitement, real living is that which happens in the city.

Yet, despite the contrasts, the parallels between Gilgamesh and Enkidu are striking: besides their likeness in strength and vigour, both disturb a particular order of existence. Gilgamesh upsets the civil order in Uruk; Enkidu, in his hostility towards culture and civilisation, also disturbs the pastoral order in the countryside (Damrosch 1987:94). Whether the gods had planned this likeness in image in so much detail, is left to the reader's own imaginative devices. But somehow Gilgamesh and Enkidu become a mirror of each other, right from the very beginning.

However, the *Standard Babylonian Epic,* although it favours city life, it is not blind to the costs of civilisation (Abusch 1986:144). Enkidu is introduced to civil life by the prostitute Shamhat. He will become the king's best friend and companion; together they will perform heroic deeds and win the admiration of the people. But Enkidu will suffer illness – and will die eventually. Life, civilisation is exciting, but dangerous (Westenholz & Westenholz 2000:444).

Yet something helps Enkidu cope with the complex city life and new challenges that awaits him: knowledge. After the scene of seduction, after Enkidu discovers that he cannot run as he used to, his knowledge increased:

Tablet I:185 :

u šu is×i✪h⇩ma rapaš h⇩asīsa but his understanding broadened

Knowledge compensates for a loss of innocence (Damrosch 1987:95). Enkidu has lost his former friends and his peaceful existence, but equipped with knowledge he is ready to enter into the city – and civilisation.

This preference for city life may be illustrated by another point. One of the most perplexing questions in the *Gilgamesh Epic* pertains to the nature of the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. As Enkidu sits at the feet of the prostitute to learn further of his purpose in life, she tells him of the dreams that Gilgamesh dreamed way back in Uruk and the explanation Ninsun had given. The dreams and the explanations concern the heavy object that fell to the ground – initially Gilgamesh cannot pick it up, but when he does so, he loves it like a wife and does something with it: the Akkadian root of the word is *h⇩abābu* (I:239;253;263;268). The translation of *h⇩abābu* is somewhat problematical. George (2003:553-557; 1999:10-11) translates the one word with two: *caress and embrace.* In this regard he probably agrees with The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD) that interprets *elišu h⇩abābu* indeed as *caress and embrace.* However, in a later Akkadian Dictionary of which George himself is one of the editors (2000), *h⇩abābu* is translated as *murmer, chirp, twitter – of water; flies "buzz"; birds; lovers.* Here he seems to agree with Wolfram von Soden's *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch: murmeln, zirpen, zwitchern.* In this particular Gilgamesh-episode Von Soden interprets *h⇩abābu as flüstere* – to whisper. And last, but not least, Parpola, in the glossary that he provides at the end of his transliteration, renders *h⇩abābu* with *to make love.* It seems that the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu may have been homosexual.

However, apparently sexual relationships could be expressed with several terms of which the nuances are anything but clear to the modern reader. Bottéro and Petschow (in *Reallexicon der Assyriology, Band 4*:466) suggest that the undertones of the love between Gilgamesh and Enkidu may resound with the development of civilisation. Together with the erection of cities and

the building of temples for the gods to dwell in, a particular *city cult* also developed. This cult was mainly religious by nature, but not exclusively restricted to religious practices only. Prostitutes – male and female – were institutionalised and an important element of civilisation. The suggestion of Bottéro and Petschow (above) is that Gilgamesh would probably love Enkidu in the way of a civilised city-man: *à la vie civiliseé, à la ville.* The complete transformation of Enkidu from a savage beast to a suave city dweller seems to be implied by this relationship.

Yet another explanation is given by Hardman (1993:1-8). He distinguishes between *homosexualism* and what he calls *homoaffectionism.* The latter pertains to *same sex relationships which do not necessarily involve homosexual acts, but do involve strong emotional bonding, which may or may not include sexual conduct* (Hardman 1993:v). Relationships of this kind are intimate relationships between members of the same gender who mutually support each other, work closely together and are unconditionally loyal to each other. Without these kind of relationships, it would be impossible to conduct wars, to undertake important projects: in short, *homoaffectionism* is important for the evolution of civilisation (Hardman 1993:2).

1.3. Animals

A second important issue that arises from the Sumerian poems is the imagery around the concept *bull.* Bilgames is continuously referred to as a *bull* in some way or another. His mother is Ninsun, goddess/lady Wild Cow. And the Bull of Heaven pertains to the constellation Taurus (George 1999:168). Schrott (2001:13) points out that this is also the constellation in which the sun rose in the sky and in the new year. But he (Schrott) is further convinced that this imagery reflects a cultural historical paradigm.

Sheep and goats were domesticated quite early, roughly during the eighth millennium BC. Cattle were wild beasts at that stage, they were dangerous,

and they roamed the plains, as they needed a large area for grazing. Only about 3000 years later they started to be domesticated, and by the time of the Sumerian age, they were still relatively new on the scene and also a symbol of status. Mostly the government owned cattle that were used in its services: to do heavy work like ploughing, artificial irrigation and transport. Its meat was eaten, but milk was not popular, as its nutritional value was not yet realised. Thus, the *bull* or *steer* symbolises a Mesopotamian cultural revolution. What is significant, is that the *Age of Taurus* is regarded astrologically as the period 4000-2000 BCE (Parker and Parker 1979:44), exactly the time during which Sumerian civilisation and culture dominated the scene.

[In this regard Schrott 2001:31-32 makes some interesting remarks concerning the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the signs of the Zodiac. References to the *lion/lions,* the *scorpion*-people, the *twin* mountains may be the remains of ancient myths incorporated into the *Epic,* and were perhaps significant to its ancient recipients in a way that is very difficult to understand. This aspect certainly deserves research.]

1.4. Kings

The whole ideology around *kingship* is also important. Legends that were composed much later honour three important kings of Uruk: Enmerkar, Lugalbanda and Bilgames (George 2003:6). The heroic age of Sumer was kept alive in the memories of many people and inspired the artists of the time. Ancient Mesopotamian art portrays kingship with a hat, a stick and a chair – or a crown, a scepter and a throne (Postgate 1994:216). But unfortunately it is virtually impossible to know exactly how the early Sumerian city-states were ruled.

A rather romantic theory exists that these cities were ruled democratically by means of an elected city council on which any citizen had the right to be a member – even women – and that ultimate decisions were eventually in the

hands of the elders of the city. A leader was appointed only in times of emergency or threat: once the crisis was warded off, the position of leadership was also disposed of (see Saggs 1962:37-39). This theory probably has its roots in the Sumerian poem of *Bilgames and Akka,* and in the later Standard Babylonian account of Gilgamesh and Enkidu seeking the approval of the elders of the city before they venture into the Cedar Forest to slay Humbaba. In both narratives the king needs to counsel the elders of the city before taking action. This theory may have some support, though the high degree of democracy is most probably exaggerated.

What is certain is that the leader – LUGAL, literally *big man* – was in the first place a military leader (Schrott 2001:9; Kuhrt 1995:34; see also Saggs 1962:360). Furthermore, it appears that kingship was neither permanent nor hereditary in the very beginning – this happened only later (Postgate 1994:270). But even when kingship did become a permanent institution, the power of the king was not absolute. It seems that he was kept in check by some sort of council and several advisors.

However, it is necessary to keep in mind that politics was always closely related to religion. Other titles used for the ruler of the city are *e n s i*, mostly translated as *governor* and e n: e n often pertains to a temple function (Kuhrt 1995:34). Whether these titles had bearing on the one and same person or whether they designated separate offices is rather unclear. However, the king, the leader was definitely also the most notable ceremonial actor. Kings had large impressive temples built for deities. One of the most important duties of the king was to perform sacrificial ceremonies at the temple. He needed to placate the tutelary deity of the city in order to guarantee prosperity for the people.

Thus, the king served as a kind of a mediator between the people and the gods (Saggs 1962:361). Another of the king's duties was to erect elaborate

temple-complexes for the tutelary deity of the city (Pollock 1999: 175). If the god

or goddess was pleased, the people prospered. If not, the wrath of the gods descended on the people and disaster struck. The king was responsible to ensure that everything possible was done to keep the gods happy.

The king was supposed to be to his people like a *shepherd to his sheep* (Westenholz & Westenholz 2000:443; George 1999:xvi), ruling, guiding and protecting them. He was responsible for social justice and to protect the weakest of the weak from abuse. A text from the latter part of the *ED III*-period attests to the reforms of Uruinimgina: he solemnly promises Ningirsu (god of Lagash) that he will protect the waif and the widow against the powerful (Kuhrt 1995:39). But the same text later on still gives women a raw deal: if she dares to speak disrespectfully about a man, she is to be shut up brutally. Her mouth shall be crushed with a burnt brick that is to be displayed at the city gate for all to see.

Putting the issue of disrespectful women aside – the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* zooms into this ideology of the just and responsible king right after the prologue with its king doing more or less the opposite from what he is supposed to do. King Gilgamesh's behaviour is quite disgraceful.

The expedition to the Cedar Forest is one of the prominent themes in the *Gilgamesh Epic* – from the Sumerian Bilgames poems into the *Old Babylonian Epic,* until the final rendition of the *Standard Version.* Apparently kings of the Ancient Near East achieved an important performance by undertaking an expedition to far-off mountains in order to chop off trees (Ferguson 1999:327; Damrosch 1987:100). It seems that they did not care much about nature conservation and the osone layer! But chopping off cedar trees was a necessary deed for a king's esteem. Sargon I and his grandson Naram Sin were able to succeed in this regard, and their chronicles recount

the deed of chopping off cedar trees on a mountain in a remote area as one of their heroic performances.

1.5. Theology

The *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* reaches back to Sumerian times not only in terms of ideology, but also in terms of theology. Many gods and goddesses that were prominent in the Sumerian pantheon had ceased to be active by the time of the Middle Babylonian period.

For many ages religion was a matter of oral transmission and only fragmentary remains of religious tradition found their way into writing. However, it is relatively certain that the earliest Mesopotamian religion – that is before the time of the *Early Dynasties* and the city states – was connected to survival and fertility (Nemet-Nejat 2002:178; Pollock 1999:188; Jacobsen 1976:26). During the fourth millennium people were threatened daily by famine and disease. The forces of nature determined the fate of human beings. Nature either gave life or destroyed it. This was interpreted religiously: the gods were responsible for matters concerning life and death. Good and evil spirits lurked everywhere – in the weather, in the seasons, in the crops, in the waters, and so forth (Jacobsen 1976:21-22). Myths were told in order to explain some of these forces over which humans had no control (Nemet-Nejat 2002:178) – for example the seasons and the weather.

Some of these very ancient deities find their way into the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.* The most obvious example is the mother of the king, Ninsun, goddess of the wild cow. Furthermore the appearance of Enkidu is compared with attributes of the goddess Nissaba and the god Shakkan respectively (I:90-92). Nissaba was a Sumerian cereal goddess, the goddess of grain who later became the patron goddess of the scribes (George 1999:224; Parpola 1997:147; Walker 1996:43). Shakkan was the

god of gazelles, wild asses and other wild beasts. But unlike Nissaba he does not seem to play any role in later theology.

As social circumstances change, so does religion. As it was stated, city-states started to rise all over southern Mesopotamia round about the third millennium BC (Postgate 1994:34). Cities were governed, life was ordered in terms of rules and regulations. And so the urban bureaucracy became projected into the heavenly realm (Jacobsen 1976:77-79). Gods of nature were transformed into city-gods with powers and duties similar to those of a king and officials in an urban bureaucracy (Nemet-Nejat 2000:179). Sumerian city-states consisted of a council, a king and other officials. Likewise the Mesopotamian pantheon consisted of two councils of deities: the *Igigi* and the *Anunnaki* (cf George 1999:222-223). In due course the *Igigi* became the council of the great gods of the heaven and the *Anunnaki* the council of the gods of the Netherworld. The transition from Tablet VI to tablet VII in the *Standard Version* especially marks the counsel of the great gods: they are deliberating who shall die – Gilgamesh or Enkidu?

Eventually some gods crystallise. Three cosmic gods survive into later Babylonian and Assyrian periods: An (Akkadian Anu), Ellil (Akkadian Enlil) and Enki (Akkadian Ea) (see Nemet-Nejat 2002:182-185; Jacobsen 1976:75-143, Saggs 1962:328-340 and Von Soden 1994:173-182 for a detailed discussion of the Mesopotamian pantheon and its evolution). An personifies the heaven. His name means *sky* in Sumerian, he resides in heaven. He held the most important position among the gods. He represented calm authority. An does not really play a major role in the *Standard Epic of Gilgamesh.* He is honoured as one of the great gods, but he seems very much a *deus absconditus,* even giving in far too easily to his daughter Ishtar's temper tantrum. It seems that he cannot really care any longer what goes on below.

Equal in rank and next to An there was Enlil, literally translated *Lord Wind.* Contrary to the serene calm of An, Enlil represented the force, but also the fickleness and the storminess of the wind. Therefore his attitude towards

human beings was always rather ambivalent: although he was the one who legitimated kingship, he was also the one who brought about the Deluge in the later Atrahasis epic, - the narrative of Uta-napishtim in the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.* When the many people on earth start to irritate Enlil, he decides upon a permanent solution to his problem: complete extermination. Enlil's hostility towards humans features in the *Standard Epic* itself. Enlil is the god who appointed Humbaba to guard his Cedar Forest against human intruders; Enlil is the god who decides that Enkidu must die.

Enki (Akkadian Ea) was the clever – even cunning – one among the gods. His domain was the *sweet waters* – the Deep. Contrary to the brute force of Enlil, Enki was the diplomat. Like water he chose to sail around obstacles and to make use of persuasion rather than coercion. Later he became associated with wisdom. Enki/Ea's role in the *Standard Epic of Gilgamesh* is more or less restricted to the Uta-napishtim-narrative. He is the one who lets out the secret of the coming cataclysm to Atrahasis/Uta-napishtim and instructs the man to build a boat that would carry him and his kin to survival.

Ninhursaga (Aruru in the *Standard Epic*) was the only prominent goddess among the three great gods. Although every one of the male gods had their consorts, they were seldom more than a rather hazy figure associated with a male deity. Ninhursaga was something like a primeval mother. Although she was initially the patron goddess of the wild animals, she gradually became the goddess who exercised a determinative influence upon the development of the fetus in the womb. Her creator-role is stressed in the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh:* she hears the cries of the women-folk of Uruk and obliges by creating Enkidu from a piece of clay. But Ninhursaga/Aruru does not hold a political office. It seems that she starts to fade away and her features and functions become absorbed by other deities.

At a certain stage Mesopotamian religion changes from being nature-fertility orientated to a religion that is unmistakably astral by nature. The deities next

in rank, also sometimes regarded as children of those above, started to dominate the heavenly scene and kept their influence for many centuries later. These deities pertain to the moon, the sun, and the stars.

Nanna (Su-en who becomes Sîn in Akkadian) was the moon-god. He was the light of the night and measured time, he determined the calendar. He plays a very minor role in the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh:* a distraught and tearful Gilgamesh prays to Sîn, in the beginning of tablet IX. He fears the lions that he had once slaughtered, he prays to the moon-god, recognising him as the *light of the night* (IX: 10-11). However, in later Babylonian theology Sîn becomes very important as attested by the religious reforms of Nabu-na'id, the last Neo Babylonian king (Saggs 1962:332).

Utu (the Akkadian Shamash) was the sun god who expelled darkness and brought evil to light. His most important function was to protect law and justice. He plays quite an active role in the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.* Throughout the first half of the epic Gilgamesh and Enkidu often bring offers to Shamash. They do so during their trip to the Cedar Forest, and they do so after slaughtering the Bull of Heaven. Ninsun's prayer to Shamash just before the two heroes' trip to the Cedar Forest brings interesting relationships to the light. There seems to be special relationship between Gilgamesh and Shamash. Ninsun prays that the god cares for her son on his perilous journey. Indeed, he intervenes when Humbaba seems to be getting the better of Gilgamesh and Enkidu – Shamash launches thirteen winds that blind the monster. But it also seems that there exists a feud between Shamash and Enlil. According to Ninsun Shamash is the one who put the desire into Gilgamesh's heart to venture into the abode of Humbaba, Enlil's special guardian. Humbaba is associated with *the evil things that Shamash hates* (III: 53). And when Enkidu lies stricken with disease after disposing of the monster, Shamash tries to dissuade Enlil from having Enkidu die. Having failed that, he speaks to the delirious Enkidu, making him come somewhat to

his senses. And after the death when the grief-stricken obsessed Gilgamesh roams the plains, he bends down quite concerned to speak to the sad hero.

What is striking in the *Standard Epic* though, is the omission of the name and function of the god Marduk – almost. In Parpola's (1997) edition his name appears only once in tablet III: 177. It is true that Marduk was still a minor figure among the gods by the time the *Standard Epic* found its final form (George 1999:224). However, he appears on the scene already during Hammurabi's reign, although rising to fame only after the Hammurabi-dynasty (Saggs 1962:340). But nothing of the cosmic strife of *Enuma Elish* is reflected in the *Epic of Gilgamesh.*

Inanna (Akkadian: Ishtar) is the only goddess of the old pantheon who continued to exist on an equal footing with her male colleagues. Initially she was a Sumerian goddess of fertility. Many myths relate her relationship with Dumuzi (Tammuz in Akkadian and the Old Testament). Some way or another Dumuzi lands in the Netherworld where Ereshkigal, Ishtar's *charming* sister is queen. Together with her vizier Namtar they conduct a reign of terror. Inanna ventures into the Netherworld to fetch her lover, everything withers and dry up on earth, becoming infertile. This event is connected to the hot and dry season in Mesopotamia. However, when she finds her beloved Dumuzi, they return, consume their lovemaking and the same fertility becomes visible on earth again. Inanna's early symbol was a bundle of reeds. As religion took on astral features, she became associated with the planet Venus, the morning – and evening star simultaneously. Inanna/Ishtar accordingly becomes the goddess of insatiable sexual lust and bloody war. She represents the intense emotions of love and hate – two sides of the same coin, or planet.

Ishtar never really grows up. Maturity and motherhood are not associated with her. Sex and lust are her attributes, not marriage and children. She is a coquettish fickle nymph who entertain many lovers and then dispose of them,

usually in a macabre way (tablet VI of the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh*).

Ishtar's sister, Ereshkigal is probably the most important figure of the Netherworld: here she reigns as queen. At her side is her husband Nergal and her vizier Namtar (see also Mc Call 2001:69-73). These are the most prominent deities of the Netherworld in the *Gilgamesh Epic.*

However, at this point it is important to mention another type of deity – the so-called chthonic deities, those who come up from beneath the earth, but return, sooner or later. Tammuz, who shares the two sisters Ishtar and Ereshkigal in some way or another, is such a deity. But the most important of these deities in the *Gilgamesh Epic* is the snake.

A flight from death or a quest for life is the overarching theme in the *Gilgamesh Epic.* Mortality, a chance to obtain life everlasting is one of the central motifs. In this regard the snake plays an important part. As Gilgamesh leaves Uta-napishtim with Urshanabi the boatsman, he stops on his way back to Uruk to take a bath. A snake creeps up and snatches the rejuvenating plant that Uta-Napishtim had given him as parting gift.

Initially it seems to be an accident: carelessness on the part of Gilgamesh. But is it only that – a mere casualty?

Behind this small yet tragic anecdote lie particular mythical ideologies. According to Ancient Near Eastern myth a distinction needs to be maintained between gods and humans. Humans may never achieve the same pinnacles as gods (Kapelrud 1993:54). In this regard the advice of Siduri, the barmaid of the *Old Babylonian Epic* is significant (this is not included in the Standard Version): she tells Gilgamesh that the gods had destined humans to die, the very moment that they were created. Life – one may assume everlasting life –

they grasp in their hands. Therefore Gilgamesh should enjoy the life that he has whilst he is alive. (See Abusch 1993:1 for the text and a translation.)

Gods do not wish to have humans as their equals – and the only ones that can prevent this happening, are the gods themselves (Kapelrud 1993:54). The snake, here towards the end of the *Epic,* is more than a creature – *nēšu ša qaqqari:* a *lion of the earth* (XI:306). In the Ancient Near East the snake was a divine power that represented the chthonic realm (Kapelrud 1993:56). These beings lived beneath the earth, they were dangerous, quick and sly in their actions. Snakes were feared because they were dangerous – at the same time they also had healing powers. They had faculties that humans did not have, therefore it was impossible for humans to prevent them from doing what they wanted to. A snake was thus more than an ordinary creature. Eventually humans were outwitted by powers beyond their control.

Thus, it is not by chance that a snake snatches Gilgamesh's precious plant. This snake is in fact on the side of the gods – that chthonic being that the gods themselves had appointed to prevent humans from becoming their equals. In this case, the issue is life everlasting. They dare not take chances, not even with a rejuvenating plant.

Remarks: The *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* reflect many of the concepts, ideologies and beliefs of the Ancient Near East that date back to Sumerian times. Although modern readers are able to understand the narrative perfectly well without the additional information, this knowledge certainly enhances one's appreciation of the *Epic.* It does help to know that wild untamed nature was not the ideal: the bright lights of the city were winking. It explains why the guardian of the cedar woods was killed mercilessly and why trees were chopped off randomly. It also explains who were the deities and why they were worshipped and feared. Thus, at first glance the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a strange, yet fascinating and enjoyable tale. At second glance it becomes serious, intriguing…even scary.

These were the ideas – but what are the facts – if any?

2. Sumerian literature: the five poems on Bilgames

2.1 Obscure origins – did the king really exist?

The figure of king Gilgamesh appears at the dawn of history in southern Mesopotamia. However, awareness of history as a field of study is not realised yet, writing is just being appropriated to record something other than business transactions (Walker 1996 :17). The late Uruk III-period, also known as Jemdet Nasr is rapidly phasing out, and the Old Sumerian Early Dynasties are being established in the many city-states which are rising all over the country (cf Kuhrt 1995:23-27). A highly developed urban culture is replacing the previous agrarian one, peoples' lives are ruled by an urban bureaucracy and its intricate social, economical and political structures (cf Kuhrt 1995:31-44). Wars between these city states are the order of the day, even the lives of the rich and the powerful are uncertain, and people are increasingly looking for protection behind large and fortified city walls (Jacobsen 1976:77-78). Sometime during this revolutionary age of the third millennium BC steps in the figure of King Gilgamesh of Uruk.

The historicity of Gilgamesh cannot be proved without any doubt. His existence cannot be confirmed by inscriptions from his time (Tigay 1982:13). However, the name *Gilgamesh* does appear in the so-called Sumerian King List according to which he, Gilgamesh was the fifth king of the first dynasty of Uruk, and who lived somewhere between 2700-2500 BC. This would place his existence in the Second Early Dynastic Period of Sumer (Tigay 1982:13; see also George 1999:xv&ix; Van de Mieroop 1999:29; Damrosch 1987:89; Kuhrt 1995:29-30).

The Sumerian King List documents all the kings and cities since the beginning of time, this is to say even before the Deluge. In spite of the cataclysm the list continues up to the rulers of Ur III and their successors at Isin (cf Kuhrt 1995:29-31; Postgate 1994:28). An impression is created that kingship always resided in only one city for a duration of time. The first city after the Deluge was Kish and apparently exercised a kind of a hegemony over the other cities. After some time had passed, the city is smitten and kingship and reign are transferred to another city and its rulers: Kish is succeeded by Uruk, Uruk is succeeded by Ur, and so forth. The Sumerian King List reflects a continuous, almost god given rotation amongst the city-states of Southern Mesopotamia.

However, the Sumerian King List is not without some interpretative problems. The first obvious problem is the legendary length of reign of some of the kings, especially those before the Deluge. More significant however, is that this List was compiled during the last part of the nineteenth century BC, that is toward the end of the Ur III-period (cf Pollock 1999:191; Kuhrt 1995:29; Postgate 1994 :28; Tigay 1982:14). Thus, the Sumerian King List does not convey historical facts and should not be treated as a historical document. Rather, this List should be regarded as literature that is also inspired by a particular ideology. It reflects an ideal situation (Kuhrt 1995:31).

Nevertheless, although the Sumerian King List is not reliable historically, this is not to say that it is unimportant. On the contrary! In the first place the ideology which inspired the text was a very important one: it influenced kingship and reign for many past centuries and would continue to do so for centuries to come. Mesopotamian culture was on the whole very conservative. In the second place, in spite of its obvious bias and some deliberate omissions, some kings and cities did really exist. Therefore the existence of Gilgamesh deserves the benefit of the doubt: the Sumerian King List cannot be rejected as mere imagination.

However, by the time that the Sumerian King List was compiled, the tradition of King Gilgamesh of Uruk – or rather Bilgames as he was known at this stage by his Sumerian name - was already firmly established. The first two kings of the Ur III dynasty, Ur-Nammu and Shulgi were fascinated by their ancient Sumerian predecessor (George 2003:108; cf also George 1999:xix; and Schrott 2001:11). Both these renowned rulers composed lyrical poems in honour of the King of Old. Ur-Nammu calls himself the *brother of Bilgames the Great,* and Shulgi calls Bilgames his *brother-friend* (George 2003:108-109). However, at this point it is important to note that neither Ur-Nammu nor Shulgi had any *Epic of Gilgamesh* at their disposal to draw their inspiration from. They had only heard – perhaps read – some Sumerian poems that dealt with King Bilgames of Uruk, his heroic deeds and his death.

These Sumerian poems will now be examined in some detail. Although they do not have any direct bearing on the later *Epic of Gilgamesh* itself, they created an image of a legendary king, therefore they did function to shape a particular frame of reference for the author of the next creative phase of the narrative.

2.2. The poems

(see George 1999:141-208. See also Calmeyer's summary in *Reallexicon der Assyriology, Band 3:*360-363).

Andrew George translates these five poems fully in his 1999-edition of *The Epic of Gilgamesh.* (In his most recent work, the 2003-edition, he only provides a summary and a brief discussion.) Therefore I take the 1999-translation as point of departure. The rather vague correspondences with as well as the very obvious differences from the Standard Babylonian Version will be highlighted.

(i) Bilgames and Akka: 'The envoys of Akka'

Akka, Enmebaragesi's son, king of Kish sends emissaries to Uruk to demand submission of the latter. Bilgames, king of Uruk **convenes a meeting with the elders** of his city, suggesting that the solution to the problem lies in waging war. However, **the elders disagree**, and try to persuade him to surrender. Bilgames **rejects the advice of the elders**, and places his trust in the goddess Inanna. Consequently he **turns to the young men** of the city, once again suggesting war as the only way out. The **young men eagerly agree.** Bilgames commands his **servant Enkidu** to start with the necessary preparations for battle in order to defeat Akka.

Akka commences his siege and Uruk is alarmed. Bilgames asks a volunteer from his royal warriors to go to Akka and confuse him. Birhurturra, his royal bodyguard agrees to do so. As he exits the city, he is taken captive and brutally beaten. He is then brought before Akka.

In the meanwhile the Steward of Uruk has climbed up on the walls of the city. Akka spies him and asks Birhurturra if the one he sees is Bilgames. Birhurturra denies, and adds that if it were, battle would follow as well as the defeat of Akka. For this he is beaten once again. Now Bilgames himself appears on the city walls. Despite the warning and hesitancy of the elders, the young men take up their weapons, and led by Enkidu they proceed from the gate. Akka also sees Bilgames on the rampart and asks Birhurturra again if it is the king of Uruk. This time Birhurturra agrees, and just like he has predicted the previous time, battle commences. Akka is defeated and taken captive.

The denouement of this poem is rather strange. Bilgames addresses Akka in terms of admiration, as a superior who was once extremely generous towards him and gave him refuge. The particular occasion is not mentioned. Akka then acknowledges the status and importance of Uruk as a city of the gods

and asks Bilgames to repay his favour. In due course Bilgames obliges and let Akka go free to Kish.

From this poem the following should become clear: the main point of contact between the Sumerian poem and the Standard Version is Bilgames's counsel with the elders and his hard-headed rejection of their advice. Consequently he turns to the young men of the city who egg him on. This theme finds its way into Tablet II of the Standard Version, however the events differ completely. In the Standard Version Gilgamesh and Enkidu are on their way to the Cedar Forest to slay Humbaba. The main difference from the Standard Epic is that Enkidu is the servant of Bilgames, not his friend. And of course, Akka and Birhurturra are not characters in the later narrative.

From this poem emerges an image of Bilgames who is willful, headstrong, yet magnanimous, expressing admiration and appreciation for others if necessary.

(ii) Bilgames and Huwawa: 'The lord to the Living One's Mountain' and 'Ho, hurrah!'

Apparently two compositions existed, a longer and a shorter one, called Version A *'The lord to the Living One's Mountain'* and Version B *'Ho Hurrah!'* respectively. It seems that the former was the more popular version, and it is significant that this poem is the one that is the most frequently copied out on school tablets (cf George 2003:18). However, the two versions resemble each other and have many lines in common.

Version A: *'The Lord to the Living One's Mountain'*

This poem features Bilgames's **obsession with establishing an everlasting name.** He **knows that everybody must die sometime**, therefore he calls his **servant Enkidu** and discloses his plan to venture into the mountain in order

to set up his name. However, as the Cedar Mountain is the concern of Utu, the sun god, **Enkidu advises** the king to inform the god of his intentions.

Consequently Bilgames brings an animal offering to Utu, stating his case as he is **crying: he knows that he must die, but before this he wishes to establish his name.** Utu hears his supplication and obliges by **giving Bilgames seven rather awesome warriors to accompany him**: one with the paws of a lion and the talons of an eagle; the second is an open-mouthed cobra; the third a Dragon Serpent; the fourth spat fire; the fifth a serpent with a devastating tongue; the sixth a torrent battering the mountains; the seventh something that blasts lightning. In addition the **goddess Nissaba also gives him support** that guides him on his way.

Consequently Bilgames summons all the **unattached and able men of the city to his side to accompany him** on his quest: those who have family matters to attend to, are commanded to see to the needs of their families. So, Bilgames, his awesome seven warriors and his crew of fifty unattached and heavily armed men make their way to the Cedar Mountain.

In search for a cedar, Bilgames and his company cross six mountains, only when they reach the seventh one, he finds the cedar that he wants. They fell the tree and stack the wood in a pile. However, by doing this they disturb Huwawa in his lair. Huwawa reacts, seemingly by casting a spell upon them that hypnotises them in a kind of sleep or daze. Enkidu first awakens from **the strange dream and is worried that he cannot rouse** Bilgames **from this sleep.** He urgently reminds his lord of his duties toward the men who accompanied them, and their mothers.

Bilgames recovers at the words spoken by Enkidu. Immediately he wants to go forth and slay Huwawa. However, **Enkidu warns him** that the creature is extremely dangerous. Nevertheless, Bilgames is confident that the two of them together will succeed, and they proceed. As they draw closer to

Huwawa's dwellings, they are stopped in their tracks by the monster who commands Bilgames to place both his hands on the ground. The king obliges and **starts bargaining** with Huwawa. He promises unconditionally his big sister Enmebaragesi as Huwawa's wife, and his little sister Peshtur as concubine. In exchange of one of his auras of terror, Bilgames promises to become a kinsmen of Huwawa, and – believe it or not – the monster obliges.

The company of Bilgames is only too glad to cut off branches, tie them together and lie them at the foot of the mountain.

Bilgames continues his bargaining in exchange of the rest of Huwawa's auras. Unfortunately the text is damaged and the second and seventh gifts are unclear. However, the remaining ones are interesting: the finest quality flour and bottles of cool water; big sandals for big feet; rock crystal, chalcedony and lapis lazuli.

But cleverly Bilgames deceived Huwawa. Now, without his seven auras he is completely disarmed and easily taken captive. He **desperately pleads for his life,** and initially **it seems that Bilgames takes pity on the monster. But Enkidu is not convinced** and warns his master about the revenge of a captive set free. **Huwawa insults Enkidu about his words,** and Enkidu reacts by cutting off Huwawa's head. They put the head in a leather bag and tip it out before the gods Enlil and Ninlil. **Enlil is enraged** and reprimands them that they should have displayed reverence and courtesy towards Huwawa. In return **the god distributes seven heavenly auras** of his own to the field, the river, the canebrake, the lion, the wood, the palace and the goddess Nungal.

Version B: ***'Ho Hurrah!'***

This poem is shorter than version A and its restoration is for most of the part incomplete. The main difference from version A occurs after Huwawa cast his

spell over Bilgames and his company. Enkidu is the first one to recover and speaks to his master. But instead of the bravado that Bilgames exhibits in Version A, he seems less sure of himself and calls on his god Enki to inspire his words. George (1999:161) understands this phrase as an inspiration by the god of trickery to *overcome his opponent with cunning speech.*

This poem finds its way into the Standard Epic in an adaptive form. The expedition to Huwawa/Humbaba is well recorded as Gilgamesh's first enterprise to establish an everlasting name. But once again, the Sumerian Enkidu is a servant, not a friend. The Sumerian Bilgames is accompanied by auxiliaries, the Babylonian one goes with only the assistance of his friend. Apparently the initial bargaining of the king with the monster is omitted in the Standard Epic, however, the lines recording the first encounter are missing, therefore it is impossible to know. And in both the poem and the Epic, Huwawa/Humbaba pleads for his life, and it seems that the king is about to take pity on him. From the poem Enkidu's role as counsellor emerges, as well as the concern of the Sun god for the wellbeing of the hero.

However, some roles are reversed. A strange sleep seizes Enkidu as he lies dying in the Babylonian tablet VIII, and Gilgamesh is the one who is concerned by the fact that he cannot wake him. Furthermore, the Babylonian Humbaba is defeated by sheer force, not deceived by the Sumerian Bilgames's insincere promises. In the Standard Epic the distribution of Enlil's auras lacks, however, his anger is carried through: eventually this becomes one of the reasons that Enkidu must die.

Apparently some confusion exists about the direction of the Cedar Forest. The Sumerian texts state that the mountain of the Cedar Forest is the concern of the Sun god, therefore it is implicitly located in an eastern direction (Schrott 2001:12; Tigay 1982:76-77). The Akkadian versions connects this mountain with the Lebanon, therefore it is located in a westerly direction. It seems that a change of direction took place somewhere during the

transmission of the Sumerian poems and the final version of the *Standard Babylonian Epic.*

In his later edition George (2003:97) raises the question whether the epithet *the Living One* really should be attributed to Huwawa. He is of the opinion that the *Living One* is the one who also survived the mythical Deluge. Therefore, most probably the poem on Bilgames and Huwawa also included some reference – even a narrative – of a journey to Ziusudra, the Sumerian survivor of the Flood. George suspects that in the process of transmission the original text was abridged by omitting the Flood episode.

The association of Bilgames with Enmebaraggesi should also not be overlooked. In the Sumerian poem of *Bilgames and Huwawa* Enmebaraggesi is the big sister of Bilgames whom he proposes as wife for the monster. However, Enmebaraggesi is also the name of the father of Akka, his adversary in the poem on *Bilgames and Akka*. Apparently the name Enmebaraggesi was appropriate for a man – a king – or a woman – a high priestess (George 2003:106). Two possibilities seem likely. Firstly, in the light of royal marriages that were arranged for diplomatic purposes, one may conclude that Enmebaragesi of Kish was a woman who was indeed Bilgames's sister. That may also explain Bilgames's magnanimous attitude towards Akka, who would be his nephew. Secondly, the literary devices of irony and humour cannot be underestimated. Enmebaraggesi of Kish could have been an opponent of Bilgames and his name appropriated in this poem for Bilgames's big sister, would have had a comic effect.

(iii) Bilgames and the Bull of Heaven: 'Hero in Battle'

In his 1999-edition George remarks on his rendering of this poem that it is *far from definitive* (:167) due to a lack of reliable sources and textual corruptions. Therefore I shall incorporate additional remarks on the *Bull of Heaven*-poem according to his summary in his recent work (George 2003:11-12).

An anonymous poet praises Bilgames in a hymn-like fashion. Thereafter the king's mother, Ninsun addresses him, assigning tasks that appear rather strange and inexplicable, even to a scholar like George. Bilgames obeys, and as he completes these duties, the goddess **Inanna falls head over heels in love with him. She swears that he will be her man** and that she will not let him go.

Apparently according to some texts **Bilgames asks advice from his mother** adding that Inanna made her advances in the lee of the wall, traditionally the place of prostitutes and prostitution. Ninsun advises her son to **turn down the goddess's proposal**, and Bilgames dutifully obliges during his next encounter with Inanna. Apparently this is not done gently nor discreetly, because the goddess is **driven to rage and tears as she complains about her humiliation before her father An. She requests the Bull of Heaven to kill Bilgames. An initially refuses,** objecting that the Bull of Heaven – the constellation Taurus – grazes in the sky and would have no food on earth. **Inanna** not only **threatens to scream** but actually does so, and as her screams cleave the air, An gives in.

The goddess and her pet descends from heaven, and just like An knew, the Bull devours all grass and slurps up all water. Meanwhile king Bilgames is **enjoying himself during a drinking session**. Lugalgabagal – what a lovely name! – the minstrel who was entertaining him, needs to go outside to relieve himself, but what a shock! He sees the Bull and the havoc it plays and reports to his master. But Bilgames is unconcerned, calls for more drink and more music. Only when he has had his fill, he takes up his weapons, orders his mother Ninsun and his little sister Peshtur to go to the **temple of Enki** and bring some offers. Bilgames resolves to smite the Bull and to distribute its meat to the poor.

Bilgames and Enkidu tackle the Bull, killing it brutally and mercilessly while Inanna is looking down from the rampart. As Bilgames vowed, he butchers the animal and **hurls a haunch at Inanna.** She dashes out of the way and he demolishes the rampart of the city instead. Angrily the king cries, wishing it was the goddess and not the city-wall that he had struck. But, as he earlier vowed, he throws the corpse and innards in the street, and distributes the meat to the orphans.

Once again the ending of poem seems out of place. The horns of the Bull are made into two flasks, and Inanna in her temple Eanna pours sweet oil into them. Holy Inanna is praised.

Obviously this poem also found its way into the Standard Epic, however with major differences. Ishtar falls in love with Gilgamesh when she sees him washed and clad after his combat with Humbaba. The goddess's promises in the poem differ from those in the Epic. Gilgamesh does not need his mother's advice. The Epic has no drinking scene, only a party afterwards. Inanna screams, Ishtar threatens to let the dead out to eat up the living. Preceding the fight, no offerings are brought in the Epic.

However, the main motif remains: the goddess of sexual lust madly falls in love with the king but he rudely spurns her. In her humiliation she seeks revenge by requesting the Bull of Heaven from her father in order to kill the king. Her plan backfires: her beloved pet is brutally butchered by the king and a – slave/friend? The Sumerian poem is unclear whether Enkidu is a slave or a friend. One may assume however that he is still a slave, just like in most of the other poems on Bilgames.

(iv) Bilgames and the Netherworld: 'In those days, in those far-off days'

This poem has many repetitions. It starts by referring to the mythological origins of the world. Heaven and earth had just been separated and the three

major gods are claiming their domain: An takes the heavens, Enlil takes the earth and Enki is in his boat towards the Netherworld, presumably on his way to his cosmic domain, the Ocean Below. The Netherworld has been given to Ereshkigal as a dowry gift.

Whilst Enki is sailing in his boat, a terrible hailstorm rages. The force of the south wind rips out a willow tree from the bank of the Euphrates and blows it down. Presumably some time later (the poem does not indicate this), Inanna comes by, picks up the tree and plants it in her garden in Uruk. (Interestingly she carries the tree in her *hand* and waters it with her *foot* – the significance of this is not clear.) She eagerly awaits the time when she can have a throne and a bed furnished for her by its timber.

But as the years go by, some evil creatures make home in Inanna's tree: a Snake-that-Knows-no-Charm in its bark, a Thunderbird in its branches and a Demon-Maiden in its trunk. Inanna weeps and calls on her brother, the Sun-god Utu to help her, but he does not do so. Still weeping, she turns to her **brother Bilgames** and repeats her story to him. He does what one may expect: he disposes of the vile creatures without any further ado. He gives his **sister Inanna** the wood that she wants, and for himself he makes toys – a ball and a mallet (translation uncertain. George 2003 in chapter 13, his commentary on SB Tablet XII, gives some explanation of these toys.)

Fascinated by these, Bilgames plays with them all day long. Not only does he play, but also he **makes the young men of the city play along with him, to the point of exhaustion.** And whilst the men play with the king, **the women are kept busy** bringing them bread and water. As the day ends, Bilgames draws a mark where he placed his ball in order to know from where to continue the game at the very crack of dawn. However, **the women complain bitterly** (to the gods?). So, when Bilgames arrives at the scene where he had made his mark, both his ball and his mallet fall down to the bottom of the Netherworld.

He sits down at the Gate of Ganzir, the entrance to the Netherworld and sobs bitterly over his lost toys. He desperately calls for anyone to go down and fetch them, eventually his **servant Enkidu** volunteers. However, this is easier said than done. Bilgames gives Enkidu several instructions that include precautions one must take in order to enter and exit the Netherworld unharmed. In the Netherworld lies Ereshkigal, mourning for her son Ninuzu, raking her bare flesh with her nails and ripping out her hair like leeks. But Enkidu pays no heed and does exactly what he is told not to do – and the Netherworld seizes him.

For seven days Bilgames awaits the return of his **servant** and his toys, but after the seventh day he realises what has happened: Enkidu is seized by the Netherworld. Once again he is heart-broken – far more becomingly than a king should be over the loss of a servant. He appeals to the god Enlil in Eshkur to help him, but Enlil does not. Then he appeals to the god Nanna in Ur for help, but Nanna does not. He turns to Enki in Eridu for help, and Enki does, however, indirectly. Enki approaches Utu, the Sun god to make an opening in the Netherworld and to have Enkidu's shadow emerge. And Utu obliges.

Overcome by emotion Bilgames and Enkidu embrace, hugging and kissing each other. A long dialogue, in the form of question and answer follows: Bilgames asks Enkidu about the conditions in the Netherworld. (This dialogue offers a glimpse on the perspective that the people of the Ancient Near East had on the life hereafter.) It appears that the living and the dead does have some relationship. Obviously those who had many children are the happiest: they are remembered by many and many bring them offerings to serve whatever needs they may have. Death by mutilation of the body – whether illness, injury, devourment by a wild animal – is less pleasant: the injured part of the body keeps on plaguing the sufferer in the afterlife. Those who disrespected their parents or cheated a god face similar grim

circumstances. Someone who was not buried for some reason or another, someone whose *corpse was left lying on the plain* has a shade that does not come to rest. But the worst off were those who were burnt to death. Their smoke went up to the heavens. These spirits were never soothed by the necessary offerings made to them by the living. Therefore they sought revenge and became extremely dangerous. The living feared these spirits the most. However, some spirits were rewarded in the afterlife: those who died naturally of old age, those who died unnaturally very young, and stillborn babies.

This poem calls Bilgames the brother of Inanna, perhaps indicating a symbolic close relationship between the king and the deities rather than meaning that they were literally brother and sister. Bilgames's inexhaustible energy and the demands that he makes on the men and women of his city are recorded in the Standard Version, but the latter does not indicate the reason or reasons for the king's tyranny. And in the Standard Version Enkidu also ventures into the Netherworld. However, the reason for this awesome trip is completely different. The Standard Epic has Enkidu die from illness due to the wrath of the gods. But the emotional embracement between the king and the spirit, and the dialogue that follows, reflect remarkably that which is recorded in Tablet XII of the Standard Babylonian Epic.

(v) The Death of Bilgames: 'The great wild bull is lying down'

This is the last Sumerian poem and starts with a lament for Bilgames who lies on his deathbed. He is dying of old age. Namtar, the agent of Death has seized him. Whilst sweat is rolling from his body, Bilgames has a dream – presumably he is **delirious with fever**. He dreams that the god Nudimmud opens his eyes and he has a vision.

He is **drawn into the assembly of the great gods and they discuss his grim future** with him. They admit that his career was one of fame: **he travelled many roads,** fell a unique cedar, slew Huwawa, **built monuments**

and temples, reached Ziusudra, re-established order after the Deluge, all the Sumerian rites, rituals and cultures that would have been forgotten. Enki explains to the dying king: they do take into account that his mother is a goddess, therefore immortal, but due to the part of him that is human, he is also bound to the fate that bewaits all humans – death. The Deluge was meant to wipe out all life on earth, however, Ziusudra managed to survive. He was the only and last one. No more exceptions shall be made. Nevertheless, Bilgames will have a special position in the Netherworld. He will be the governor, chief of the shades and he will be the one to pass judgment. And after his death he will not be forgotten. During the Month of Torches **wrestling matches and trials of strength** will take place. (Apparently the Festival of Lights took place in the fifth month of the Babylonian year, more or less in August, also referred to as the *month of Gilgamesh.* On the ninth day together with the ceremonial lightning of torches young men used to imitate the fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu by performing wrestling matches in the doorways – see George 1999:196.)

In the midst of Bilgames's delirium Enlil appears and explains that he destined him to be king during a lifetime, not to live forever. The human part of him is destined to die. Not even a king can avoid death. But Bilgames should not despair. He is going to a place where many avowed priests and priestesses lie, he is going to be reunited with his deceased family members, and he is also going to be reunited with his **friend and companion Enkidu.** Furthermore, Enlil repeats that Bilgames will be counted as one of the lesser gods, the governor of the Netherworld.

Apparently Bilgames seeks counsel – it is unclear from whom – but the message of the dream is repeated: no living being escapes death, yet Bilgames is destined a special position hereafter.

In a lucid moment, Bilgames, inspired by Enki, starts working on his tomb. Apparently the agent of communicating the vision and making its meaning

clear is a dog, not a human (for some explanations see George 2003:15). The vision pertains to the site where the tomb is to be erected: it is not to be discovered and not to be destroyed – ever.

Consequently Bilgames orders the workforce of his city to divert the waters of the river Euphrates, and to build a tomb of stone in the riverbed. From the poem it seems that Bilgames's whole household is to be buried alongside him: his wives, children and servants. Furthermore, before his funeral, he also has gifts prepared for the various gods of the Netherworld. Then he lies down, presumably to die. The doorway is sealed, the Euphrates is opened and the river once again follows its normal course. Hereafter no one will ever discover the tomb of Bilgames.

This poem has two different endings according to two different manuscripts George 1999:207-208). The first and better-preserved one explains a few things. The whole issue of the importance attached to a name in the Ancient Near East is brought to light. People live on after death as long as they are remembered by those alive. Therefore funerary statues are erected and placed in temples to ensure continued invocation of the name of the deceased. Furthermore, Aruru is the one who makes it possible for people to have children and families to remember them and ensure that their names live on. The second ending simply preserves a praise of Bilgames, son of the goddess Ninsun.

Gilgamesh does not die in the Standard Babylonian Epic. However, his famous career is lauded in the prologue. The Standard Epic also explains the wrestling matches that take place in the Month of Torches. The most important point of this poem is that it calls Enkidu explicitly and for the first time the friend and companion of Bilgames.

2.3 The function of the Sumerian poems

The Sumerian poems on Bilgames are more interested in Bilgames and what he *did* than in the inner message of what he *was.* They do not reflect on the inner struggle of the hero, on the questions of life and death or on the meaning of life. This led scholars to conclude that these poems were most probably composed orally soon after his proposed lifetime and meant for court entertainment (George 2003:6; Tigay 1982:36). Indeed, the drinking scene in *Bilgames and the Bull of Heaven* points to a lively royal court where singing and drinking were popular.

The doxologies at the ending of the poems do have a hymn like sound to them, which may indicate some kind of cultic function. Apparently Bilgames was deified quite early, especially in his position as a judge of the Netherworld (see George 2003:119-132), however, liturgical notations seem to be lacking (Tigay 1982:36). Therefore, the oral Sumerian poems on Bilgames most probably were performed in the royal palace for the entertainment of the king rather than in the temple during liturgical ceremonies.

Thus, although the prime motifs of the Sumerian poems are not repeated in the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh*, the inspiration to the later *Epic* can be traced back to the early Sumerian Age. Consequently this age and its concepts and ideologies will be examined.

3. From frivolous frolic to academic achievement: entertainment to literature

3.1. Writing

The first Sumerian poems on Bilgames were composed orally (George 2003:6; George 1999:lx; Schrott 2001:12;), obviously in Sumerian. Several centuries after the *lifetime* of Bilgames – that is if he existed – these poems were written down. This implies that there were several centuries of oral

transmission before anything about Bilgames became concrete in writing. At this stage it is appropriate to give a very brief overview on the *development of writing* in ancient Mesopotamia.

Actual *writing* is preceded by a kind of a token system, called 'stones' that can be dated to 10 000 BCE (Nemet-Nejat 2002:48). These were made of clay, more or less the size of small marbles and were used for basic book-keeping in the home or at the market. Thus, in the Ancient Near East writing was appropriated in the first place to record simple household matters or business transactions (see also Walker 1996 :17). During the latter half of the fourth millennium BC this was quite common and not restricted to the south of Mesopotamia or to the Sumerians only, although the earliest *writing* was indeed found at Uruk in Mesopotamia (Nemet-Nejat 2002:49). Everyone who engaged in trade and commerce needed to keep track of what was bought and what was sold. However, these first economical records was what one may call *international*: they were mainly *pictographs* of which the picture represented the object for which it stood. That is to say, there was a picture of an animal or a plant with indications of a number next to it. This referred to what and how much of it was bought or sold and mainly pertained to merchandise and livestock (Nemet-Nejat 2002:49; Walker 1996:21). The earliest *pictographs* were drawn with a sharp tool on wet clay. Then the clay was left in the hot sun to dry out.

Increasing urbanisation brought about a more complex way of living and demanded certain cultural adaptations – also with regards to *writing* (Nemet-Nejat 2002:47). The economic administration of temples and palaces placed new demands on scribes, and it became necessary to develop a kind of a *shorthand* to keep up with the rapid pace of urban life. Therefore, instead of drawing the whole object, a symbolic representation became preferable as it was possible to do this with only a few quick strokes. But these abstract forms needed to be standardised in order to be recognisable for all, and in due course *logograms* became the norm. Very quickly the scribes realised that

logograms could also represent *syllables* in spoken language that could be combined to form many different words, also words with abstract meanings (Walker 1996:21-23). Now it was possible to appropriate writing for a variety of purposes. Besides business transactions many other texts saw the light. Inscriptions lauded kings, hymns praised deities, myths explained the world and its seasons, later on longer epic poems narrated the trials and tribulations of heroic kings, and legal codices ensured a just and orderly society. In short: writing developed as a *response to cultural developments* (Pollock 1999:172). Thus, together with writing that is transformed into language, Ancient Mesopotamia enters the arena of history.

Since it was no longer necessary to draw the accurate pictures that the *pictographs* demanded, a drawing tool with a sharp point was also unnecessary. One with a flat or a blunt point was equally suitable. The impression that the blunt point left on the wet clay was wedge-like: from there the Latin *cuneus* that became *cuneiform* in English (Walker 1996:17).

Writing became increasingly a means of disseminating knowledge – to people about people and about the world. But writing also became a tremendous power. Written material represented a particular *ideology*: that is to say the interests of a minority are presented as though they are beneficial to all (Pollock 1999:194). In a largely illiterate society this was an important issue. Writing became a means to fashion a particular outlook on life and on the world: that of the scribes.

The first readable texts date to the first half of the third millennium and are written in Sumerian (Nemet-Nejat 2002:49).

3.2 From Sumerian to Akkadian

Then rose to the occasion Sargon of Akkade.

Legend and romance obscure the facts of Sargon's heritage. A text from Nineve dating to the eighth century (more than a thousand years after Sargon's reign) records that he was a fatherless child secretly born by an *entum* – apparently a cultic functionary of very high status (Kuhrt 1995:48). His mother placed him in a basket of rushes, sealed it and cast it into the river. Eventually he was found by Aqqi the water-drawer who adopted him, raised him and appointed him as his gardener. But the goddess Ishtar loved him, and he reigned as king for 56 years.

Apparently the truth is less romantic – according to earlier folktales. It seems that Sargon's parents were quite ordinary, his father may have been a date-grower. Sargon served in the court of Urzababa, king of Kish and eventually became the royal cupbearer of the king. The events of the downfall of Urzababa and the consequent kingship of Sargon were attributed to a decree of the gods, but one may assume that Sargon took matters in his own hands to turn the tables and establish a new dynasty.

The dating of the Sargonic period – also called the Old Akkadian Empire or the Akkadian period – is generally accepted as ranging from 2340-2159 (see Kuhrt 1995:44 for different opinions). Two matters are important with regards to the reign of Sargon. He was the first ruler who succeeded in establishing an empire: that means centralised power. Instead of the many independent city-states, every one with its own ruler and bureaucracy, there was now one ruler over them all.

The second point is that Sargon was a Semite and as soon as his rule was established undisputedly, his language also became the spoken language of the region (Schrott 2001:10; Kuhrt 1995:46). This region comprised the south of Mesopotamia where the old Sumerian city-states were located, as well as the north from where Sargon originated. Sargon established a new capital, Agade/Akkade and the Semitic vernacular became known as Akkadian. And very soon Akkadian was not only being spoken, but also being written,

adapting the cuneiform signs of Sumerian to suit its own purposes (see also Nemet-Nejat 2002:49-50). Sumerian was slowly but surely dying out as spoken language, yet, it was still the language of culture and court. Therefore, most probably for the duration of the Sargonic age or Akkadian Empire, the Sumerian poems on Bilgames continued to be transmitted orally, even perhaps in the royal courts of the Sargonic kings.

The Akkadian Empire lasted 140 years reaching its epoch during the reign of Sargon's grandson, Naram-Sin (Kuhrt 1995:50-51). However, the stability of the empire seems to have been crumbling, because Naram-Sin's successor, Shar-kali-sharri was the last member of the Sargonic dynasty. Apparently a short period of anarchy followed his rule, enabling a number of local rulers of other centers to re-establish their rule, including cities like Lagash, Kish and Uruk (Kuhrt 1995:53).

3.3. The Sumerian Renaissance

It is difficult to know exactly what happened between the end of the reign of the last Akkadian rulers, Dudu and Shudurul and the establishment of the Ur III Dynasty. A later text from the Ur III-period attributes the downfall of the Akkadian empire to an invasion from the Gutians of the Diyala region in the Zagros-hills (cf Kuhrt 1995:56; Postgate 1994:41). A text describes the Gutians as a barbaric race, destroying everything as they move forward. This text also states the reason for the invasion: Naram-Sin removed goods and divine statues from Enlil's temple in Nippur, therefore the god sent the barbarians to plunder the land (Kuhrt 1995:56). The logical consequence would be the transfer of kingship and rule to another king and another city.

The founder of the third dynasty of Ur was Ur-Nammu. He knew about Bilgames of Uruk and admired him greatly because he composed a hymn praising himself and also calling Ninsun his mother and Bilgames his *brother* (George 2003:108). His successor Shulgi likewise called Bilgames his

brother-friend. These claims on a family relationship with the king of old may indicate that the third dynasty of Ur had had its roots in Uruk. Ur-Nammu appears to have been a former provincial governor under the reign of Utu-hengal of Uruk (George 2003:109; Postgate 1994:41-42), and related to the king either by blood or by marriage. And apparently Utu-hengal of Uruk expelled the Gutians from Sumer. It is unclear how it happened that Ur-Nammu took over from Utu-hengal, whether peacefully or whether by force. Nevertheless, it seems that the idea of kinship and kingship with the ancient kings of Uruk was powerful enough to legitimise not only the newly found dynasty in Ur, but also to have the old Sumerian traditions revive.

Two matters are important with regards to the Ur III period. The first is the development of a particular kingship ideology (cf Kuhrt 1995:68-69). Although many of the royal hymns are preserved mostly in Old Babylonian versions and the original dating to the Ur III period was initially doubted, it now appears that these compositions were indeed performed at the royal ceremonies of the rulers of Ur III.

Often the hymn is composed in the first person, as though it is the king himself speaking. His divine birth is stressed, his parents are usually a mortal king and an immortal goddess. As if this is not enough, he is designated for the throne by the highest gods. Birth and designation thus legitimise his position as king and ruler.

Furthermore the king excels in strength, and his physical beauty is lauded. He is born stronger and more beautiful than them all. He is very brave. He takes the lead in military battle by leading his troops as commander, at the same time he sets the example as the perfect soldier. And he is able to handle all sorts of weapons. The whole world knows of his successful campaigns and this fills his enemies with fear. Occasionally he is described as a hunter of wild and dangerous animals, such as lions. He does not catch them

treacherously with a net, but tackles them face-to-face. By slaying these animals, he guarantees the safety for the shepherds and their flocks.

But the king does not excel only physically, he does so mentally as well. He is the most wise and learned of men. All seeks his counsel, and when he gives it, he is able to speak all the five languages that his subjects use, without the need of an interpreter. These languages were presumably Akkadian, Sumerian, Amorite, Elamite and perhaps Gutian (Kuhrt 1995:69).

The king is also a caretaker of the sublime as well as of the ordinary affairs of the day. He looks after the temple and the religious services, he is devoted to the gods, thereby making sure that the land prospers. He is an outstanding musician who composes the most beautiful hymns in honour of the gods. But he also exercises justice and protects the weak from abuse, just like his Sumerian forbearers. And, what is very important is that the king's scribal abilities are stressed: all his accomplishments and wisdom he wrote down himself for posterity.

In fact, the Ur III ruler appears to be a true *renaissance man.*

From this brief overview of kingship ideology it should be clear that many – in fact, most – of these aspects found their way into the prologue of the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.* Gilgamesh is of divine descent. He is exceptionally strong, brave and wise. He cares for culture. And his wisdom is recorded – apparently by himself - for posterity.

The second matter pertains to the revival of Sumerian. A question that is often raised, is how did it happen that Sumerian became the language of education and bureaucratic administration if Akkadian was firmly established as the vernacular of the time? Kuhrt (1995:60) seems to agree with Pollock's (1999:194) concept of ideology. Sumerian was *a device that served to define and distinguish the educated élite*. Everybody could speak and understand

Akkadian, only a few exceptional academics knew Sumerian. That is why Sumerian worked.

An epoch of the Ur III period is reached during the reign of king Shulgi. He is known for many military campaigns and a successful foreign policy. He was also responsible for important administrative reforms for example the standarisation of weights and measures, and the establishment of a new calendar (Schretter 2001:308; Postgate 1994:42). But Shulgi also did much to promote the Sumerian culture and to preserve it for posterity. He established academies at Nippur and Ur for this purpose, and most probably the first Sumerian poems on Bilgames were copied out in one or more of these learning centers (cf also Schretter 2001:309-311; Schrott 2001:12; George 1999:xvii; Tigay 1982:13-14).

Although the majority of the Sumerian Bilgames poems date to the eighteenth century and are the products of Babylonian scribal apprentices of this time, their origins can be certainly traced back to the courts and academies of the Ur III period (George 2003:7). Their prime function was probably still to provide court entertainment, but they were also starting to be appropriated in a learning context. A fragment of the Sumerian poem *Bilgames and the Bull of Heaven* that comes from Nippur is the oldest published evidence of a written existence of these poems and undoubtedly date to the Ur III period (George 2003:7).

3.4. The end of Ur III and the Isin-Larsa period

It is often suggested that the downfall of the Ur III dynasty was caused by nomad Amorite tribes who increased their raids on the existing cities (Postgate 1994:42-43). In fact, Shu-sin, king of Ur did build the so-called *Amorite Wall* that was supposed to keep marauding bands at bay. However, Kuhrt (1995:71) points out that the idea of a *barbarian horde of Amorites* that

invaded the land and destroyed everything as they moved along, is not quite correct.

Most probably the Ur III-state consisted of several groups of Amorites who may also have been respectable members of the society. The stability of the imperial structure of Ur III started to collapse already during the reign of Shu-Sin. During the reign of Ibbi-Sin, the last ruler of Ur III, a crisis is indicated: there was a short in the supply of grain resources, prices escalated, central power dwindled, and cities in southern Mesopotamia were left to their own devices for protection and provision. The official calendar was abandoned. And yes, cities were raided by marauding Amorite bands, however, it seems that the Ur III government *dubbed* all groups who took advantage of the crumbling central state *Amorite* (Kuhrt 1995:71). Everything simply contributed to make a bad situation worse.

Thus, when Elam and Shimashki attacked Ur, Ibbi-Sin had very little resources, was unable to offer resistance and the capital was ravaged. And like so often, a touching lament on the fall of Ur closes by attributing the whole disaster to a divine decision (cf Kuhrt 1995:71-72).

Once again a number of independent small city states were scattered over the country that was now known as Sumer and Akkad (Postgate 1994:43). Isin, with its ruler Ishbi-Erra was the first of these cities to establish a dynasty. Apparently Ishbi-Erra was an official, perhaps a governor with whom Ibbi-Sin had been corresponding (Kuhrt 1995:76; Postgate 1994:45). Ishbi-Erra claims that he was the one who expelled the Elamite garrison from Ur, therefore he is also the true successor of the Ur III rule. But because this dynasty could not prove any political inheritance from Ur, they needed divine sanction. Indeed, the Sumerian King List that was most probably completed during the Isin-Larsa period indicates that this was the case: the Isin dynasty is in accordance with the will of Enlil (Kuhrt 1995:76; Postgate 1994:45). And

accordingly the new generation of rulers conducted their rule in the conservative traditional Mesopotamian style.

Not long after the establishment of the Isin-dynasty, about a 100 km to the south arose a rival dynasty, that of Larsa (Kuhrt 1995:78). It seems that the rulers of Larsa had initially been provincial governors in service of the Isin-ones. The break between Isin and Larsa is indicated by the capture of Ur (ca 1932 BC), by Gungunum, the first member of an independent Larsa dynasty. Although the power of Isin was dealt a severe blow and its father-son succession was brought to an end by the usurper Enlil-bani (ca 1860 BC), it seems that the Isin – and Larsa kingdoms continued to run parallel for a considerable time (see time chart in Kuhrt 1995:79).

3.5. Babylon

However, next to the rival kingdoms of Isin and Larsa, a third dynasty was slowly but surely rising: that of Babylon, beginning with Sumuabum (1894 – 1881 – Kuhrt 1995:79). Hammurabi, the most famous Babylonian king rose to the throne in ca 1792 BC. Initially he was no more than one of the many kings who followed another stronger overlord. And the first victories attributed to him were in fact those of the then more powerful kings: Shamshi-Adad of Assyria and Rim-Sin of Larsa of whom he was an ally. However, in 1763 he undertook a successful campaign to the east of the Tigris region and thereafter defeated Rim-Sin of Larsa. And his control spread rapidly. He gained control over Isin, Uruk, Ur and Nippur, as well as the sizeable dominions of Larsa (Kuhrt 1995:108-109). Babylon, previously an unimportant town, no more than a village, became the capital of the region of Sumer and Akkad (Schrott 2001:13; Kuhrt 1995:108; Postgate 1994:39).

3.5.1. Akkadian supreme

The period that is known as *Old Babylonian,* roughly ranging from the end of Ur III to the end of the first dynasty of Babylon (1595 BC) is not a historical but a linguistic terminology (George 1999:xx; Kuhrt 1995:74; Postgate 1994:36; Edzard 1967:178). During this time a language was spoken, commonly referred to as *Old Babylonian* that was actually a dialect that developed from the earlier Akkadian.

On the political scene new masters were ruling, those of Semitic Amorite heritage. Conventional forms, even in places of learning were being abandoned. The old traditional style of literature was adhered to at the traditionalist royal court of Isin, however, scholars at the academy of Nippur seem to have treated this conservative approach with considerable scorn (George 2003:21). The intellectuals could no longer remain oblivious to the world outside and had to take note of the common language of the time. Therefore it is quite possible that students, especially would-be scribes started to practice their writing skills also in Akkadian Babylonian. Literature in the Akkadian dialect of Old Babylonian was blooming and reached a zenith (George 2003:30; 1999:lx).

Because the recent dynasties conducted their rule in traditional Mesopotamian fashion, they also continued to use Sumerian for official purposes. Nevertheless, it is fairly certain that already by the eighteenth century Sumerian literature was restricted to places of learning and appropriated almost exclusively by teachers and pupils (George 2003:17). Sadly enough, this would also have been the fate of the Sumerian Bilgames poems. Fortunately outside the school walls a new hero was taking shape in the vibrant tongue of the vernacular. Poets were telling of Gilgamesh. During this time the *Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* came into being.

One should never overlook the preceding oral tradition of ancient Mesopotamian literature (George 2003:17 & 20-21). Most probably shorter poems or longer narratives were composed orally before they were written

down. This would also be the case with the development of the *Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.* But although it is impossible to trace back the whole process of transmission, both George (2003:22) and Tigay (1982:42) agree that the version that was eventually written down, was the work of one creative mind. George states that *...we may be sure that the poem was originally the work of a single poetic genius, whether he sang or wrote it.*

According to Schrott (2001:14) the *Old Babylonian Version* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was composed during the time of Hammurabi; this standpoint cannot be proved nor refuted completely. Nevertheless, one may argue that there may have been relative stability during the reign of Hammurabi – although stability only pertains to the existence of a central government, not to peace and tranquil in general. Wars were continually waged over either guarding or expanding territory, nevertheless, it is also true that literature bloomed, also during the reign of Hammurabi. Therefore the Old Babylonian world will now be examined.

3.5.2. The Old Babylonian world

Hammurabi was once again the model of an ideal Mesopotamian ruler. He built and restored temples, city walls, public buildings, and he undertook irrigation projects (cf Kuhrt 1995:111-112). Nowadays he is most famous for his law-code. Reverently he poses before Shamash, the Sun god, god of justice and solemnly swears to exercise all that the god expects: justice and protection of the weak.

(i) Marduk

By the time of Hammurabi the gods were definitely known by their Akkadian names, the Sumerian ones had become obsolete (Schrott 2001:14). Furthermore, new gods rose to the occasion. Marduk, previously a minor god

– just like Babylon was an unimportant town – became the patron god of Babylonia (Schrott 2001:14; Kuhrt 1999:112). At this point the almost complete omission of Marduk in the *Standard Version* is striking: the primary Sumerian gods with their Akkadian names are retained, but Marduk (d AMAR UTU) appears only once in the *Standard Babylonian* epic: III:177 (Parpola 1997). In this regard it is interesting that the name of Marduk occurs in connection with the Cedar Forest – just before Gilgamesh and Enkidu leave. Unfortunately the tablet is badly damaged, it is virtually impossible to determine in which context and who mentions this god.

(ii) Aya the bride

Yet another influence of Hammurabi's reign is indicated in tablet III:55. This pertains to Ninsun's prayer, primarily directed towards Shamash for the protection of her son and his friend during their perilous voyage to the Cedar Forest. She expresses the wish that *Aya the bride* remind the god (Shamash) of her (Ninsun's) request.

A particular range of female cultic personnel existed in Hammurabi's time (Kuhrt 1995:114-115). Hammurabi's code stipulates some of them and explains their rights and duties, but these were not the only ones. From a cloister in Sippar were recovered some other sources that refer to the *nadītu* of Sippar. These girls had breeding, some of them were even princesses from neighbouring states. They were *dedicated to the god Shamash of Sippar as 'betrothed' and developed a particular close bond with his consort Aya* (Kuhrt 1995:115; see also Harris in *Reallexicon der Assyriology Band 4*: 391-393). They lived inside the cloister walls, were secluded and not allowed to marry, but nevertheless, they could not have been too unhappy. They were not poor and had enough to live from. Their dowry (if they had any) and their servants came along. Making use of outside agents, they engaged actively in business. Probably these women were of the literate few in their time as they

also served as *scribes* for their own cloister administration (Nemet-Nejat 2002:56).

A *nadītu* could even adopt a daughter. If she had property, she could bequeath it freely, although her dowry had to be returned to her family after her death. But often the property was left to the adopted daughter, much to the dismay of the family. Furthermore the Code of Hammurabi protected the rights of a *nadītu* (as well as the rights of women of other classes). A particular section stipulates that a cloistered *nadītu* should receive her full share of her inheritance at the death of her father if she had not been given a dowry beforehand (Harris in *Reallexicon Band 4*:393*).*

Usually the *nadītu* retained close emotional bonds with her family because she remained dependent on them. Parents did not mind, because their daughter brought them considerable honour and status. Besides, one of the main functions of a *nadītu* was to pray for the well being of her family. In this regard the role of Ninsun in the above-mentioned passage is illuminated: she prays on behalf of her son, and she even carries out the act of adoption (III:122-127 in Parpola 1997). But she does not adopt a daughter, she adopts Enkidu as her son.

There was another type of *nadītu – the nadītu of Marduk* (Harris in *Reallexicon der Assyriology Band 4*:392). These women were uncloistered and they were also allowed to marry, but they were not permitted to bear children. They could adopt children, adopt slaves as children, or permit their husband to marry another woman – often as sister – who could bear children. However, the *nadītu* of Shamash in Sippar enjoyed greater prestige than those of Marduk.

3.5.3. The *Old Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*

The *Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* broke away from the nature of the Sumerian poems. The Sumerian poems were unrelated with regards to theme, they were five separate and independent units. There did not exist a Sumerian Epic of Bilgames. The *Old Babylonian Epic* on the contrary focuses on a specific character and works out particular motifs concerning him: *power and kingship, wilderness and civilization* (sic), *friendship and love, victory and arrogance, death and life, man and god* (George 2003:20). Most probably the Babylonian author knew the Sumerian poems from his scribal training at school, but these were not his primary sources. He revised them (George 1999:xxi) to create a new literary product to address a new audience (Tigay 1982:42).

Unfortunately the *Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* is not as well preserved as the *Standard* one. It appears that the material is rather badly damaged and has mixed origin (George 2003:22; Tigay 1982:45). Nevertheless, the main theme

corresponds with that of the *Standard Babylonian Version:* Gilgamesh's futile hope for literal immortality (George 2003:23; Tigay 1982:50). The main point of contact with the Sumerian poems is the journey to the Cedar Forest. Episodes that are missing are the fight with the Bull of Heaven, Enkidu cursing and blessing the prostitute, his vision of the Netherworld and the myth of the Deluge (George 2003:23). Significant differences are that Enkidu is Gilgamesh's friend, no longer his slave, and that all the gods are known by their Akkadian names.

Most probably the *Old Babylonian Epic* bore the title *šūtur šarrī* - surpassing all other kings (George 2003:22; George 1999:xxi; Schrott 2001:14; Tigay 1982:48-49). This line occurs in the *Standard Babylonian Version,* I:27 (Parpola 1997), forming part of the prologue. Both George (2003:24) and Tigay (1982:102) remark on the fresh and spontaneous poetic style of the *Old Babylonian Epic.* It makes the many repetitions of the *Standard Epic*

seem redundant and in terms of modern criteria for aesthetics one would be inclined to evaluate the *Old Babylonian* text as superior. Nevertheless, this was not to be the final text, because the *Old Babylonian Version* was soon being altered and adapted.

4. The Middle Babylonian period

After Hammurabi's death the realm once under his control declined gradually (cf Kuhrt 1995:115-116). Nevertheless, Babylon remained a fairly important city until it was sacked in 1595 BC by Mursili I, the Hittite king. But seemingly the Hittites were not interested in Babylon because instead of occupying the city, they withdrew up the Euphrates. Nevertheless, political affairs were pretty chaotic (Kuhrt 1995:333) until Mesopotamia became subjected to Kassite rule.

Just like the Sumerians the Kassites are from unknown origin and their language is unrelated to any known tongue. Nevertheless, Kassite rule seemed to bring stability once again to the country (Kuhrt 1995:335). Furthermore, the Kassite dynasty reigned exceptionally long, almost for four hundred years (c. 1530-1155 BC). However, what is most important is that this new group of apparently foreign rulers fitted into ancient Mesopotamian culture as though it was their very own (Kuhrt 1995:338).

Of the original Kassite pantheon little is known. The royal house seemingly venerated their own protective deities, Shuquamuna and Shumaliya, but non of their other gods were recognised in the Babylonian cult or cult centers. Furthermore, the god Marduk who was allegedly pillaged by the Hittite raid and removed to Hana on the Euphrates, was allegedly recovered by Agum II kakrime (an early Kassite king) and reinstated as the most important god of the Babylonian pantheon. Consequently Babylon also became the ceremonial capital (Kuhrt 1995:338). Thus, evidence seems to indicate that the Kassite rulers were concerned to protect and to promote traditional Babylonian cults

and customs, thereby winning the support and loyalty of the indigenous people. Once again Mesopotamian culture withstood changes in dominion, its imprint was fixed (Schrott 2001:16).

4.1. The *Middle Babylonian Gilgamesh*

The next reworking of the *Gilgamesh Epic* dates to the Late Bronze Age and *bridges the gap* between the *Old Babylonian* - and the *Standard Version* (George 2003:24-25). These texts are the result of the spread of Babylonian culture in the second millennium. In due course Akkadian became the language of power and prestige (George 2003:27) and consequently cuneiform script was studied over the whole area of the Ancient Near East: Syria, Palestine, Anatolia and even Egypt. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* was one of the literary texts that was copied in many learning centers and thus formed part of the scribal teaching curriculum. Places like Emar, Ugarit, Megiddo and Bogazkoy yielded Middle Babylonian texts of Gilgamesh. Not only was the *Epic of Gilgamesh* copied, it was also translated in Hittite and Hurrian (George 2003:24).

Remarks

Unfortunately the texts of the Middle Babylonian period are even more disparate and scattered than those of the Old Babylonian period. Nevertheless, one may observe a change in function of these texts. Initially, in the courts of the Sumerian kings until the end of the Ur III regime, the poems on Bilgames served to entertain the kings and the royalty. As Sumerian died out as a spoken language, the popularity of the Sumerian poems also declined and they became confined to the walls of the scribal learning centers. In due course narratives in vibrant Akkadian were composed on the hero Gilgamesh that eclipsed the popularity and the function of Bilgames. But also these poems were written down, and once again they started to find their way into the learning centers of scribes.

As was previously indicated, literary activity bloomed during the Middle Babylonian period. Akkadian was the *lingua franca,* and by this time Sumerian had definitely died out as spoken language. Towards the end of the second millennium Kassite reign was also nearing the last century of its rule, the Middle Babylonian period was drawing to a close, and it became now necessary to organise and categorise Babylonian literature (George 2003:30; George 1999:lx). With regards to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* one should also keep in mind that there were many texts and versions around in the many academic centers, and even some translations existed.

5. The genius

Most scholars agree that someone with the name Sîn-lēqi-unninni had something to do with the creation of the *Standard Babylonian Version of the Epic of Gilgamesh* (George 2003:28-33; George 1999:xxiv-xxv; Schrott 2001:16-17; Tigay 1982:12). Not much is known about him. He may have been an exorcist priest (George 1999:xxiv; Tigay 1982:12), therefore capable of averting evil by means of prayer, incantation or magic ritual. However, one may be definitely certain that he was trained in the scribal profession: some scribal families and priestly classes of Uruk and many cult-singers (*kalû*) regarded him as their remote ancestor.

Evidence for Sîn-lēqi-unninni's authorship of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* comes from a Neo-Assyrian list that proposes to be a catalogue of texts and authors. The *Gilgamesh Epic* is recorded as follows (George 2003:28):

> *iškar* (éš.gàr) ^{d} GIŠ-*gím-maš: ša pi-i* ^{md} *sîn*(30)-*lē-qí-un-nin-ni* ^{lu} x[(x)x]
> Series of Gilgamesh: from the mouth of Sîn-lēqi-unninni, the...

The expression š*a pí* – *by the mouth of* – was a typical way to express authorship. But exactly when Sîn-lēqi-unninni lived, is uncertain. The scholars

mentioned above all place him late in the second millennium, however, this estimation is based rather upon an intelligent guess than on concrete evidence. Thus Sîn-lēqi-unninni is dated somewhere between the thirteenth and the eleventh centuries BC (George 1999:xxv).

Once again a large gap separates the time of Sîn-lēqi-unninni's literary labour from the extant sources. These date to two periods. The older texts are from the mid – to late seventh century BC and were discovered in Ashurbanipal's libraries at Kuyunjik (Nineve) and other Neo Assyrian private libraries in other contemporaneous cities. The younger ones date from the fifth to the first centuries BC and are from late Babylonian libraries, mainly in Uruk and Babylon. Both groups of sources record the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in twelve tablets. George (2003:31) is convinced that this version, known as the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* was already fixed before the Neo Assyrian and Late Babylonian periods, and that the man Sîn-lēqi-unninni was responsible for this composition and its division in twelve tablets.

Obviously Sîn-lēqi-unninni had the *Old Babylonian* and/or *Middle Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* – even the Sumerian poems on Bilgames - at his disposal, but he wrought some major changes to the material. What were they?

Sîn-lēqi-unninni supplied the existing *Old Babylonian šūtur eli šarrī* with a prologue: *ša naqba īmuru – he who saw the Deep.* The heroic Old Babylonian king *who surpasses all others* is replaced by another one who *saw the Deep.* This opening line immediately invokes a reflective mood. Rather than an outward show of superiority, the focus of the new text is on inward reflection – a different kind of achievement. Whatever the old king had done, is now placed in a different perspective.

Then the narrator in the prologue invites the reader to climb onto the city walls. These words are echoed in the closing lines by the hero himself, now speaking to the boatman. Thus, the poem is tightly enclosed by its own walls,

as it were. The prologue also gives the impression that the whole narrative is actually an autobiography in the third person (I:25-26 – Parpola, 1997). This was typical of a specific kind of Mesopotamian genre, known today as *narû*-literature (George 2003:32; Tigay 1982:144). Texts of this kind resort under wisdom-literature, especially with regards to royal counsel (George 1999:xxxv). The biblical books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are examples of this kind of literature. The words of the king are recorded to instruct his son and to prevent him from pitfalls during his reign. But the address of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is apparently aimed at a wider audience. The reader is to imagine that the words of Gilgamesh – by the mouth of the narrator - are addressed to everyone that hears/reads them: in short, these words are set down for posterity, for the benefit of the many generations that are yet to come.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* goes beyond the usual lecturing and moralising of texts of this kind. The hero acquires wisdom through failure, shame and personal suffering. He also realises the value of tangible labour during one's life. But he learns the hard way. The abstract qualities of wisdom and learning and the concrete rootedness of human existence in everyday life are masterly illuminated in the prologue and the matching ending lines. George (2003:32) states: *In reprising the prologue, the ending offers insight into the realities of human existence, with the city held up as a symbol of human activity and permanence. The mood at the close is just as pensive as the new prologue.*

But why did it become necessary to reflect upon life and its problems?

5.1. The changes

Damrosch (1987:87 - 118) suggests that the differences between the *Old Babylonian Version* and the *Standard Babilonian Gilgamesh Epic* mark a process of historicising – transition from *myth* to *history.* He points out three significant interventions within the *Standard Version*: interventions of addition or deliberate omission.

(i) The creation of Enkidu (Damrosch 1987:94)

In the *Old Babylonian Epic* Enkidu is raised from his Sumerian status as Bilgames's slave to Gilgamesh's friend. His origins are of no importance. The *Standard Version* – although it does not elaborate the point – pictures the beginning of his life as a primitive human being who was created by the gods – Aruru to be specific.

In *myths* gods intervene directly in human affairs: they talk directly to them, they even have sexual relationships with them. Of course they can still do so. But in the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* the preference is for indirect dealings from the divine side. Instead of stepping in personally into the situation, the gods create Enkidu. This *divine withdrawal from direct action in the story* marks for Damorsch (1987:97) the *historicising of poetic epic.*

Indirect communication is further emphasised by the occurrence of the many dreams in the *epic.* These dreams need to be interpreted by someone: their meaning is not revealed directly by the gods themselves. Thus, although the gods can talk to Gilgamesh and Enkidu directly, they prefer to communicate indirectly. And this is the way that people also experienced historically their communication with the gods.

(ii) The rejection of Ishtar (Damrosch 1987:103)

(A more detailed discussion of Tablet VI follows to illuminate some other viewpoints that are not relevant right now.)

It seems strange that Gilgamesh rejects the advances of the goddess of love: does he do so only because she has proved herself to be an inconsistent and fickle lover in the past? It appears that Ishtar's previous lovers all had their original natures directly reversed (Damrosch 1987:105), thus, for Gilgamesh

Ishtar becomes *the perversion of the proper function of the thing in question. The free become domesticated; insiders are expelled; the settled are forced to wonder; the living die; and humans are turned into animals* (Abusch 1986:173-174). Wherever Ishtar intervenes directly in human culture – whether artifacts, animals, people - the consequences are devastating. The stable order, balance and harmony become disrupted. This point is illustrated even more clearly in the following scene: the descent of the Bull of Heaven. Ishtar's father had warned her – the Bull is a celestial beast, it grazes in the sky. And indeed, when it arrives in Uruk, it creates havoc in the city. It destroys culture, it destroys life.

What seems to be happening in these scenes is the beginning of a process of human culture defining itself over against the supernatural world of the gods. Cosmic realms – the natural and the supernatural should not mix (Damrosch 1987:107). Not that divine and human affairs should be separated completely – this is not what the *epic* is proposing. It rather stresses that each group should keep its place, only then the relationship between humans and gods can be stable, tolerable and even mutually supportive.

There are definite boundaries between the worlds of gods and of humans. Neither gods nor humans may violate these boundaries. When Enkidu tears off the right flank of the Bull and flings it into Ishtar's face, he does just this: he taunts the gods and believes his strength matches theirs. This is his fatal error – therefore the gods decree that he shall die and not Gilgamesh (Damrosch 1987:109). Thus, the mythical world of the gods and the historical world of culture should respect each other in order to guarantee the stability of both.

(iii) The Deluge

Damrosch (1987:114) states: *When Gilgamesh visits Utnapishtim* (sic)*, history visits myth.* Obviously the recount of the Deluge has been inserted into

the *Epic* for a particular purpose: Uta-napishtim did achieve immortality, Gilgamesh cannot. These are two different stories, the one of Gilgamesh and the one of Uta-napishtim. However, the Deluge-story is not inserted simply for the sake of its difference. It also points to the reality that the time has come when the gods no longer act as they did in myth.

At the time of the composition of the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic,* the world had become increasingly secularised. The truth of the old stories of the gods was seriously doubted, or euhemerised. What is happening in the *Standard Babylonian Epic* is not the questioning of the *truth* or *reality* of Uta-napishtim's story. Rather, it is rendered inaccessible (Damrosch 1987:115). Uta-napishtim's name is qualified by *rūqi*: the Far-off, or the Distant. Even the place where he lives – beyond the Waters of Death – cannot be reached by any mortal. Gilgamesh was the last who had done this.

When Gilgamesh returns to Uruk together with Urshanabi, he boasts with the walls of his city as the walk around. Then he engraves his story on a stela to bear witness to all future generations. These are tangible, durable records of human constructions. In this way the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic becomes the story of the loss of myth and the gain of history* (Damrosch 1987:118).

The omission of Siduri's counsel from the *Standard Version* is puzzling. In fact, it is such common sense (see George 2003:279; Abusch 1993:1; Tigay 1982:97; Thompson [now out of print] 1930:53). This advice corresponds remarkably with that of Qohelet 9:7-9. But for some or other reason Sîn-lēqi-unninni omitted the barmaid's piece of sound advice and common sense from the *Standard Babylonian Epic* and rather had Uta-napishtim give a long – almost philosophical -- lecture on wisdom towards the end of Tablet X.

George (2003:32) understands this omission as a deliberate intention of Sîn-lēqi-unninni to highlight the encounter between Gilgamesh and Uta-napishtim, thereby stressing the futility of the quest of the hero. However, Damrosch (1987:92) suggests that the omission of Siduri's counsel should be understood together with the addition of the *prologue* and the *epilogue.* The hedonistic trait of the barmaid's advice is de-emphasised, but a broader wisdom perspective is gained – wisdom of a serious reflective nature on life, culture and human history.

To summarise: the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* does not abandon the mythical tradition. It chooses to rework older material thereby redirecting the theme altogether. The distance between gods and mortals becomes separated temporally as well as spatially. On the walls of Uruk Gilgamesh realises that he is responsible for his life, his story – history if you will – within the real world of material culture.

5.2 The puzzle of Tablet VI

Why would any normal man reject the advances of a goddess – especially a goddess of love?

Damrosch (above) provided a possible explanation: the cosmic realms of above and below are better kept apart. Gods and mortals are not supposed to mix or intrude into each other's domains.

However, there seems to be another explanation. For Tzvi Abusch (1986:149) the answer is to be found in Ishtar's words as she proposes to Gilgamesh (VI:9 – Parpola 1997) :

attā lū mute''imu anāku lū aššatka you will be my husband, I will be your wife

These are the same words that Ereshkigal says to her future spouse Nergal who is to reign with her over the Netherworld: these are also the words of the demon Arad-Lili to a human female.

According to Abusch (above) this is a unilateral formulation: there is no mutual agreement between the partners. One decides and this decision implies finality and control. Furthermore, Ishtar's proposal is framed by likewise proposals from the Netherworld – thus, she is in fact inviting Gilgamesh to become part of the world that invites him, the world of the grim, spooky and colourless infernal regions.

Already the last Sumerian poem on Bilgames – *the Death of Bilgames* – assigns to the deceased the role of judge and ruler of the shades in the Netherworld (see *The Death of Bilgames: 'The great wild bull is lying down* in this thesis). This tradition is found elsewhere in other texts: Gilgamesh is called the 'ruler of the Netherworld' in an Old Babylonian copy of a Sumerian hymn to Utu (George 2003:127); in the *Death of Ur-Nammu* he is 'king of the Netherworld'. A cultic lament *Urummairrabi* groups Gilgamesh together with two other deities of the Netherworld: Ningishzida and Dumuzi (George 2003:128). But even more striking is a late Babylonian text that actually equates Gilgamesh with Nergal (George 2003:129-130).

Thus, Ishtar's proposal comes from the world below; she is inviting Gilgamesh into his tomb – into the world below. What she is promising him – a chariot of lapis-lazuli and gold that is drawn by demon-like mules (VI:10-12 - Parpola 1997) – have bearing on the funeral rites: these will transport him to his tomb (Abusch 1986:153). The fragrant odours of line 13 refer to the incense that form part of a funeral ritual (Abusch 1986:155). And the princes and nobles that will kiss his feet (VI:16 – Parpola 1997) are those inhabitants of the new world – the Netherworld that Gilgamesh is about to enter.

Ishtar is deceiving Gilgamesh. She is promising him everything she is revered for: honour, power, wealth, sex, fertility, as though these will be bestowed onto him whilst he is still living. Yet, the moment he accepts these gifts, he will be transferred to the Netherworld.

Abusch (1986:157) notes that *both marriage and death involve leaving one state and group and entering another, with the wedding and funeral facilitating the transition.* Here particular *rites of passage* are performed – wedding and funeral ceremonies seem to have more in common that one would like to admit. Marriage rites involve leaving one family to become part of another; so do funeral rites. Both *marriage* and *funeral* are part of Ishtar's proposal: if Gilgamesh does marry Ishtar, he will leave this world and enter into another via his tomb: the Netherworld (Abusch 1986:158-160).

Gilgamesh is no fool. He is understanding perfectly well that Ishtar is inviting him to take his position as ruler and judge of the Netherworld prematurely. But right now he is simply *too young to die.*

This interaction between Gilgamesh and Ishtar foregrounds once again the whole issue of mortality – or immortality, if you wish. This is what the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is all about. Yes, later on Gilgamesh will grapple with the realisation of the finiteness of life. Enkidu will become ill, he will die and be buried in tablet VII. From tablet IX Gilgamesh will venture on a long journey in search of life everlasting. Only in tablet XI, after his encounter with Uta-napishtim, Gilgamesh will accept that his life-span is limited. And only afterwards, in tablet XII will Gilgamesh be ready to learn more of the Netherworld where he is about to take up a leading position in the future.

5.3 The puzzle of tablet XII

Abusch (above) suggested that tablet VI has in a way paved the way to tablet XII. In tablet VI Gilgamesh was not ready yet to accept the inevitability of his

death: after tablet XI he has come to terms with himself, life, death, and so forth, and is now ready to learn more about his future domain.

Nevertheless, Tablet XII of the *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* has always been a contentious issue among scholars (see George 2003:50-52 for a survey of different opinions). The first eleven tablets form a neat and close unit – Tablet XII does not seem to belong, in fact, its addition seems quite unnecessary. Just as Gilgamesh accepts the death of his friend and starts to go on with his life again, the ghost of Enkidu is called up from the Netherworld to upset matters anew. Why?

In 1982 Tigay (:5) regards Tablet XII as an *inorganic appendage*, and even George in his 1999 edition (:100) considers this tablet as an appendix that *is no part of the epic at all*. However, this tablet is there and it would not go away, no matter how hard scholars try. And since 1999 George has done intensive research that brought him to some significant conclusions. What follows is a summary of a discussion in his latest edition on the *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (George 2003:47-54).

What is striking is that Tablet XII is almost a mechanical translation of the second part of the Sumerian poem of Bilgames and the Netherworld. This simply does not fit the picture of the creative genius Sîn-lēqi-unninni – or his earlier forerunner. The word order and the vocabulary are described as *plain and unimaginative* (George 2003:48). Furthermore, as it has been pointed out above, the plot is inconsistent. In the first six tablets the epic builds up to a climax, Enkidu dies at the end of Tablet VII. Gilgamesh grieves, he undertakes his futile search for life everlasting, and at the end of Tablet XI he realises that life is all about living meaningful here and now. Enkidu is dead and buried, life must go on. And suddenly, in the beginning of Tablet XII, Enkidu is alive and well and on his way to the Netherworld. For some or other reason another story is inserted with another explanation of how it had happened that Enkidu was seized by the Netherworld.

Tablet XII also puts the neat symmetrical division of Tablets I – XI under pressure. The first five tablets deal with establishing an everlasting name by means of heroic deeds: by defeating men, monsters and gods. The combat with Humbaba is the climax. Tablet VI marks the transition, the hinge as it was, the fatal overstepping of limits by the two heroes. They had pushed their luck too far. Ishtar was a goddess not to be defeated, and her pet, the Bull of Heaven was the monster not to be smitten. This sin was not to be forgiven. The antagonised gods retaliate by having one of the heroes die in the greatest shame and without offspring: Enkidu.

The next five tablets deal with Gilgamesh's grief and a different search for everlasting reminiscence: not only by means of a name, but by means of physical presence, by means of being alive forever. This is the motif of the next series of tablets. And then suddenly an appendix is added which simply does not belong.

Thus, there are three disturbing issues - language, plot and structure – that disqualify Tablet XII as part of the *Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.*

Nevertheless, it was appended: when, and why?

Long before the time of Sîn-lēqi-unninni, during the eighteenth century BC, the Sumerian poem of Bilgames and the Netherworld was a popular exercise in scribal training (George 2003:49). Later on, during the first millennium BC most of the Sumerian canonical literature does not feature at all. George is convinced that Sîn-lēqi-unninni added Tablet XII to the *Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* during the Middle Babylonian Period – but once again, why only the latter part of the Sumerian poem, why did he do it so unimaginatively, or perhaps more perplexingly, why did he do it at all?

Perhaps the text itself holds the answer suggests George (2003:52). The second part of Tablet XII, the dialogue between Bilgames and the shade of Enkidu focuses on commemorative rites of mourning. These rites are supposed to be carried out at prescribed intervals after mourning, but more specifically, they are concerned with those who have died, leaving no descendants to perform the necessary commemorative rites. Enkidu was one of these unfortunate shades. Like an animal such a shade has to scavenge for food and drink because nobody cares for it. Thus, Tablet XII, a partial translation of the Sumerian poem on Bilgames and the Netherworld, stresses memorial offerings and the need for proper commemoration.

Memorial offerings and proper commemoration rites raise the question of the function of Bilgames/Gilgamesh in the cult. An Ur III tablet credits Bilgames for honouring his deceased parents and ancestors with the appropriate rites (see George 2003:53), and apparently since the latter part of the third millennium his symbolic presence was obligatory at rituals of burial and commemoration. But once again, Sîn-lēqi-unninni composed his *Epic* towards the end of the second millennium, and by this time language and cultural values certainly had changed. The question now is: did the original poem of Bilgames still have its original function? Did it have any use outside the scribal curriculum? Was it necessary at all to translate the original Sumerian poem on Bilgames and the Netherworld to be used later on in rituals of commemoration?

An explanation is to be found perhaps even later on. Towards the end of the eighth century Sargon II, now a king of the Neo Assyrian empire died in battle (ca 705 BC - see Kuhrt 1995:498). Alongside him many soldiers perished, many of them had no descendants, and their bodies were never recovered for proper burial: exactly the concern of Tablet XII (see also Schrott 2001:18). An Assyrian court scholar, Nabû-zuqup-kēnu (George 2003:49) immediately made a copy of Tablet XII as soon as the news of the tragedy reached him. Thus, it seems that even in the late period of Assyrian rule commemorative

offerings to appease unspecified and anonymous shades were not abandoned (George 2003:54).

The whole *Epic of Gilgamesh* centers on death and dying. The stark reality of the *Grim Reaper* confronts the modern reader as much as it did the pre-literate Sumerian society. Afterlife is but a hazy hope or hazard. Kings and paupers die alike. The quality of afterlife is determined by commemoration and proper burial rites: are you remembered, and will they do what is necessary?

The description of Tablet XII as an *eloquent reminder of the duties owed by men to their ancestral spirits* (George 2003:54) seems apt. But there are other possibilities.

A drama perhaps?

It may be that the entire series of twelve tablets was either sung or recited for ritual use, for example at funerals or in memorial cults, especially those of kings (George 2003:54). The Babylonian month *Abu,* the fifth month of the Babylonian year was specifically dedicated to Gilgamesh (George 2003:126; Schrott 2001:33). During this month, the month of the *festival of torches* (George 2003:126; George 1999:203; Schrott 2001:33) the legendary struggle between Gilgamesh and Enkidu was commemorated. Young men partook in wrestling matches in doorways, imitating the fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the doorway of the wedding house. These matches lasted nine days, nine days were also the conventional duration of the commemorative rituals that honoured the dead. Significantly, the very early Sumerian Poem on the Death of Bilgames refers to this activity: before his death Bilgames has a dream describing those rites that will be conducted by torchlight during the month *Abu*, during the *festival of lights.*

Schrott (2001:33-34) offers an interesting interpretation of this aspect of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and connects it to the seasons and the calendar of ancient Babylonia. His point of departure is the three months that designate summer: Dumuzi, Abu, and Ulul: these are June, July, and August.

During the month of Dumuzi the festival of the Sacred Marriage took place. The king acted as a substitute for the sacred gardener Dumuzi. During this festival offers were brought to invoke the favour of the gods, especially fertility. The festival lasted two days and coincided with astrological planetary positions that indicated the end of winter and the beginning of summer. (Ancient Mesopotamia distinguished only two seasons, winter and summer.) The end of winter and the beginning of summer was determined by the day on which the sun rose for the first time in a particular zodiac sign – that of Taurus, also the constellation that is connected to Gilgamesh (cf Schrott 2001:13).

Schrott goes so far as to propose that the whole epic many have been a drama that was performed during the two days of the New Year's festival. The first part staged the struggle between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the trip to the Cedar Forest and ends with the lament over Enkidu's death. The next series pertain to a prolonged wailing: Gilgamesh's lamentation over the loss of his friend and the realisation of his own mortality. However, Schrott seems to jump a far distance when he connects the Babylonian month Ulul with the Greek ὐλαλή - a cry. This connection fires imagination but exceeds the limits of rational historical reflection: the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was composed long before the Greeks arrived on the cultural scene.

6. The place of the *Gilgamesh Epic* in academic circles

The *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* became known to modern scholars mostly from the discoveries made at Ashurbanipal's royal libraries in Nineve (George 2003:348; George 1999:xxvii). These tablets are called the

Kuyunjik tablets and remain the largest group of tablets that record the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. However, it is not as though Sîn-lēqi-unninni issued a master copy of his work that was duly printed and reprinted and distributed in the various outlets of the Ancient Near East. Just like the *Old Babylonian Epic,* the *Standard Version* also seems to have undergone changes. Also, towards the end of the second millennium the power and glory of Babylonia were declining and a new might was rising: that of Assyria (see Kuhrt 1995:473-501). The age of the Neo Assyrian Empire had dawned. And indeed, some Neo Assyrian manuscripts of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* differ considerably from the *Standard Babylonian Version* and seem to correspond rather to the *Middle Babylonian* one (see George 2003:31-32 for a full discussion of the extant variants). Thus, although there was a *Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* (which one should never forget is a modern way of reference), this did not exclude the circulation of the other variant texts of the *Epic.*

At this point it may be informative to look closer at the scribal tradition of Babylonia from the second millennium onwards. Once again, the ancient tutors did not leave an exposition of their teaching curriculum with its standardised outcome based goals. What is left to the modern scholar is but damaged and scattered tablets that he or she has to struggle with, very much like struggling with a jigsaw puzzle of which most pieces are missing. One has to infer, deduce, make intelligent guesses on what little evidence one has at one's disposal (George 2003:35).

Most crafts in ancient Mesopotamia were traditional and passed on from father to son for many generations. Scribal art was no exception (George 2003:35). It appears that there were two phases in the training of a scribe (George 2003:35; Walker 1996:43-45). A student started by practicing the most elementary skills and performing less advanced exercises. These exercises were mostly copies of basic words or short sections of traditional literature. Thereafter he (scribes were mostly male) proceeded towards demonstrating that he had mastered the intellectual and academic demands

that were required from a scribe. He was requested to reproduce long tablets of whole literary compositions, or large sections of those. Most tablets that are recovered are the products of such a scribal education and were written out by boys for their fathers as proof that they were worthy of passing the scribal examinations (George 2003:37).

Before the eighteenth century the prescribed curriculum consisted mainly of traditional Sumerian texts (George 1999:xx). However, soon afterwards matters changed rapidly as Akkadian started to replace Sumerian as the spoken language, also by academics. And although Sumerian continued to form an important part in the scribal curriculum, Akkadian started to appear alongside Sumerian on the clay tablets of would-be scribes. These students were either improvising, memorising or copying episodes from Babylonian narrative poetry in the language they knew best: Akkadian. And the text that they selected and preferred for this exercise was Gilgamesh (George 2003:35).

Already in the fourteenth century the former power of Babylonia started to dwindle and other kings and countries dominated the eastern Mediterranean. The Late bronze Age saw the rise of the Egyptian New Kingdom and the Hittite Empire. Nevertheless, Akkadian continued to be the *lingua franca* of international communication of the region (George 1999:xxv). Both the Hittite king and the Egyptian Pharaoh conducted their international correspondence in Akkadian and the minor rulers of the Levantine coast and Syria likewise addressed their overlords in Akkadian (George 1999:xxvi) – although often spotted with local Canaanite and Hurrian idioms.

International Akkadian correspondence was conducted in the traditional manner: by means of cuneiform script on clay tablets. Therefore local scribes - whether they were Egyptian, Hittite, Canaanite, et cetera – also had to be trained in the traditional manner in order to comply to the international standard of composing letters, drawing up treaties and other documents of

their rulers. This standard was set according to the Babylonian scribal tradition with its lists, vocabularies and literature. Especially during this time, the Late Bronze Age, *Gilgamesh* was a popular exercise in the scribal schools of Syria, Palestine and Anatolia (George 2003:39). Also during this time the local versions in Hittite and Hurrian were composed.

Also the thirteenth century BC has some evidence for the popularity of *Gilgamesh* as a scribal exercise in learning centers of the West: those at Emar, Ugarit and Hattusa (George 2003:35). Apparently learner scribes were introduced to *Gilgamesh* fairly early in their training. A scriptorium excavated at Emar yielded texts of different genres: folk-tale, fable, wisdom sayings and literary texts. George (2003:35) concludes that texts, besides serving as an exercise for practicing writing skills, also had a pedagogical function.

School tablets from the first millennium illuminate the process of scribal training more clearly. At Babylon, Sippar, Kish and Uruk such tablets were recovered. Apparently a student in his first phase needed to master the basics: syllabary and lexicon, the essential pantheon, some proverbs and a very few literary texts (George 2003:36). Some of the literary texts were *the birth legend of Sargon, the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin, the literary letter known as the Weidner Chronicle, a literary letter of Samsuiluna, the Poor Man of Nippur and Gilgamesh.* Obviously young Babylonian children were enticed by exiting stories like those of Gilgamesh, Sargon and Naram-Sin and were introduced at an early age to oral versions of these heroes. The formal scribal curriculum appropriated this familiarity fruitfully.

As a student moved on to his secondary and more advanced phase of scribal instruction, he encountered more literary texts. But the Babylonian tablets of the first millennium reveal rather upsetting evidence. The usual exorcist texts, vocabularies and lexical lists were there, but literary texts were restricted to *Enūma eliš, Ludlul bēl nēmeqi,* the *Marduk prayers* and *Tintir* (Babylon) (George 2003:36). The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is very poorly represented. George

infers that texts of this period in Babylon had a twofold purpose: besides for preparing a student for apprenticeship as a junior *asipu* – a novice scribe – he had to be acquainted with the contemporaneous theology and political ideology of the capital. A young scribe needed to prove his practical skills, but by now he was also supposed to move on beyond the entertaining storytelling of the first phase. During the second phase a particular worldview was inculcated.

However, in Late Babylonia of the first millennium it was not only the *Epic of Gilgamesh* that failed the test for the second phase of scribal instruction. Many traditional texts such as *Etana, Adapa, Anzû, Nergal and Ereshkigal* do not feature even in elementary education. [Henrietta McCall (2001) provides good English translations of these myths as well as some other texts.] George (2003:36) believes that *this was not because they were unpopular, but they did not serve the pedagogical needs* of the time.

Thus, it seems that the traditional Babylonian texts were replaced by new ones to suit the ideologies of Babylonia. However, it also seems that these very texts were still copied out at other learning centers of the west and in Assyria. Towards the middle of the eleventh century – a time when also Sîn-lēqi-unninni may have lived – traditional Babylonian literature was standardised and canonised. Allegedly much of this was done by someone with the name of Esagil-kin-apli (George 2003:352). And although these texts declined in popularity in Babylonia soon after the turn of the millennium, they were duly copied out elsewhere in scribal schools, especially in the peripheral centers of Assyria. In these centers classical Babylonian texts survived. The provincial regions were by nature more conservative and tended to retain the old traditions. Many Babylonian texts that were copied during the Middle Assyrian Period found their way into Assyrian libraries of the seventh century BC, including the famous library of Ashurbanipal.

Thus, although the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is poorly represented on extant material from first millennium Babylonia, this is what one might expect. The minds of young would-be scribes had to be filled with other matters. Especially the second half of the *Epic* seems to be very rare. But this is exactly the part that had to be mastered by the more advanced students, therefore its limited appearance. Nevertheless, material from outside Babylonia indicated that *Gilgamesh* continued to function as an exercise in scribal schools. George (2003:39) states: *To sum up, I would maintain that in the late second and first millennium the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh had two functions in training scribes. It was a good story and thus useful, in small quantities for absolute beginners. And as a difficult classic of traditional literature it was studied at greater length by senior pupils nearing the end of their training. If its use in the formal curriculum of scribal education was limited this way, this does not necessarily mean that the poem was unpopular in wider circles.* Literate people seem to have enjoyed *Gilgamesh* to a considerable extent.

Remarks

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* had come a long way. It began as *light entertainment.* It survived a change of culture and language. It took on a new shape altogether. This final new shape will be examined in the following chapters: the *discourse* of the *Epic.*

CHAPTER 4

LITERARY THEORIES: STRUCTURALISM

The first part of this thesis examined the *sources* of the *Gilgamesh Epic.* In the following chapters two literary theories will be appropriated in order to analyse the *discourse* of the *Epic* - in other words, the text itself will receive attention. It must be stressed once again that this thesis does not pretend to be exhaustive. Only two of many recent literary theories were chosen; these two theories are also considered to be representative of two opposite approaches towards literature. These are (i) a text-immanent structural analysis, and (ii) a reader-orientated approach. However, a structural analysis does not necessarily oppose a reader-orientated theory. It will appear in the end that these two approaches rather complement than exclude each other.

1. Why is a theory necessary?

Perhaps one should reflect for a moment on *theories* in general. What is the sense of having a theory at all? Is it really necessary? Can one not simply read the *Epic of Gilgamesh* enjoying it for its own sake?

It appears that every scholarly discipline has its theories. Natural sciences, humanities, theology, music – all have theories. Likewise theories are also formulated within the field of literary studies. And just like scholars in other fields of research, literary scholars were also appointed or denied posts at universities, due to a particular theory associated with them (see Selden 1986:1-2). Thus, theories seem to be powerful instruments in academic circles: they open or close the doors towards academic promotion.

On a basic, non-academic level, one may argue that a theory spoils the joy of reading, that a theory *tends to undermine reading as an "innocent" activity* (Selden 1985:3). Yet literary theories are also instruments for looking at literature in a different, even in a completely new way, thereby revitalising the engagement between text and reader. Without entering into the debate on one literary theory over against another, this part of my thesis aims to do just this: to look at the Epic of Gilgamesh in different ways and to re-activate its meaning anew.

What is a theory?

A theory is a speculative instrument (Freund 1987:15), an abstract level of discourse...which attempts to formulate, conceptualize (sic) and generalize (sic) the underlying principles of certain phenomena. In other words, a theory is a way of looking at something, and an effort to understand it. Furthermore, the general nature of underlying principles is stressed. One may thus deduce that theories – literary theories, to be specific for this study – should be appropriable to a variety of texts, not only one. Literary theories usually approach a text by asking questions from one of the following angles: questions regarding the author, the text, or the reader (see Seldon 1986:3). Recent literary theories are less interested in the author. Even if a real author

is known, his or her personal feelings, motivation, imagination, psychological make-up and so forth are matters that are discussed in the media rather than within theories of literature. Even autobiographies are regarded as literary compositions, however self-revealing these may be. Literary theories rather focus on the other two components: the text and the reader. But although only the text and the reader remain, there are many – even conflicting theories concerning these two parties: this thesis chose two.

The two literary approaches that are dealt with in this study both originated during the first half of the twentieth century. Behind each one lies a particular philosophy – a history – circumstances that necessitated the formulation of such a theory. Consequently the first approach – a text-immanent approach or a structural analysis – will be examined in more detail.

2. Continental structuralism

2.1. Ferdinand de Saussure

The basis of a theoretical approach towards language which was later extended towards literature was provided by Ferdinand de Saussure. Underlying the understanding of language of the Russian Formalists, the Prague Linguists and the French Structuralists, is De Saussure's work (Davis & Schleifer 1991:120). Literary structuralism which became popular in the 1960s was an application of De Saussure's linguistic insights to literature (Eagleton 1983:96). De Saussure lectured on general linguistics at the University of Geneva from 1907 - 1911 and emphasised the need for a *scientific* study of language. Apparently the book *Course in General Linguistics (1916)* which appears under his name, is a transcription of notes taken by his students during lectures: he himself never kept any of those.

De Saussure was not the first to study language. During the nineteenth century much research was done in the field of language, but these were

mostly diachronic studies carried out by historical linguists. They were interested in the origin and development of related languages, especially the Indo-European group. By means of comparing the words of different but related languages, going systematically back in time, these linguists aimed at discovering a common language source which they called Proto-Indo-European (Davis & Schleifer 1991:121).

De Saussure does give credit to the accomplishments of diachronic linguistics. This was also an endeavour to understand the nature of language, and the means by which to come to this understanding, was to trace the historical occurrences of words. However, according to De Saussure these studies fail in that they do not perceive the true nature of the object of study. Elemental words contained within a language is not its nature: the nature of language is to be found in the formal relationships which give rise to words and expressions. What people actually said was not as important as the structure which allowed them to say it (Eagleton 1982:114). Accordingly De Saussure proceeded to re-examine language and to provide a *scientific* understanding of the object of study.

Some of De Saussure's basic assumptions

1. A *synchronic* approach as opposed to a diachronic one. De Saussure conceived of language as a *system of signs* (Zima 1999:1-2; Eagleton 1983:96), therefore a *scientific* study of language needed a *system* as its point of departure (Davis & Schleifer 1991:121). Furthermore, language functioned as a *complete system at a given point in time* - its historical development and changes through the course of time were less important than its present qualities. Accordingly De Saussure distinguishes between speech-events *(parole)*, and the system or code governing those events *(langue)* (Davis & Schleifer 1991:122). The study of *langue* is the *synchronic* study of the relationship among the elements of language at a particular point in time: therefore *langue* should be studied, not *parole*.

2. A *functional* relationship as opposed to a *causal* one. A *word* is merely a *linguistic sign* (Davis & Schleifer 1991:122). A *sign* is made up of a *signifier (signifiant)* - a sound-image of its graphic equivalent, and a *signified (signifié)* - a concept or meaning (Davis & Schleifer 1991:123; Eagleton 1983:96). Neither is the *cause* of the other. *Signifiant* and *signifié* both exist simultaneously in a relationship of *reciprocal presupposition*: their combination is completely *functional* as this combination *differs* from all others. Linguistic signs differ due to different combinations of *signifiant* and *signifié.*

3. An *arbitrary* relationship as opposed to a *motivated* one. There is no inherent reason why a *sign* consisting of a *signifiant* and a *signifié* refers to a particular object (Eagleton 1983:97). For example, neither the letters in *c a t* nor the phonetic sound of the word *cat* resembles anything connected to a four-legged furry creature uttering the sound *miaau.* The only reasons may be cultural and historical convention. Therefore, the *arbitrary* relationship between the word-sign and the object it refers to, is stressed.

2.2. Russian Formalism

De Saussure's structural linguistics were first appropriated for the study of literature in Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century (Davis & Schleifer 1991:128; Eagleton 1983:97). Two groups of critics began working towards what became known as *Russian Formalism*: the Moscow Linguistic Circle (in 1915) and Opojaz - the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (in 1916) (Zima 1999:26; Davis & Schleifer 1991:129). Initially the fundamental aim was to analyse poetic or lyrical texts. Indeed, in these early years *literature* was identical to *poetry.*

A name to remember is that of Roman Jakobson: in fact, he is seen as the major link between *formalism* and modern-day *structuralism* (Zima 1999:36;

Eagleton 1983:98). He was also one of the leaders of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (Zima – above; Davis & Schleifer 1991:128; Du Plooy & Viljoen 1992: 28). Although he fled more than one country more than once, he left a remarkable impression on literary circles wherever he came. But initially he worked in Moscow – Russia.

What are the basic principles of Russian Formalism?

In the first place a literary text – for the Formalists a poem – was to be bracketed off from its social and historical circumstances. Literature is an autonomous work of art (Zima 1999:27; Davis & Schleifer 1991:129). In other words, the material forces of production and the positive or negative appreciation on the receptive side are more or less ignored. I say *more or less ignored,* because of course it is impossible not to receive a literary text in some way or another. But the *content* of the text was considered subordinate to its *expression* – its *form* (Zima 1999:28). Thus, just like De Saussure had dissociated *sign* and *referent,* so the Formalists dissociated the *form* and the *content* of literary texts. Consequently

the *literary form* of a text was foregrounded, formal textual properties became the prime concern.

According to the Formalists, a literary text can be analysed only by means of its formal textual properties – its underlying laws and structures (Eagleton 1983:98). Literary innovation is not due to new historical circumstances, but by means of new literary *forms,* once the existing ones had become dated (Zima 1999:28). The same concept of innovation was applied to language: ordinary language that one used for everyday communication was *made strange* – or *defamiliarised* (see also Du Plooy & Viljoen 1992:28; Davis & Schleifer 1991:131).

Russian Formalism had the following major consequences for literary studies later in the Western world: firstly the interior patterning of the text becomes obvious - one can understand how it *works* (Davis & Schleifer 1991:129). Secondly *form* designates a text as belonging to a particular genre, for example a novel, a poem, a drama and so forth. Therefore, according to *formalism* literature is constituted by relational patterns within a text and which are relevant to that particular text or genre. In this way *Russian Formalism* produced a *science of literature*: *formal devices* created *literary effects* which could be *investigated* and *analysed* by studying the *text only.* The inspiration of the author and the subjective emotions of the reader were irrelevant: by means of an *objective analysis* of *formal devices* one could eventually get a grip on a *literary text.*

Both the Moscow Linguistic Circle and Opojaz were disbanded in 1930 by the Russian government. Their focus on the autonomous existence of the text governed by its own regularity and independent of history and society was not in line with the ideological standards of socialist realism (Davis & Schleifer 1991:129): they failed to make communist propaganda. So, many of the members of these movements fled to Prague to join the Prague Linguistic Circle where Roman Jacobson had already been working for some time (see below).

2.3. Prague Semiotics

Roman Jacobson migrated to Prague in 1920. When the Prague Linguistic Circle was founded in 1926, he became one of the major theorists of Czech Structuralism (Zima 1999:36; Eagleton 1983:98). Prague Linguistics also used De Saussure's concepts as their point of departure, especially his emphasis on the *arbitrary relationship between sign and referent* - that is, between word and thing. This was also one of the basic concepts of the Formalists: consequently Prague Linguistics agreed that the text was indeed an *autonomous object,* detached from its social, cultural and historical

circumstances. But, more than the Formalists, the Czech structuralists stressed the *structural unity* of a work. The different *elements* of a text were in fact *functions of a dynamic whole:* texts were viewed as *functional structures* which ought to be studied in their own right as they functioned according to their own rules (Eagleton 1983:100). In a sense Prague Linguistics took over the ideas of the Formalists, elaborating on them and systematising them further.

The Prague school of linguistics represented a kind of transition from Formalism to modern structuralism. Later on the terms *structuralism* and *semiology* became merged, as *semiotic* or *semiology* means the systematic study of signs. *Structuralism* especially transformed the study of poetry, however, it *revolutionized the study of narrative. It created a whole new science - narratology* (Eagleton 1983:103).

However, after 1930 Russian Formalism and Prague structuralism had almost no impact on Western criticism and theory until 1960 in France with the coming of French Structuralism (Martin 1987:25; Davis & Schleifer 1991:129).

2.4. Narratology

The *Second World War* broke out and Roman Jakobson migrated once again, this time to the United States (Eagleton 1983:98) where he met the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. The development of modern structuralism was the result of this encounter, this intellectual relationship between linguist Roman Jakobson and anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Lévi-Strauss studied many and varied myths, mostly Amerindian (Davis & Schleifer 1991:138). Jakobson helped him to see that linguistic analytic methods could also be used by anthropology (Martin 1987:25; Selden 1986: 58-59). Cultural narratives were the object of Lévi-Strauss's interest: linguistic methodology made him realise that myths, just like texts also consisted of

elements structured in a particular way (Davis & Schleifer 1991:138). These individual basic units he called *mythemes.* Combined in a particular way and according to particular rules, *mythemes* contributed toward the meaning of the myth. Thus, Lévi-Strauss came to the conclusion that all these apparently different myths were variations on but a few themes (Eagleton 1983:103) and that any particular myth could be reduced to some *constant universal structures.* In a sense Lévi-Strauss succeeded to *demythologise* the myth.

Structural narratology developed from an appropriation of linguistic models to narratives (Selden 1986:59-61; Eagleton 1983:104) – that is the concept that there are basic underlying structures to all narratives, no matter how simple or how complex. The most important exponents of structural narratology are on the side of the French: Gérard Genette, Claude Bremond, A.J. Greimas and Roland Barthes. Mieke Bal in the Netherlands closely follows their insights, occasionally elaborating on them (see Ohloff 1985:46). However, the way towards structural narratology was being paved from Russsia, as far back as 1928 by a Russian Formalist, Vladimir Propp.

Russian Formalist theory of narrative takes as point of departure the distinction between *story - fabula* and *plot – sjuzet* (Selden 1986:12). This distinction pertains to the difference between the raw material that an author has at his or her disposal *(fabula)* and the way that he or she arranges this material in a literary text *(plot).* Thus, the *plot* or *sjuzet* has bearing on the literary text. Propp took an interest in the *plot* of Russian fairy tales (Selden 1986:57). He reduced all folk tales to *seven spheres of action* and *thirty one functions* (Ohloff 1985: 46; Eagleton 1983:104). Following the *reductive* principles of Propp, Greimas in 1966 simplified the units of *narratology* even further by acknowledging only *six actants* - *actants* do not refer to characters of narratives, but are merely *structural units.* These are Subject-Object; Sender-Receiver; and Helper-Opponent. But it was Gérard Genette who elaborated extensively on the Formalists' distinction between *fabula and*

sjuzet and suggested a narrative should actually be divided in three levels: *histoire, récit* and *narration* (to be discussed in the next chapter).

3. A choice for Gérard Genette's model

What makes Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980) especially suitable as a model for structural analysis, is that he does not merely provide a theory, but also applies this to a complex novel - that of Marcel Proust: *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*). This novel consists of three volumes, 1300 pages in total. Culler (in his foreword to Genette 1980:9) states: *It is as though Genette had determined to give the lie to the skeptics who maintained that the structural analysis of narrative was suited only to the simplest narratives, like folk tales, and, in an act of bravado, had chosen as his object one of the most complex, subtle and involuted of narratives.*

If one accepts that a theory formulates general principles that are appropriable to all specific instances (see above), Genette's theory of narrative discourse should be equally suitable for Proust's *Recherche* and Sîn-lēqi-unninni's *Gilgamesh Epic.* This model was furthermore deliberately chosen for its complexity. Although the *Gilgamesh Epic* belong to *temps perdu*, it is anything but a *simple folk tale.*

For the purposes of the analysis that is to follow, I regarded only tablets I – XI as the *narrative proper.* Although the previous chapter argued that tablet XII was intended as part of the *Epic,* this tablet does form an *appendix* to the narrative structure that is so neatly enclosed by the walls of Uruk. Furthermore – for reasons that I stated in the section on Methodology – the *Epic* is treated as a *narrative,* not as a *poem.* Thus, what follows is a *narrative analysis of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, tablets I – XI.*

CHAPTER 5

A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *BABYLONIAN GILGAMESH EPIC* ACCORDING TO THE MODEL OF G. GENETTE 1980

Introduction

Only Tablets I - XI of the *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* feature for the purpose of a *narratological analysis.* The reasons for this were put forward in chapter 2 of this thesis: Tablets I - XI narrate events that have a bearing on one another. Furthermore, these events begin and end on the same place, on the walls of Uruk. This chapter appropriates Genette's (1980) model for a *narratological analysis* to the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic.*

1. Narrative, story, narrating

According to Genette (1980:25-27) *narrative* (French *recit)* has *three different meanings.* The *first* obvious reference is to the *narrative statement,* also called the *narrative.* This denotes the discourse itself, oral or written, which recounts a series of events. *Narrative statement,* or plainly *narrative* pertains to the very words of the *text,* whether they are written down or whether they are recited aloud. These are the cuneiform signs on the broken tablets of the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic.*

Secondly there are events that succeed one another, also called the *story.* These events could be either real or fictitious, and have bearing on *what happened from the beginning to the end.* The way in which these events are recounted - whether they follow one another chronologically or whether the order is interrupted in some way or another - is not taken into account. The *story* of *Gilgamesh* (in the *Standard Babylonian Version)* starts with what he did in Uruk, continues successively with all the events that followed, and ends with

his return to his city. The *story* in this sense refers to the *history* outside of the text but which gave rise to the text: *what really happened and when?*

Thirdly someone is needed to *recount* the event, also called *narrating.* This implies the *action of telling*, and pertains to the *narrating instance.* Who is telling about *Gilgamesh* and how is it done?

Bal (1986:13-15) elaborates on similar distinctions which she calls *tekst (i.e. the narrative statement),* geschiedenis *(i.e. the story), and verhaal (i.e. narrating).* However, as far as the latter is concerned, she stresses more the *way* in which the events are recounted rather than the *action of telling* of the events. Thus, in a very basic sense a narrative analysis should bear in mind (i) *what is actually said or written,* (ii) *the actual sequence of the events that are recounted, and* (iii) *who is telling the story and in what way.*

An analysis of narrative discourse is constantly aware of the different aspects of *narrative, but* has to remember that they are intimately interrelated (Bal 1986:15; Genette1980:27). Although the aspects are taken apart and examined individually for the purpose of analysis, they cannot be separated from one another.

2. Analysis of narrative discourse: tense, mood, and voice

Genette (1980:31) chooses three classes of determinations in which to organise the analysis of a *narrative discourse. Tense* deals with *temporal relations* between *narrative and story. Mood* deals with *forms and degrees* of *narrative representation. Voice* deals with the *way* in which the *narrating is connected to the narrative. Voice* thus has bearing on the interrelationships between both *narrating/narrative* and *narrating/story.* However, *voice* pertains not only to the *narrator* or to the *narrating instance,* but also to the addressees, real or implied. *Tense and mood* both come into play at the level of interrelationships between *story and narrative.* These rather confusing inter

relationships will become clearer in their appropriation to the narratological analysis of the *Epic of Gilgamesh.*

2.1. Tense: order, duration, and frequency

Under the heading of *Time* or *Tense* Genette (1980) discusses the following categories: *Order, Duration and Frequency.* Also these categories will be discussed and applied to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* where they are relevant.

2.1.1. Order

Genette (1980:35) explains as follows: *Order* determines the connections between the *succession of events in the story* and the *way in which they are arranged in the narrative (i.e. the pseudo-temporal arrangement).* A *story* usually consists of significant events that follow one another successively. When the *succession* of events in the *story corresponds to the order* in which they are recounted in the *narrative,* it is simply a matter of *chronological time.* That is to say, the *order of the narrative discourse* indicates more or less clearly the *order of the story events.* However, this is seldom the case in narratives. A perfect temporal correspondence between *narrative* and *story* exists very rarely in *narrative discourse.*

More often than not, the chronological succession of events is interrupted in some way or another. *Anachrony* is the term Genette (1980:35&36) uses to indicate the *various types of discordance between the story and the narrative.* The most common way for interrupting a narrative is by means of inserting events that happened a long time ago, or by means of creating anticipation for what is to come. In this regard Genette (1980:40) chooses to avoid the traditional terms like *anticipation* or *retrospection* in order to describe the way in which the narrative is being interrupted, as these may be subjective phenomena. He uses *prolepsis* (for) "*any narrative manoeuvre that consists of narrating or evoking in advance any event that will take place later; analepsis*

(for) *any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at a given moment and ... anachronism to designate all forms of discordance between the two temporal orders of story and narrative..."* (Genette 1980:40). In other words, and drastically oversimplified, *prolepses* pertain to *what may happen, analepses* pertain to *what has happened,* and *anachrony* is a total mix up of all the tenses and times in both *story* and *narrative.*

So, *anachronies* are inserted into and disrupt the primary *narrative* (Genette 1980:48). In this way a second *narrative* is created. *First* and *second narratives* are Genette's way to distinguish different *temporal* levels of *narrative.* However, it is important to note that the denotations *first* and *second narratives* do not indicate that one is more important than the other (cf. Genette 1988:28&29); on the contrary, second *narratives* are extremely valuable for understanding the first one.

Furthermore, anachronies consist of a *reach* and of an *extent* (Genette 1980: 47&48). From the moment of interruption in the *narrative discourse*, an *anachrony* may *reach into the past* or *into the future,* that is, what did happen or what is going to happen. *Anachronies* also cover a *duration of story,* that is, how long did the event last, or how long is it going to last. This is called the *extent* of the *analepsis* or of the *prolepsis.*

In other words, *order* has to do with the interruption of the *primary narratives* by one or more *secondary narratives*. The latter has bearing on events that happened either a long time before or a long time after the former, or on events that are taking place simultaneously with those that are being narrated in the first instance. These *secondary narratives* have their own *narratological time span,* or *extent,* and they usually influence the *primary narrative* in some significant manner.

A tense moment in the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: the opening line*

The opening line of the Epic poses a serious problem: the transliterations of Parpola and George differ significantly. As I have stated, these kinds of differences do not affect the narrative as such, however, this very first one has implications for a structural narratological analysis.

Parpola

Parpola (1997) reconstructs this first line as follows:

ša nagba īmuru lušēdi māti

According to this rendering the parsing of *lušēdi* is the s-stem of the verb *idû(m)*: to know. The preposing particle *lu* together with the preterite expresses a desired action. In Old Babylonian it occurs with the first person singular (*li-* in third person singular and plural when it unites with the initial vowel of the verbal form)(see Caplice 1988:40; Von Soden 1969:105-106).

Consequently the first line reads - according to Parpola's transliteration:

I:1 *ša nagba īmuru lušēdi māti* Of the Deep that he saw, I must tell the land

According to this transliteration, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Standard Babylonian Version, from now abbreviated SBV) seems to be an *analepsis* and a *prolepsis* simultaneously from its very beginning. Although strictly speaking the *first narrative* is not interrupted, it also has not started yet. But the *story* that is about to be told, happened a long time ago. This *anachrony* reaches into the past and into the future, and is introduced by a *narrating instance: I.* Someone (I) is going to tell of events that occurred before his (my) time. (Denning-Bolle [1992:47] also translates the first line as *He who saw everything I want to make known to my land.)*

This *narrating instance* disappears from the scene immediately after I:1, and never does he utter the words *I remember...*, in fact, he plays no part in the *story* or in the *narrative* at all. The *analepsis* and *prolepsis* are both impersonal - in this sense Genette's categories are certainly more useful than *anticipation* or *retrospection.* This is not a personal remembrance: the person concerned is out of the events that occurred, he is only about to disclose them. He is also not disclosing an event that will take place later: what is going to happen is the *narrative* itself. The *narrative* is not a remembrance of past things: what is going to occur, is vivid in the present.

Past, present and future meet at the walls of Uruk. Genette (1980) does not have a separate category for *place*; he prefers to incorporate the significance of location into his analyses of *time, mood* and *voice.* Nevertheless, the city of Uruk, especially the walls are of major importance in the *Epic of Gilgamesh (SBV).* In the *prologue* the *narrator* who remains an anonymous *voice* for the rest of the *narrative,* invites a (anonymous) *narratee* to come and have a stroll on the top of these magnificent walls, to look down on the city and its surroundings, and to admire the beauty and splendour of everything (I: 16-21). In the closing lines of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) king Gilgamesh himself invites the boatman Urshanabi to do exactly the same (XI: 315-320).

From the top of these walls an *analepsis* is triggered and is sustained - albeit unnoticed - throughout the whole *narrative* until it catches up with its own past: the present of king Gilgamesh. Thus, one ends up exactly where one started: on the walls of Uruk.

But the *prologue* is also a *prolepsis*, pertaining to events after the return of the king (I: 1- 45). It tells of Gilgamesh as a good king, one who is brave and wise, and it refers to a wisdom acquired only after he had seen the Deep. On the other hand, the *Epic* itself tells of a young and arrogant king who abuses his power brutally, who acts unwisely an immature, who becomes confused and frightened after the death of his friend, and who goes in search for something

which every reader instinctively knows, is a futile quest. Only after he accepts that he had lost, only after failing miserably every test for acquiring life eternal, he returns to his city as the mature and sober ruler to whom the *prologue* refers. Thus, also the *prolepsis* is continued and sustained throughout the *narrative*. Gilgamesh is back in Uruk, he has learnt a hard lesson, but now he is ready to reign as king in a more mature way.

True enough, in a technical sense the *prologue* is neither a *true analepsis* nor a *true prolepsis.* Both *analepses* and *prolepses* are supposed to interrupt the *first narrative* with a *second* one (Genette 1980:48). But somehow past, present and future seem to merge on the walls of Uruk to create a kind of timelessness, already at the very beginning of the *Epic.*

George

George (2003:538) transliterates the first line of the *Epic* as follows:

ša nagba īmuru išdī māti he who saw the Deep, the foundation of the country

In this case *išdī* simply refers to the *foundation* of the country. George adheres to a conservative interpretation. He admits that the *basis of the country* (:445) may be interpreted metaphorically, that it may refer to the *Deep*, therefore agreeing with the abstract notion of wisdom. Furthermore, he also admits that *mātu* is not a synonym of *ereṣu*: the former signifies the land as a collection of people whereas the latter indicates the earth as a concrete object. Thus, the very first lines of the *Epic* could be read in an abstract, rather than in a literal way: a kind of wisdom that is indispensable to all human beings, is at stake.

George bases his transliteration on convention. Apparently the expression *išdī māti* was used to indicate the stability of the land or to keep the land stable (George 2003:778). According to this transliteration the opening lines simply form part of the summary of Gilgamesh's achievements. They have nothing to

do with the narrator's personal interests in the matter. Therefore, George's transliteration is sober, less impressive, but perhaps more reliable.

I have seen these opening lines, and it really is impossible to discern whether the second to last word should read *lušēdi* or *išdī māti.* Perhaps one should leave this debate to scholars versed in cuneiform. George (2003:778) states: *Much fantasy has indeed been brought to bear on the text's incipit, for the situation has changed only very recently, with the discovery of RM 956, a new piece of MS d. This fragment demonstrates that for the past century, ever since Haupt's copy identified the first line on MS B3 as SB I 1, readers of the epic have been telescoping into one couplet what is in fact two parallel couplets...Though some ideas put forward for these opening lines are more attractive than others, there is often little to choose between them. It also remains eminently possible in each case that none of them is right. The recovery of l.1 is a case in point, for none of the many suggestions had come close to išdī māti, and we are reminded how perilous it is to restore all but the most predictable lines of this poem. In many lines, here and elsewhere, I thus prefer to leave open to the question of restoration.*

Thus, it seems that one guess is as good as another. I would be inclined to agree with George's more conservative approach, however, Parpola's rendering certainly provides a much more romantic and imaginative reading of the *Epic*. But this section deals with a structural analysis and not with a reader-orientated one, therefore the validity of the two readings and the reliability of the different sources will not be discussed further.

Analepsis

Analepses can become quite complex. Genette (1980:49) distinguishes an *external*, an *internal* and a *mixed analepsis.* An *external analepsis* is one *"whose entire extent remains external to the extent of the first narrative".* Thus, the *external analepsis* reaches back before the starting point of the *narrative*

and also ends before that. An *internal analepsis* falls within the extent of the *first narrative,* reaching back later than the starting point and may or may not catch up with the point in the *narrative* where it originated. A *mixed analepsis* reaches back to a point earlier than the starting point of the *narrative* and its extent arrives at a point later than the beginning of the *first narrative.*

External and *internal analepses* function in different ways for the purpose of *narrative analysis.*

1) External analepsis

External analepses do not meddle with the *first narrative.* Their function is only to inform the reader about something that had happened before. Uta-napishtim's recount of the Deluge qualifies as an *external analepsis*: the whole cataclysm occurred long before Gilgamesh became king of Uruk. However, its function is not only to inform the reader about the flood. It also stresses the whole matter of Gilgamesh's futile search for immortality. The Deluge was a unique event that gave one human family - Uta-napishtim and his wife - the opportunity to live forever. The story of the flood is Uta-napishtim's, it has nothing to do with Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh cannot benefit from what happened long ago. He, like all other human beings are born to die someday. There is no way that this fate can be averted. Thus the informative function of this *second narrative* is loaded with meaning that extends beyond the scope of the whole *Epic:* it pertains to life itself.

2) Internal analepsis

Internal analepses are somewhat more problematical. These *second narratives* are embedded in the temporal field of the *first narrative*, therefore they might interfere with it by means of *collision* or *redundancy* (Genette 1980:50). Genette (1980:51&51), distinguishes between *internal heterodiegetic* and *internal homodiegetic analepses*.

i) Internal heterodiegetic analepsis

Internal heterodiegetic analepses are "*analepses dealing with a story line (and thus with a diegetic content) different from the content (or contents) of the first narrative"* (Genette 1980:50). This means that the *second narrative* differs from the *first* one, although they coincide temporally. These *internal heterodiegetic analepses* do not normally interfere with the *story* line of the *first narrative,* as their usual function is to shed light on the past of a character that has been introduced recently, or on one who has been out of sight for some time.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* does have a few such *internal heterodiegetic analepses.* Enkidu becomes human after he and Shamhat made love for six days and seven nights, apparently without stop. Thereafter his earlier friends, the animals reject him and he returns to Shamhat to learn his purpose in life. She tells him that he is to go to Uruk to meet king Gilgamesh. Enkidu immediately wants to challenge the king and show him who is the stronger one, but Shamhat remembers the two dreams that Gilgamesh had. She recalls that Gilgamesh had these dreams before Enkidu came down from the hills, and when he woke up, he told his mother what he had dreamed (I:226-241; I:259-264): heavy objects fell from the heaven and he was unable to pick them up.

What is interesting in this case is that the distinction between *first* and *second narrative* becomes rather unclear. From the very beginning the *first narrative* proposed to record the *story* of king Gilgamesh of Uruk. But at some stage in the *narrative discourse* the Shamhat/Enkidu episode became quite spontaneously and without any abrupt interruptions part of a *first narrative*: the creation of Enkidu and his existence on the steppe until the prostitute came to change everything. The *internal heterodiegetic analepses* - the dreams - are occurring now as though they are interrupting a seemingly *primary narrative.* The contents are different from the present *story* line.

However, the events that are remembered have a bearing on what really is the *first narrative* - the *story* of Gilgamesh. In the nearby future the Shamhat/Enkidu episode will once again blend smoothly and unproblematically with the Gilgamesh-*narrative* and becomes so part of it, that one wonders whether this constitutes a *second narrative* at all.

These *heterodiegetic analepses* are inserted back into the *primary narrative* where they do actually belong when Gilgamesh and Enkidu meet and fight like young bulls. However, after this initial clash, they become firm friends. But at some stage during the friendship, Enkidu becomes depressed. At seeing his friend becoming depressed, Gilgamesh suggests that they go down to the Cedar Forest to slay Humbaba. Rather panic-stricken Enkidu remembers the earlier days when he had actually encountered the presence of the monster (II:170-174). This remembrance is also an *internal heterodiegetic analepsis*: Enkidu's early days, although they coincide temporally with the *story* line of Gilgamesh, play no significant part in the *Epic,* and they have a different content altogether. Very little detail is given about these days, except that Enkidu lived and grazed like an animal. Now, by means of a chiastic structure this remembrance that is only Enkidu's, is repeated as an urgent warning (II:189-193): Humbaba is extremely dangerous. In this way the initial *internal heterodiegetic analepsis* is once again drawn into the first *narrative* and becomes part of the *story* line.

ii) Internal homodiegetic analepses

Internal homodiegetic analepses are "*internal analepses that deal with the same line of action as the first narrative"* (Genette 1980:51). Genette (1980:51-54) distinguishes between *completing* and *iterative internal homodiegetic analepses.*

iii) Completing internal homodiegetic analepsis

Simple ellipsis

Completing analepses fill in "gaps" in the *narrative* by means of *simple ellipses,* or "breaks" in the temporal continuity (Genette 1980:51). Rephrased this means that certain events are left out and remembered later to fill in those missing "gaps" in time. If one - perhaps hypothetically - considers Gilgamesh's dreams now for the time being as part of the same *narrative,* one would have a case of *internal homodiegetic analepses* which fill in the "gap" between Gilgamesh's terrorisation of his people and the coming of Enkidu. Despite his arrogant attitude, Gilgamesh is rather lonesome and desperately longs for a friend. Although he was chosen by the gods for this task, being king is a lonely business.

In the end it must be said that, considering these dreams as *internal analepses* - whether they be *hetero-* or *homodiegetic* - is a hypothetical matter. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) is not very specific about time at all. For example, say the tyranny of the city started in 2356 BCE, perhaps sometime during August and Enkidu was created the following August in 2355 BCE. Sometime later Shamhat and Enkidu sat down and talked on a Sunday in June 2346 BCE. Suddenly Shamhat remembered a dream that Gilgamesh had on another Sunday night in June 2350 BCE that made her think. But nothing of the kind. One can merely assume that Gilgamesh dreamed of Enkidu after the latter had been created: one can merely assume that the creation of Enkidu took place after the starting point of the *Epic.*

However, one runs into trouble if one tries to work out their ages. Then one needs to assume otherwise, namely, that Gilgamesh, the very young child dreamed about Enkidu, before his reign of terror started in Uruk. Everything changes, and the dreams become pure *external analepses,* also fulfilling the function of a *prolepsis.*

Paralipsis

The second type of a *completing analepsis* Genette (1980:52) calls a *paralipsis.* Just like an *ellipsis,* a *paralipsis* also fills in "gaps", however, in this case an event or a person is deliberately sidestepped or not mentioned at all. *Paralipses* usually pertain to traumatic events or to persons who caused these events from a character's past, events and people he or she wishes to forget because the memories are too painful. It is very difficult to ascertain whether the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) contain any *paralipses.* There are certainly many gaps: perhaps the closest one can get to a *paralipses* is the many references Gilgamesh makes in Tablet VI to Ishtar's misfortunate lovers. Obviously his words brought back memories that she would rather forget, she was hurt and insulted by what he had said. But, besides for the reference to Tammuz, the reader is kept in the dark with regards to the other painful events. Presumably the ancient recipients knew what they were.

Nevertheless, there do not appear to be deliberate repressions of other painful experiences. A trauma like Enkidu's untimely death is openly lamented: in fact, Gilgamesh's elegy is repeated time and again - as the next section will illustrate.

iv) Iterative internal homodiegetic analepsis

Iterative internal homodiegetic analepses are also called *repeating analepses* (Genette 1980: 54). These *ellipses* deal with several portions of elapsed time as if they were alike. In Genette's discussion (cf. Genette 1980:53-61) it becomes obvious that the *nouveau roman* appropriates this device for different purposes than ancient literature did. However, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) does have significant repetitive recalls.

After the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh roams the plains on his way to Uta-napishtim, in search of everlasting life. He passes through the tunnel of Shamash/the sun, and he reaches the seashore where Siduri the barmaid lives. She inquires after his mission, and he gives her a very long explanation: Enkidu, his friend whom he loved dearly, and with whom he did several remarkable heroic deeds, had died tragically (X:48-75). This is exactly the same explanation that he gives to Urshanabi, the boatman of Uta-napishtim (X:122-146 - lines 64,69 and 73 are omitted in the reply to Urshanabi). And this reply is repeated to Uta-napishtim (X:221-248).

Gilgamesh's repetitive answer stresses his obsessive thoughts on death and dying, his obsession with everlasting life. To every question he has only one answer that actually becomes quite boring after a while. But he really has nothing else to say. In this regard Genette (1980:54) points out that these *repeating analepses* may become *redundant*. This is a valid question as one does become fed-up with Gilgamesh who is unable to snap out of it. Nevertheless, these repetitions do stress his pain over his deceased friend and also the obsessive-compulsive nature of his reasoning.

But another thing is brought to the foreground: his perspective has changed. Those heroic deeds - slaying Humbaba, the Bull of Heaven, hunting down lions - which he used to boast about, are now painful reminiscences. Life without Enkidu has no meaning at all. Driven by sorrow and his fear for death, the only way to continue for Gilgamesh is by means of conquering death itself. He needs to obtain everlasting life. But he fails to see the paradox: if it would become possible for him to live forever, he would have to do so without Enkidu anyway. Perhaps the fear would gradually diminish and eventually go away, but the sorrow would remain. Gilgamesh rejects the advice given him by the barmaid and Uta-napishtim, advice that boils down to: death is inevitable. *Gilgamesh, you are going to die, sooner or later*. But in the meanwhile, until that fateful event occurs, you are alive, you have a life that needs to be lived an even to be enjoyed whilst it lasts.

v) Mixed analepsis

A last question Genette (1980:61) asks with regard to *analepses* pertains to *mixed analepses,* to the way in which *analepses* interrupt and then rejoin the *first narrative.* A *partial analepsis* ends on an ellipsis without rejoining the *first narrative.* Thus, there is a "gap" between the end of the *analepsis* and the beginning of the *first narrative.* If one assumes that Gilgamesh dreamed about Enkidu whilst he was merely an infant - that is before the starting point of the *Epic* - there is a portion of his life about which nothing is known, therefore an *ellipsis*. The intervening period of his growing up, or the way in which he became king is seemingly not relevant to the *Epic* at all. (But this reasoning would not apply to the assumption that Gilgamesh dreamed about Enkidu after he became king of Uruk, because in this case the dream becomes an *internal homodiegetic analepsis.*)

A *complete analepsis* is an external one which rejoins the *first narrative* and becomes part of the *narrative discourse* without any "gap" between the ends of the *analepsis* and the beginning of the *narrative.* In other words, the *external analepsis* overlaps with the starting point of the *narrative.* This type of *analepsis* does not feature in the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* However, if his growing up years had been recounted, perhaps explaining why his reign became one of terror in its early years, this might have been a case of *complete analepsis.* But the early years of Gilgamesh remain a mystery.

Prolepsis

Genette (1980:67) states that "*anticipation, or temporal prolepsis, is clearly less frequent than the inverse figure, at least in Western narrative tradition",* but admits that "*each of the three great early epics, the Iliad, the Odyssey and the Aeneid begins with a sort of anticipatory summary that to a certain extent justifies the formula Todorov applied to the Homeric narrative: plot of*

predestination." Obviously Genette has not heard of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV), furthermore this *narrative* is not really a *plot of predestination*, and the *prologue* (I:1-45) is not only an *anticipatory summary.* The narrator does propose to make known to all and everyone everything that Gilgamesh has learnt (Parpola, I:1-2), it is about to tell about his search into faraway regions, the difficult paths that he had trod, his discovery of what had been before the Deluge, the secrets of ancient times, and his heroic manner of conducting battle. It is even going to tell of his encounter with Uta-napishtim. Yet this is a tale of the past, what is to be disclosed is not going to take place, everything happened a long time ago. Therefore it should be noted once again that the *prologue* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) is neither purely *proleptic* nor purely *analeptic,* but rather a unique mixture of both.

Prolepses hold the same distinctions as *analepses. Prolepses* are *internal, external* or *mixed* (Genette 1980:68)

1) External prolepsis

External prolepses reach beyond the scope of the *first narrative* - in other words, these would pertain to episodes that take place after the closing point of the *story,* and they do not interfere with the first narrative. Thus the *prologue* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* - if one does not merely regard this as an *anticipatory summary* - qualifies as a type of *external prolepsis* (cf. the discussion under the heading *anachrony):* only after Gilgamesh saw the Deep, he became the wise and mature king who is lauded in the *prologue.* But besides the *prologue,* nothing else is recorded about these prosperous years of reign.

2) Internal prolepsis

Internal prolepses, just like *internal analepses* do interfere with the story line of the *first narrative*. In this regard the category of *internal heterodiegetic prolepsis* is not applicable, for whether anticipation is external or internal, it

would have a different interest than the *first narrative.* As far as *internal homodiegetic prolepses* are concerned, Genette (1908:71) differentiates between *completing* and *repeating prolepses*.

i) Completing prolepsis

Completing prolepses "fill ahead of time a later blank" (Genette 1980:71). In a very uncertain sense Enkidu's vision of hell (VII:165-202) may qualify as an example of such a prolepsis. As Enkidu lies dying, he has a dream in which he is seized by a bird-like, beast-like young man who drags him down to the Netherworld. If one disregards tablet XII as part of the *Epic,* Enkidu's time after his death is filled in by this episode.

ii) Repeating prolepsis

Most of the *prolepses* in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) are in the form of dreams and fall into Genette's category of "*those that - still ahead of time - double, however slightly, a narrative section to come (repeating prolepses)"* (Genette 1980:71). This appears to be more intricate than it seems at first, because Genette (1980:75) also states that true *prolepses* do create anticipation and should not be confused with advance notices and advance mentions. Especially because one is dealing with an ancient text like the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and especially because Akkadian is not one's first language, it is very difficult to ascertain the exact notice of each utterance. What seems to be an anticipation for one person, may just as well be an advance notice for another. Therefore, unfortunately one has to guess.

So, back to the dreams of Gilgamesh whilst Shamhat is instructing Enkidu on his purpose in life: to befriend the restless young king of Uruk. Gilgamesh dreamed of Enkidu some time ago, and his mother, the clever and wise Ninsun, explained these dreams: some time in the future, he is to meet a loyal and trustworthy friend, in her eyes, his equal (I:250-255; I:267-269). At

this stage the reader is not supposed to know that Gilgamesh and Enkidu are going to become blood brothers. Gilgamesh has just been portrayed by the narrator as the arrogant young king who abuses his power: the women have in the meanwhile prayed for the creation of his double in order to have his energy curbed. Enkidu is the answer to their prayers, but no one knows for certain what the result will be when Enkidu does meet Gilgamesh and challenge his strength. Ninsun's explanation, although she is a goddess, still has to be put to the test. Therefore, in these instances anticipation is created, and these passages do qualify as *internal completing prolepses.*

However, not all dreams are *internal completing prolepses.* The next series of dreams are the ones that Gilgamesh has as he and Enkidu travel towards the Cedar Woods to slay Humbaba (tablet IV). Every time that they pitch camp for the night, they perform rituals in order to provoke a dream, however, for Gilgamesh these dreams turn out to be nightmares. He relates his dreams to Enkidu, who tells him soothingly every time that he has nothing to worry about, and that everything will work out just fine.

The first question one needs to ask, is whether or not Gilgamesh's recounting of his dreams could also be regarded as *analepses* as well. The answer is no. The lapse of time between the event and its recall is simply too short. Gilgamesh vividly remembers the dream as he wakes up shivering and upset. The same argument holds for the dream Enkidu has about his own death. These dreams are recounted as soon as they happened, therefore they have the sense of the immediate presence rather than an aspect of retrospective remembrance.

However, these five dreams of Gilgamesh in tablet IV do create anticipation: the reader is aware of the ferocious nature of the monster, and is also aware of the fact that the two heroes are acting against the will of the god Enlil who appointed Humbaba to guard the Cedar Woods. Yes, Ninsun has asked Shamash for the protection of her son (II:42-56), but will he do so? Anything

might still happen. This feeling of anticipation increases when Shamash himself urges the two heroes to hurry towards the woods (IV:192-197) and carry out their intentions. It is almost as though the combat has taken on cosmic dimensions, a struggle between two gods who use the heroes and the monster as their pawns: Gilgamesh and Enkidu on the side of Shamash, and Humbaba on the side of Enlil.

The last matter of *prolepsis* concerns Enkidu's dream about his own death. Whether this is a *true prolepsis* can be doubted, because once again, very soon after he realises the implication of his dream, he becomes ill. Nevertheless, one cannot know how many days, weeks, and months or even years elapsed between VII:1 and VII:162 - that is from the beginning of the dream until the illness becomes full-blown. In between Enkidu becomes rebellious, cursing all and everyone, unwilling to accept his fate. Then, reprimanded by Shamash, he withdraws his curse on Shamhat. Only after that does he become really ill. Nevertheless, this passage does not seem to create the same sense of anticipation, because this dream comes true fairly quickly after it is recounted. And it comes rather as a shock: after Gilgamesh and Enkidu slew Humbaba, after they killed the Bull of Heaven, the gods decide that one of them shall die - an untimely and tragic end to a sincere and deep friendship. Therefore this dream does not create anticipation, one should rather say it gives a sad advance notice.

Achrony

Genette (1980:83) defines *achronies* as "*proleptic analepses"* and "*analeptic prolepses"*, paraphrased as follows: "*It would happen later as we have already seen,"* or: "*It had already happened, as we shall see later."* The initial remarks on the *prologue* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* pointed out that it is an *analepsis* and a *prolepsis* at the same time, however, also that it does not qualify as a *true* example of either, therefore it is not a case of *true achrony.* Although the narrator appears to be saying "*it had already happened as we shall see later",*

that which had happened is what he is going to tell about: the *story* that is going to become the *narrative.* This is different from isolated events which are being recalled and which will (or will not) interrupt the *narrative* at a later stage. Therefore, although the remote past becomes alive in the present of the reader, and although the *Epic* does create a feeling of timelessness, one cannot really say that present, past and future become confused.

Remarks

The ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh* succeeds in weaving its *primary* and *secondary* narratives in a masterly manner by means of its different devices with regards to *order.* This happens in a remarkable spontaneous and natural manner. Nothing is forced cerebrally. And that is exactly why it works. Together with the narrator the narratee moves along the lines of the narrative, now here, then there, sometimes in the middle of the action, sometimes outside and involved in events that took place many years before, of those that will only realise in the distant future.

2.1.2. Duration

Genette's later work (1988) is in a sense a defence of and a commentary on his earlier (1980) one. As far as *duration* is concerned, he notes that there are some levels of *duration* that are virtually impossible to compare with one another, therefore it is also impossible to ascertain the relationship between any of these (cf. Genette 1988:33-34). To begin with, the *story* has a specific duration: so many days, weeks, months or years, and so forth. These are recounted in the *text:* so many pages (or tablets in the case of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* [SBV]). However, the *text* needs to be read: so many pages (tablets) per hour. And due to the different circumstances and capabilities of different readers, *duration* expressed in terms of these relationships is very difficult, if not impossible.

In his 1988 work, Genette (1988:33) admits to a difference between an oral and a written *text.* An *oral narrative* - literary or not - does have a measurable *duration*: how long does it take to recite the *narrative*? The first oral Sumerian poems of *Gilgamesh* must have had a duration that perhaps could have been measured. As far as the later versions are concerned - the *Old Babylonian Version* and the *Standard* one - it is still unclear whether these were recited loudly or merely read or copied out quietly. However, even oral *durations* cannot be fixed for the simple reason that one person speaks slower or faster than another one. Even quoting dialogue into the *narrative* that is the closest one can get to the actual *duration* in the *story*, poses this problem (Genette 1980:87). So, the only way to measure the reading of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is: how many clay tablets per hour, per day or even per week - a matter which obviously would vary greatly according to the reading skills in Akkadian of the different readers. Consequently, for these very variable and undeterminable matters, Genette (1988:33-34) prefers to use the term *pseudo-time.* Furthermore he proposes that his chapter in *Narrative Discourse* (1980) should bear the heading *Speed* instead of *Duration,* or perhaps even *Speeds,* since "*no narrative moves forward at an entirely steady pace...*" (Genette 1988:34).

Thus, *duration* examines the connections between the *variable duration of the story sections* and the *length of the text* in which they are recounted *(i.e. the pseudo-duration): duration* pertains to connections of *speed.* The rhythm of a narrative is determined by the accordance or discordance between the duration of the story sections and the pseudo-duration. For example, there is considerable correspondence between dialogue in the *story* and its verbatim report in the *narrative*. But on the other hand, an expression like *for six days and seven nights* leaps over story-time within a few words to pleat time, as it were.

Finally Genette (1980:88) states: "*...it is hard to imagine the existence of a narrative that would admit no variation in speed - and even this banal observation is somewhat important: a narrative can do without anachronies,*

but not without anisochronies or, if one prefers (as one probably does), effects of rhythm."

Anisochrony

Anisochrony pertains to the rhythm of *narrative discourse*, the *speed* with which it moves forward or slows down. *Narrated time* as compared to *narrating time* - that is the *duration of the story* set against the *length of the text* - indicates the *rhythm of narrative discourse*. Genette (1980:95) distinguishes four basic forms of *narrative movement* that he calls *the four narrative movements: pause, scene, summary and ellipsis.* He postulates the following scheme:

pause: NT = n, ST = 0 Thus NT oo > ST
scene: NT = ST
summary: NT < ST
ellipsis: NT = 0, ST = n Thus NT < oo ST
ST = story time; NT = pseudo-time of the narrative
oo > = infinitely greater than; oo < = infinitely smaller than

1) Summary

A *summary* is defined as "*...the narration in a few paragraphs or a few pages of several days, months or years of existence, without details of action or speech"*, (Genette 1980: 5&96). The *narrative* sums up what happened over a relatively long period in a relatively short way. Traditionally *summaries* functioned as a "*transition between two scenes, the background against which scenes stand out,"* (Genette 1980:97). For the flow of the *narrative, summaries* are necessary, however, they do not pertain to the dramatic moments of action or events.

A typical *summary* would be something like: "The beautiful goddess Ninsun fell in love with the young and handsome king Lugalbanda of Uruk. They married

and had one son whom they called Gilgamesh. However, Lugalbanda died tragically in a battle against Enmerbaragesi whilst his son was but a baby. Gilgamesh grew up without the strict discipline of a father. His mother doted on him since he was the living image of his father, so he turned out to be rather something of a spoilt brat. Thus, when he was made king of Uruk, he started his reign by abusing his power brutally."

This type of *summary* seems absent in the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* Periods of time are either left out by means of *ellipses* (discussion follows), apparently because they are totally irrelevant, or otherwise acceleration is evented by means of *scenes* (see later). Genette (1980:97) notices the absence of *true summaries* also in Proust's *Recherche.* Somehow, the ancient author just like Proust, decided against the use of this literary device just because it is available. Thus, it seems that many literary devices are at the disposal of authors, but that creative authors are not compelled to use them all.

2) Pause

Pauses are traditionally those long descriptive passages in which no action takes place, for example a description of a beautiful garden, the picture of a landscape, or of the view of the snow on the mountains, and so forth. Strictly speaking, a *true pause* is when an external *narrator* describes a picture "*solely for the information of his reader",* (Genette 1980:100). This implies that the inward thoughts of a character are not really *pauses,* because the narrative does not exactly come to a halt.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) does not have many such *pauses.* The closest one gets to a *pause* is in the beginning of tablet V. Gilgamesh and Enkidu completed the long journey towards the Cedar Forest, and have just arrived at its entrance. They stand still to admire the beauty of the trees. One gets the impression that a picture of beauty, peace and quiet is being created (V:1-16) [this description may even continue, but from line 11 the tablet is badly

damaged, therefore it is impossible to ascertain exactly how long this *pause* is]: the cedars are high, they decorate the slopes of the mountains where the gods live, they joyfully cast their sweet shadows, elsewhere there are aromatic smelling plants or shrubs. But within this serene presentation, Humbaba's spoor (V:4) casts an ominous smudge. All is not what it seems: the proverbial calm before the storm. Later on the picturesque beauty of the Cedar Forest contrasts sharply with the ugly fight that takes place within: the fight between Humbaba on the one hand, and Gilgamesh and Enkidu on the other.

This *pause* comes just after the long journey that comprises most of tablet IV. Now the *narrative* needs to take a deep breath after a period of travelling a long distance without stop, and before swinging back into action, before launching the deathly attack. Here the *pause* functions to highlight contrasts: the contrast between beauty and ugly; between stillness and movement. The initial dialogue between the men and the monster slowly but surely increases the tension by postponing the moment of the violent attack. As has been said, the text is badly damaged. However, the dialogue between Humbaba and the heroes can be reconstructed from V:81 to approximately line 103. The fight itself is described in V:115-126 - only eleven lines. Thereafter dialogue functions in an opposite way by slowing down the *narrative* as Humbaba desperately pleads for his life. And then, within one single line, the monster is beheaded.

Tablet VIII is perhaps an indication of a very long *pause.* It commences with Gilgamesh who summons the whole of the land, the people, the animals, and the animate and inanimate objects to mourn the death of his friend.

Everybody and everything *pauses* at the deathbed of Enkidu. Equally drawn out are the elaborations on the various gifts that are prepared to accompany Enkidu on his journey to the Netherworld. Enkidu has died. Everything must come to a standstill until the proper burial rites had been carried out. This whole tablet centres on the deceased Enkidu. One may conclude Tablet VIII, by

means of this very long *pause,* marks a transition between youthful self-reliance and the shocking realisation that even great accomplishments do not guarantee an everlasting life. The ideal of establishing an everlasting name by means of heroic deeds during one's life is cancelled by the realisation that the very thread of life is to be cut at some point or another.

Another *pause* or descriptive passage is at the end of tablet IX:175-195. Gilgamesh has passed through the tunnel of Shamash/the sun and finds himself at the seashore in the paradise where the trees and fruit are of semi-precious stone. This *pause* also functions to slow down the *narrative*, also after a period of very fast and intense movement. Gilgamesh's journey towards this location was a desperate race against time. For eleven double hours he rushed forth at a deadly pace, seeing only darkness behind and in front of him. Suddenly he finds himself in bright daylight, and not far off is a beautiful paradise. Gilgamesh has time to catch his breath and admire his surroundings before he proceeds on his journey towards Utnapishtim. This *pause* is also followed by dialogue (the dialogue between Gilgamesh and Siduri), and then by a fight - the fight Gilgamesh picks up with Urshanabi, the boatman. But instead of being the hero, Gilgamesh turns out to be the fool this time: his only success is the destruction of the Stone Things without which the boat cannot pass the Waters of Death. And instead of beheading a monster that might have killed him, he faces the inevitability of his own death.

3) Ellipsis

Genette (1980:106 states: "*From a temporal point of view, the analysis of ellipses comes down to considering the story time elided",* that is, time in the *story* not accounted for in *narrative discourse.* There are two types of *ellipses: definite ellipses* and *indefinite ellipses. Definite ellipses* indicate the elided time, for example: "Four years and two months later..." *Indefinite ellipses* do not indicate temporal duration, for example, "Some years later..."

Furthermore *ellipses* can be *explicit* (Genette 1980:106), *implicit* (Genette 1980:108) or *hypothetical* (Genette 1980:109).

i) Explicit ellipsis

Explicit ellipses are either definite or indefinite and they pertain to the examples mentioned above. The *narrative discourse* states explicitly that some *story time* has passed; *narrative time* pleated itself over so many years, or some time. On the whole the *narrative* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) is not really concerned about being specific on temporal elapses. Indications of time are specified by means of *bēru* (George 2003:494): *bēru* is an ambiguous term for it may indicate either a measure of time - usually translated with *double hours* - or a measure of distance – then translated with *league.* In this regard one may state that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is explicit with regards to temporal elapses, however, it is impossible to ascertain the exact duration. The other temporal indication occurs in the expression *for six days and seven nights.* However, this is rather an idiomatic utterance than one that has to do with a literal six days and seven nights - for example, *a week later* will simply not carry the same meaning as *for six days and seven nights.*

ii) Implicit ellipsis

Implicit ellipses are *mute* (Genette 1980:108). The reader has to work out for himself or herself that some indefinite time has elapsed, but can do so only indirectly after becoming aware of some chronological gap in *narrative* continuity. *Ellipses* of this kind do appear in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV), and the most obvious examples are in tablet I. Obviously a number of years had gone by since Enkidu's creation by the goddess Aruru (I:84&85), until the time that he is spotted by the hunter (I:96). Nothing is said about Enkidu's childhood, or of his growing up. Even if one assumes that he was created as a young adult from the start, this is merely a guess, and even then, he could not have been spotted by the hunter immediately after his creation: at least a day

or two must have gone by. A period of Enkidu's life is not accounted for - thus an *implicit* and *indefinite ellipsis.*

Likewise, after the raucous party with the shepherds, Enkidu becomes their friend who keeps watch at night, protecting their flock against wolves and lions (II:44-52). Suddenly a young man who is on his way to Uruk appears in the picture (II:53) and is questioned by Shamhat (on Enkidu's request) to explain what is going on (II:54-63). The next scene is the fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu in Uruk. Obviously Enkidu did not spend only one night at the camp of the shepherds, and also one may assume that he would not simply rush off to the big city without saying goodbye. Furthermore, the trip from the shepherds' den to the centre of the city must have taken some hours at least, if not days or even weeks. Once again there is a period of time not accounted for, therefore an *implicit* and *indefinite ellipsis.*

The whole of tablet IV tells about the long and exhausting journey towards the Cedar Forest. Tablet V recounts the fight between the two friends and Humbaba, and ends where Gilgamesh and Enkidu load their raft with wood and with the head of Humbaba (V:253). In the next tablet they are suddenly back in Uruk where the goddess Ishtar falls in love with Gilgamesh the moment she sees him (VI:1-7). Although they travel back by river that is apparently quicker than by land (why did they not do so in the first place?), the reader does not know how long did this journey take: hours, days, weeks, or months? An *implicit* and *indefinite ellipsis*.

There may be another one or two examples of this kind. However, most probably these literary devices were not deliberately applied by the ancient author. Certainly, Enkidu's early life before he became a human being was not important to this author, likewise he considered the time Enkidu spent with the shepherds and the time that it took to go to Uruk, irrelevant. Also the time that it took to travel back by river from the Cedar Forest to Uruk, is of no significance. It must be kept in mind that this author had existing material at his

disposal which he had to appropriate creatively in order to compose the *Epic* (SBV): this *narrative* is all about Gilgamesh, and if a time passes during which nothing significant happens, it is simply not worth the while to tell about it.

4) Scene

Traditionally a *scene* pertains to "*the strong periods of the action coinciding with the most intense moments of the narrative",* (Genette 1980:109). *Scenes* are moments of dramatic actions described in an equal dramatic way. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) is mainly written in the form of dramatic *scenes* alternating with dialogue.

The first half of the *Epic* contain episodes of dramatic action, all portrayed intensely by means of *scenes:* Enkidu and Shamhat making love (I:171-177); the party with the shepherds (II:35-49); the fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu (II:77-98); the fight with Humbaba (V:115-126); the fight with the Bull of Heaven (VI:145-152). Just like *scenes*, dialogues are supposed to be those *narrative* sections where *story* time equals *narrative* time. Dialogue, in this first half of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV), slows down the pace of *narrative discourse,* especially where long dialogues either precede or are followed by descriptions of rapid action. The long conversations with Humbaba before and after the fight (tablet V) are typical examples.

The second half of the *Epic* contains hardly any action. Brief introductory remarks and dialogue characterise this part. Enkidu dies in tablet VII.

Thereafter everything slows down. The pace of the *narrative* is drawn out almost excruciatingly by means of dialogue that becomes like a monotonous monologue as Gilgamesh laments Enkidu's death. The only thing that really happens is Gilgamesh roaming the plains in search of everlasting life. Tablet VII starts with Enkidu's dream (SBV) about his own death; both he and Gilgamesh verbalise their sorrow and fear by means of long dialogue. The

whole of tablet VIII tells of Enkidu's funeral, mainly in the words of Gilgamesh as he calls up everybody to mourn his friend and prepare the various gifts for Enkidu to keep the inhabitants of the Netherworld happy. Tablet IX poses a problem: the lamentations of Gilgamesh remain, but apparently some action takes place between lines 12-38 (before he meets the Scorpion People). After having a dream, he takes up his axe and his sword again, (IX:13-16), but what he does with them, is unclear. The *text* is broken, and some lines (29-36) are completely missing. In tablet X there is one brief moment of action as Gilgamesh tries to take Urshanabi by surprise (X:94-108). As Gilgamesh is introduced to Uta-napishtim, the latter philosophies about life and death (X:266-327), and the most of tablet XI is Uta-napishtim's recount of the Deluge (XI:8-204). Gilgamesh fails the two tests for obtaining life eternal quickly and decisively, and abruptly returns to Uruk.

Remarks

Thus, this ancient *narrative* seems to have a concept of increasing or decreasing time: the heroic times of Gilgamesh and Enkidu are short, sudden and intense. Then, when Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh has too much time on hands, and the worst of it all is that nothing happens during this time. He has too much time to think. His obsessive thoughts drive him insane until he needs to be shocked back into reality: he is going to die anyway. All that he has left, is time, time during which he needs to work out a life which is meaningful for himself and for others. This life becomes visible on the walls of Uruk, a concrete and tangible monument by which he shall be remembered. Somehow he succeeded.

2.1.3. Frequency

Frequency has bearing on the relationships between the *events* that occur *repetitively* in the *story,* and the *many times* (or lack of it) that they are

repeated in the narrative. In other words, this has to do with how many times did something really happen, and how many times is it reported in the *narrative*.

Culler, in his foreword to Genette (1980:11) remarks: "*Repetition, a common form of frequency, has emerged as the central technique in avant garde novels.*" *Narrative frequency* pertains to "*the relations of frequency (or more simply, of repetition) between the narrative and the diegesis,*" (Genette 1980:113). This means that an event in the *story* may happen once, twice, or many more times. This event may be recounted in the *narrative* once, twice, or many more times. In this way a relationship is established between the repetition of *story-events* and the *narrative statements* pertaining to these events. In this regard Genette (1980:113) points out that "*identical events*" or the "*recurrence of the same event*" is an abstract mental construction, because every event is in fact unique, even the sun that rises everyday. Events are considered similar only in terms of their resemblance. Nevertheless he (Genette 1980:114) reduces a system of relationships to four virtual types: "*the event repeated or not, the statement repeated or not.*" This is expounded as follows:

1) Narrating once what happened once (abbr. **1N/1S**) (Genette 1980:114).

Example: "*Yesterday I went to bed early.*"

This is also called the *singulative narrative* because both *narrative statement* and *narrated event* are singular and they correspond to each other. This is the most common type of *narration* in *narrative discourse* that is also appropriated in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV). The many *scenes* in the *Epic* fall into this category: the fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu; the fight with Humbaba; the slaying of the Bull of Heaven, and so forth. What happened once is reported once only.

2) Narrating n times what happened n times **(nN/nS)** (Genette 1980:114)

Example: "*Monday I went to bed early. Tuesday I went to bed early. Wednesday I went to bed early."* (Genette 1980:115).

Strictly speaking this is also a *singulative narrative* because *narrative statements* correspond to *narrated events:* however Genette (1980:115) prefers to call this an *anaphoric* type of relationship. *Singulative* in this case pertains to the matter of equality, not to number: *anaphoric* relationships deal with something that occurred more than once and is narrated more than once.

The repetitions in tablet IV in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) is an example of such an *anaphoric* relationship. The journey towards the Cedar Forest takes place in five stages: lines 1-20; 34-52 (line 6 is not repeated); 73-92; 109-129 (with the addition of line 113); 145-163. The same thing happens five times consecutively: for three days they travel a long distance, apparently without stopping. They pitch camp for the night and dig a well for some water. Then Gilgamesh climbs to the top of the hillside, pours out some flour as an offering and requests a dream from Shamash. Enkidu also performs some rituals and eventually they fall asleep. In the middle of their sleep, Gilgamesh wakes up trembling after a nightmare he has just had. The dream is different every time, but the explanation is the same: it is a good omen.

Reading the same twenty lines five times over does become monotonous after a while. However, it becomes clear that Gilgamesh and Enkidu are not having a holiday or a pleasure trip for doing some sightseeing: they have one purpose in mind namely to slay Humbaba. Therefore they need to get to the Cedar Forest as fast as possible. The monotony of the journey and the set frame of their minds are stressed by means of this technique: tablet IV is not exactly the most exciting tablet in the *Epic* as nothing remarkable happens - they travel, eat, sleep and dream - but the repetitions in the tablet does have a remarkable effect.

The same thing happens in tablet IX when Gilgamesh departs from the Scorpion People to proceed through the tunnel of the (S)sun (IX:141-173). For eight double-hours everything remains exactly the same: the thick tangible darkness through which he races against time. However, in this series of repetitions, there is a turning point: at the ninth double-hour he becomes aware of the northern wind on his face (IX:165-166). The darkness is still the same and does not allow him to look behind him, and the race is not over yet, but things are about to change, hopefully for the better. Indeed, at the eleventh double-hour he realises that he is ahead of the (S)sun (IX:171-172), and the bright light appears at the twelfth double-hour (IX:173). By maintaining the sameness of the circumstances for eight double-hours, a favourable turn from the ninth one comes as a pleasant surprise.

3) Narrating n times what happened once **(nN/1S)** (Genette 1980:115)

Example: "*Yesterday I went to bed early; yesterday I went to bed early; yesterday I went to bed early.*"

Genette (1980:115) calls this a *repeating narrative,* and in this regard he remarks: "*This form might seem purely hypothetical, an ill-framed offspring of the combinative mind, irrelevant to literature. Let us remember, however, that certain modern texts are based on the narrative's capacity for repetition*" and then he quotes examples from some of these modern texts. But the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) uses exactly this device in Gilgamesh's long lamentations as he mourns the death of his friend, roaming the plains in search of everlasting life (see the discussion under the heading: *iterative internal homodiegetic analepsis).* Enkidu died once - Gilgamesh tells about it over and over. Just like the mentioned discussion points out, the recurring thoughts that pertain only to one matter, stresses an obsession and irrational behaviour. Gilgamesh manifests a major depression. He neglects his appearance, he is unable to

carry out his duties as king. He is driven by a flight from death towards a quest for life eternal, both flight and quest are equally futile.

4) Narrating one time (or rather at one time) what happened n times **(1N/nS)** (Genette 1980:116).

Example: "*Every day of the week I went to bed early"* instead of "*Monday I went to bed early, Tuesday I went to bed early, Wednesday I went to bed early."*

Genette (1980:116) calls this type of statement the *iterative narrative.* It is tempting to consider expressions which contain *kaiānamma* (the whole time e.g. I:110&111), or *6 urṛī 7 mūšī* (6 days and 7 nights, e.g. I:177) may be a form of *iterative narrative.* In the sense of the classical novel they certainly are: they do function as an *informative frame or background* (Genette 1980:117), therefore they are rather subordinate to *singulative scenes.* This happens to be the case in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV). Genette (1980:118-160) goes into much detail as far as *iterative narration* is concerned. Typical expressions are *each time that...*or *every now and then...*which appear to be of great significance, not merely functioning as a background for a *scene.* A typical *iterative* novel would recount a series entitled something like *Sundays in the summer of 1890* (Genette 1980: 127): what used to happen every Sunday during the summer months of 1980?

In Genette's discussion of the *iterative narrative* (cf. Genette 1980:118-160), it becomes clear that the ancient author does not appropriate this device with the same significance as Proust (or any author of the *nouveau roman*). Apparently seasons are irrelevant. The reader has to infer that Gilgamesh's face that is burnt by heat and by cold is due to the many seasons that he roamed the plains (cf. the lamentations in tablet X). Days and months do play a role (cf. the trip towards the Cedar Forest in tablet V), but not weeks. (For example, do six days and seven nights constitute a week, or is it an idiomatic expression?)

The Epic of Gilgamesh (SBV) seems less concerned about what used to happen every time or every now and then. It rather concentrates on what is about to happen and what is about to change. Life is short and intense in the first half of the *Epic,* but the implications of its brevity are not yet realised. In the second half the *Epic* death becomes a reality, but life also: Gilgamesh comes to the shocking insight that he has only one life, and that he has to make it work, with or without Enkidu (in the final instance without his friend).

Probably he did pass the statue of his friend every Sunday; probably he did have recurring thoughts every time that he passed this statue. Perhaps these thoughts inspired him to be the wise and mature king who is lauded in the *prologue*. But the ancient author had enough trust in the capabilities of his reader to infer these possibilities, and therefore did not deem it necessary to state everything explicitly.

Remarks

Many literary devices are available to authors, whether they are post-modern or ancient. But availability does not imply necessity. A literary device needs to be functional for the *narrative,* otherwise it becomes a cerebral activity of which only the author is aware. Competent authors have the ability to distinguish between what is available and what is necessary. Neither Proust nor the author or *the Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) used all of the available literary devices. What is interesting is that the ancient author of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) did not have the faintest clue about Genette (1980 & 1988); but somehow he was instinctively aware of some aspects of *narratological aesthetics*. As far as *time* is concerned (which is discussed in this chapter), a remarkable sensitivity manifests for significant interruptions, for increasing or decreasing the pace of the narrative, and for repetitions. In this regard, one may conclude that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was a remarkable literary masterpiece for its time, but not

only for its time. Modern readers are also able to appreciate the *Epic* by means of modern literary criteria.

Genette (1980) pays considerable attention to the concept of *time*. Sternberg (1990:914) remarks – rather sharply: *For anything like artistic status "narrative" must supposedly break away from the lifelike "story" because art works by deviance and disharmony.* In this article Sternberg (1990:901-945) criticises structuralist theorists – and especially Genette – who over-emphasise the appropriation of chronological interruptions in the story line, as though this device is determinative for the artistic appreciation of a narrative. Does this imply that a chronological narration – like a historical recount, for example – is devoid of artistic narration? Sternberg (above) argues strongly against such an impression. And indeed, he is correct. Simple narratives are often touching, striking, exactly because they are told with the greatest simplicity.

Thus, the discussion above – and that which is to follow, do not wish to create the impression that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* appeals to modern literary appraisal mainly due to its intricate temporal or other literary structures. The appropriation of Genette's *narrative model* is rather to provide a *tool* that may contribute towards a fresh, perhaps even new understanding of the *Epic.*

2.2. Mood

Narrative *mood* aims at the following: "*one can tell more or tell less what one tells, and one can tell it according to one point of view or another"* (Genette 1980:161-162). A narrative may choose to give detailed information to its readers, or choose to withhold some information deliberately; this information may be given in a direct or an indirect way, thereby keeping the *reader* at a closer or further *distance.* And in the final instance, characters in the narrative give information according to a particular *perspective* or *point of view.* In short: *mood* pertains to narrative *distance* and to narrative *perspective.*

2.2.1. Distance

Genette (1980:162-164) discusses the classical tradition that made a distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis.* The later Anglo American theorists called this distinction *showing* and *telling*, or *direct* and *indirect speech. Mimesis* imitates reality, diegesis only describes it. However, for Genette there can be no *imitation* or *mimesis* in narrative art, but only an *illusion of mimesis* (Genette 1980:164). Dramatic presentations, for example in live performances (theatre or cinema) are true *mimeses,* but a *narrative* can only aim at telling its *story* in a lively and vivid manner. Still, this does not *show* or *imitate* the *story:* Genette (1980:164) states that "*...narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating."* By this statement Genette agrees with the structuralists that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary.

So, it seems that *mimesis* in *narrative discourse* is impossible. Only degrees of *mimesis* remain, and in this regard Genette (1980:164) distinguishes between a *narrative of events* and a *narrative of words.*

Genette (1980:164-165) elaborates on the traditional difference between *mimesis* and *diegesis* by referring to a passage of Homer that is rephrased by Plato. Traditionally a *mimetic* representation (like the one of Homer) is quite elaborate, informing the reader or listener about all the detail, facial expressions, sound and so forth. A *diegetic* reformulation (like the one of Plato) on the other hand, is much shorter, omitting descriptive detail, and is therefore less realistic. But this distinction is illusionary, because a narrative, whether of words or of events is always only but a *narrative.*

1) A Narrative of Events

A *narrative of events* is a "*transcription of the (supposed) non-verbal into the verbal"* (Genette 1980:165), thus, a *narrative of events* is but an *illusion of*

mimesis. This mimetic effect is not fixed and is also not an inherent quality of the *narrative text,* but it depends on the various perceptions of the different readers. For example, one reader may perceive the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as very alive and real, to another the same *narrative* may appear distant, strange and rather far-fetched. Genette does not elaborate on the reasons for this difference in appreciation.

An *illusion of mimesis* in a narrative *text* is achieved by means of two factors: "*the quantity of narrative information (a more developed or more detailed narrative) and the absence (or minimal presence) of the informer - in other words, of the narrator"* (Genette 1980:166). What he actually means is that the *illusion of mimesis* in a narrative *text* is determined by *how much is said and by whom.* A mimetic effect is created when much information is given but the contributions of the informer are minimal. Dialogue is a very typical way to bring about *mimesis.* The informer is absent, as it were, the characters themselves are speaking. As it appeared in the previous discussion, the first half of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) consists mainly of short dramatic *scenes* and of *dialogue.* The *narrator* seems to disappear from the *narrative* soon after the *prologue.* The reader or the listener comes right into the heart of Uruk where Gilgamesh is harassing his people. One is immediately drawn into the scene of hard labour, power abuse, unbridled energy and protest. From the beginning of the point in time where the *story* starts, a convincing *illusion of mimesis* is created by the *narrative of events.*

Nevertheless, in this regard it is important to note that, although the *narrator* seemed to have disappeared, he did not really vanish, in fact, he is still "*present as a source, guarantor, and organizer* (sic) *of the narrative, as analyst and commentator, as stylist and particularly as producer of metaphors"* (Genette 1980:167). The *narrator* is not passively looking on, but he or she is actively taking part in the *narrative discourse.* He or she did not simply *go away*, his or her presence only becomes less obvious. But he or she is still the

one who makes use of the *narrative of events* to create an effect in a particular way.

In the case of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) the *narrator* chose to be present in a very unobtrusive way. He announces himself in the first line of the *prologue,* and never again. However, he manages to arrange his material skilfully and to make the events appear alive and real. As has been said, dramatic *scenes* (*narratives of events)* mark the first half of the *Epic.* In the second half of the *Epic* these *narratives of events* are restricted to the minimum. Yet the *narrator* continues with his task of arranging his material, but this time by means of *narratives of words* - which are discussed in the next section.

2) A Narrative of Words

Once again Genette (1980:169-170) uses the example from Homer's *Iliad* and the way that Plato rephrased it to illustrate the difference between what was traditionally known as *direct* and *indirect speech.* Genette complicates this matter by discerning the following types of discourse (cf also Rimmon 1976:49): *imitated discourse, narratized* (sic) *discourse* and *transposed discourse* (Genette 1980:171-172).

Imitated or reported discourse is dialogue that is recorded by the *narrator*, in other words, what used to be direct speech. *Narratised discourse* is dialogue that is summarised by a conspicuous *narrator* - or what used to be indirect speech. However, both Genette (1980:170) and Bal (1986:39) point out that *narratised discourse* is strictly speaking no different from a *narrative of events*. It becomes part of the *narrative discourse* and is treated just like any other event. *Transposed discourse* is rather interesting as this is dialogue that the *narrator* renders in an indirect way, however, still preserving the character's own words. This form of speech is also called *free indirect speech.*

In terms of *distance, imitated discourse* or direct speech creates the strongest illusion of mimesis, the smallest *distance* between the reader and the character. *Narratised discourse* on the other hand is far more diegetic by nature and would have the reader at a greater *distance.* Somewhere in between falls *transposed discourse* or *free indirect speech.*

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) uses only *imitated or reported discourse.* True enough, the introduction to this type of discourse is rather lengthy and usually follows the formula ...

X pâšu ipšuma iqabbi X opened his mouth, he says
ana Y amat izakkar to Y a word he says...

... but in this regard one needs to keep ancient literary conventions in mind. This was simply the way in which direct speech was introduced. The two other forms of speech, *narratised discourse* and *transposed discourse* are not used in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV).

Immediate speech is the term Genette (1980:173) uses for what used to be called *interior monologue.* The reader is brought directly into the thoughts of the character and the *distance* between them is eliminated. Two cases of this type of discourse appear in the *Epic of Gilgamesh:* Siduri and Uta-napishtim.

Siduri sees Gilgamesh approaching from afar and *thinks by herself* that he may be a murderer (X:11-13). Also Uta-napishtim sees him from afar and *wonders by himself* why the Stone Things of the boat are broken, why she is sailing without her equipment and concludes that the person who is on his way is not one of his household (X:182-187).

However, in the course of Genette's discussion it becomes clear that *immediate speech* is really functional in cases where a specific character is permanent in the *narrative* and the reader gains insight into why he or she does

certain things - or why not. Siduri and Uta-napishtim are rather different. Both these characters are new introductions into the *narrative.* They are part of their own *story* and will go back to it soon after their brief encounter with poor Gilgamesh. Their main role is to convince the main character that his quest for life eternal is a futile endeavour. The reader has enough insight into Gilgamesh's case; the only insight given by the *immediate speech* of Siduri and Uta-napishtim is that they are baffled by his tattered appearance.

Once again it appears that the *nouveau roman* appropriates the device of *immediate speech* far more deliberately than the *roman ancien* did. Neither Siduri not Uta-napishtim tells the reader anything he or she does not know already.

Remarks

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) maintains an intimate mood by keeping the distance between the reader, the events and words in the *narrative* small. The first half of the *Epic* consists mainly of *narratives of events.* These do not give much detail, often *scenes* are depicted in short and abrupt poetic lines. Nevertheless, this does not seem to make these events less real. On the contrary, the *narrator* skilfully succeeds in maintaining the *illusion of mimesis* by enhancing the impression of intense and focused action. There is simply no time for unnecessary detail.

The second half of the *Epic* consists mainly of *narratives of words,* only in the form of *imitated or reported speech.* Dialogues are long, often giving the impression of being monologues. This is especially obvious in the cases where Gilgamesh verbalises his sorrow about his departed friend: to Shamash, to the Scorpion people, to Siduri, to Urshanabi and to Uta-napishtim. There are many repetitions that verge upon redundancy.

Yet because these dialogues are *imitated or reported discourse,* they also create an alive and a present mood: these are the actual words that were spoken by the characters themselves. Regardless of how long and drawn out, or how short and abrupt these speeches were, the *narrator* did not tamper with what was said or with how it was said. The characters speak for themselves.

2.2.2. Focalisation

(Mieke Bal (1986:108-123) has elaborated extensively on the matter of *focalisation.* This chapter in her work, *De Theorie van Vertellen en Verhalen* is highly recommended. However, in the discussion which is about to follow, it will become clear that most of the categories of *focalisation* are far too sophisticated to be applied to the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* For the sake of completeness they will be discussed, but in a very brief manner. Nevertheless, the whole matter of *focalisation* is important, and cannot be omitted completely.)

Culler (in his foreword to Genette 1980:10) observes: "*Insistence on the difference between narration and focalization* (sic) *is a major revision of the theory of point of view."* Traditionally *point of view* used to pertain to categories such as first-person or third-person narratives, or subjective/objective narratives. The *narrator* was either present as a character in the narrative (a first-person or subjective narrative), or he/she was merely telling the story of someone else (a third-person or objective narrative). The question one needed to answer was: from whose *point of view* is this story being told?

However, recent literary theorists propose that this distinction is rather misleading because it suffers "from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood and voice,* a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?"* (Genette 1980:186). Bal

(1986:110) is perhaps more clearly than Genette in this regard. She simply states: "*A vertelt dat B ziet wat C doet.*" A tells that B sees what C does.

Now the whole matter of *perspective* or *point of view* becomes quite complicated. The concern is no longer about a first-person or third-person narrative, but from *whose point of view* the events or actions are perceived. This is called *focalisation.*

Of course, there are *narratives with zero focalisation* - or non-focalised narratives. This corresponds to a *narrative* with an omniscient *narrator* who knows more than any of the characters. Many classical *narratives* use this style, however, if one reads very closely, *zero focalisation* is not really sustained throughout: the case is rather that the device of *focalisation* is not exploited in the same manner as the *nouveau roman.*

Genette (1980:189) distinguishes two types of *focalisation* in a *narrative*:

(i) *Narrative with internal focalisation* of which the *focalisation* may be *fixed* or *variable.* When the *focalisation* is *fixed,* the whole *story* is told from the *perspective* of only one of the characters; *variable focalisation* has different focal characters in the same story; and *multiple focalisation* has the same *story* told from the different *perspectives* of several characters. The *narrator* who is *focalising* through the eyes of one or more of the characters, knows only as much as the character does, no more, no less.

(ii) *Narrative with external focalisation.* Spy narratives often *focalise* in this way. The character, usually the hero, knows much more than the *narrator* is willing to disclose.

Usually (but not necessarily) *narratives* vary in the way the *narrator* chooses to *focalise.* These variations in *point of view* are called *alterations* (Genette

1980:194-197). These can also be described as *momentary infractions.* Genette distinguishes between *paralipses* and *paralepses.*

Paralipsis is the usual type of *internal focalisation.* Some important information - an action or a thought - on the part of the focal hero is withheld, in other words, less information than is necessary is given to the reader. *Paralepsis* is the opposite case of *focalisation* that can be *external* or *internal.* In this case the reader is supplied with more information than is necessary.

These types of focalisations are usually appropriated to regulate the information in a narrative text. Perhaps Genette (1980:198) sums it up best in his own words: "*Narrative always says less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says."*

Polymodality is the last type of focalisation Genette (1980: 198-211) discusses. *Polymodality* pertains to autobiographical *narratives* in which the *narrator* is supposed to be the one who *focalises.* But in post-modern novels *focalisation* by the *narrator* as hero-character of his or her own story, or as real *author* in the sense of an *omniscient narrator,* becomes blurred.

Remarks

Thus, as it was pointed out right at the beginning of this section, the whole concept of *focalisation* is far better appropriated by the *nouveau roman* than by the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV). However, this ancient *Epic* does contain focalisations through the eyes of some of the very minor characters, and pertain mostly to the perception of either Enkidu or Gilgamesh. The hunter sees Enkidu and becomes frightened because he perceives him as a savage beast (I:96-103); the animals see Enkidu and they run away because they perceive him as a human being, no longer as one of their kind (I:180). Ishtar sees Gilgamesh (tablet IV) and is overcome with passionate desire. Siduri sees him and perceives him as a murderer (X:10-13); Uta-napishtim sees him

and recognises him as a stranger (X:182-187). But these *focalisations* appear rather naïve and not really of great significance.
What is startling though, is the *focalisation* that is embedded in the very first line or the *prologue* (Parpola's 1997 transliteration): Of the Deep that he *saw,* I must *tell* the land. Even the incipit of George (2003:539) hints strongly at *focalisation*: He who *saw* the Deep...

A *tells* that B *saw* something.

Initially the *Epic of Gilgamesh* appears as a *narrative* that is being told mainly from the perspective of an omniscient *narrator,* therefore a narrative that contains *zero focalisation,* typical of classical narratives. But everything changes if one realises that what is being told, is that which he - Gilgamesh - saw. Gilgamesh is the one who saw, who *focalised* in the first place. The object of his *focalisation* is the Deep - or *everything* according to some translations. This Deep/everything pertains to his life and the wisdom he acquired. However, he acquires wisdom only after he brings his life into perspective, only after he perceives and re-interprets the *narrative* of his life. In this way the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) becomes a *process of focalisation.*

From the top of the walls of Uruk the *narrator* is telling but also re-*focalising* the life of Gilgamesh. He is inviting the reader to do the same. Together they look at the life of the arrogant young king who fearlessly defies men, gods and monsters. They see the agony Gilgamesh goes through when Enkidu dies. And they perceive the futility of the quest for life eternal. Somehow *telling* and *seeing* becomes totally blurred. The *narrator* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) cleverly disguised *focalisation* as *narrative*, thereby confusing who is *seeing* and who is *telling* in a challenging way.

Long time ago, from the top of these very walls, Gilgamesh also *focalised* his life. The Deep becomes the *narrative* of his life as he *focalises* it through tears of grief and shame. Despite killing monsters and defying the great gods in his

youth, his behaviour as king was not exactly honourable. He disintegrated completely when he was confronted with failure and loss. Yet, somehow back at the walls of Uruk, he manages to pull himself together. He *focalised*, he saw the Deep; now he realises that he must go on, but not in the way that he used to. *Focalisation* brings insight and wisdom.

2.3. Voice

Narrator is usually the term that is used for the one who *tells* (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:88), but once again Genette (1980:212) perceives the matter of telling in broader sense and uses the term *voice* to refer to the *narrating instance, "the mode of action...of the verb considered for its relations to the subject..."* The subject may be the person who does the narrating, but it may also be the one who does the reporting, in fact, *subject* pertains to every one who participates in the *narrating activity,* even passively. Of course one needs to keep in mind that there is a relationship between the *act of narrating* (telling) and the *instance of narrating* (narrator) who is performing the action. Consequently critics often mistakenly identify the "*narrating instance* with the *instance of writing,* the *narrator* with the *author* and the *receiver of the narrative* with the *reader of the work"* (Genette 1980:213).

Genette (1980:213-214) makes it quite clear that the *narrating instance* differs from the *writing instance.* The real *author* - the *writing instance* - is closely involved in the *action of writing,* however, the *narrating instance* has a *fictive role,* even if the real *author* decides to play this part. Bal (1986:124-125) points out that *narrating instance* pertains to a *linguistic instance,* and its function is purely *textual.* The *narrating instance* has nothing to do with a real person in the sense of someone who is telling his or her personal story, even if this *narrative* is an autobiography. It is very important to realise that one cannot make any assumptions about the *narrating instance* outside of the text, even if he or she happens to be the real *author* and one happens to know some

personal detail. So, the *narrating instance* or *voice* is the instance who - or rather which - is *telling*, it is a linguistic construct performing a textual function.

Voice in *narrative discourse* has a relationship to the following three elements: *time of narrating, narrative level* and "*person"* (Genette 1980:215). These elements are in fact closely intertwined and function simultaneously, they are only being separated for the purposes of analysis.

2.3.1. Time of narrating

The *narrating instance* is in a particular position with respect to the *story events* that it is reporting: "*I can very well tell a story without specifying the place where it happens, and whether this place is more or less distant from the place where I am telling it; nevertheless, it is almost impossible for me not to locate the story in time with respect to my narrating act, since I must necessarily tell the story in the present, past, or future tense",* (Genette 1980:215). So, restated and oversimplified: is the *voice,* the *narrating instance* telling its story in the present, past or future tense?

Obviously and quite logically one may assume that events can only be reported only after they had happened, therefore in the past tense (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:90). Genette (1980:217) complicates this logical assumption by designating four temporal possibilities with regard to the distance between the actual time of the *story events* and the time that they are reported: *subsequent narrating; prior narrating; simultaneous narrating* and *interpolated narrating.*

1) Subsequent narrating

This is the classical *past- tense narrative.* Most *narratives* are written in this style, namely in the *past tense.* The *story events* and the *act of narrating* appear to correspond temporally, because the *past tense* is used for both. Usually the interval between the *occurrence of the events* and the *narrating* is

not indicated, and usually it is not important to know this. Genette (1980:220) calls this an "*ageless past".*

Indeed, *subsequent narrating* in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* does convey something of an "*ageless past".* The *voice* or *narrating instance* reports that it is about to tell of the things of ancient times. And the *narrating instance* uses mostly the *preterite tense,* but quite often also the *praesens.* Genette (1980:220-221) notes that some narratives, although they are written as *subsequent narrating*, do make use of the *present tense,* either at the beginning or at the end. Especially when the *praesens* is used at the end of the narrative, the effect is that the temporal interval between *story time* and *narrating time* seems to lessen, and a convergence between the two seems to take place. Also on a *diegetical level* a convergence seems to occur between the *story* and its *narrator.*

Indeed, the last lines of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) (XI:314-320) are written in the *praesens,* the words that Gilgamesh speaks to Urshanabi the boatman. The dramatic effect of the convergence between *story time* and *narrating time,* and of *story* and its *narrator* is enhanced by the fact that Gilgamesh at the end uses the same words that the anonymous *narrator* used at the beginning of the *narrative.* As it was pointed out in the section on *analepsis* and *prolepsis,* present, past and future merge in a striking and significant way.

Yet, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) is not really concerned about temporal durations or intervals. These convergences - of *present* and *past,* of *story* and its *narrator* - happen on the walls of Uruk. In this regard *place* is far more significant than *time.* In the beginning of the *narrative,* the *voice,* the *narrator* starts to tell the *story* of Gilgamesh from the walls of Uruk, and right at the end of the *narrative,* once again back on the walls of Uruk the *voice* becomes the *voice* of Gilgamesh who is telling his own *story.* In this *Epic* it is not only a temporal aspect that brings past and present together, but also a matter of locality, or place. The whole poem is enclosed by the walls of Uruk.

2) Prior narrating

Very few narratives are written throughout in the style of *prior narrating,* as it is very difficult to sustain this way of *narrating* from the beginning to the end of *narrative discourse* (Genette 1980:219-220). *Prior narrating* is the characteristic style of *prophetic* and *apocalyptic* literature, but if it does occur in other *narrative genres,* it is usually *narratives* on a second level and mainly in the form of *prolepses. Prolepses* in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) have been discussed in the previous section of this chapter (cf2.1.1b).

3) Simultaneous narrating

These are *narratives* written in the *present tense* and are according to Genette (1980:218) the simplest. Although most of the dialogues in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) are written in the *praesens,* the *preterite* is the tense that dominates; the use of the *praesens* seems to be more a matter of convention than fulfilling a particular function in the *narrative.*

4) Interpolated narrating

Interpolated narrating is the most complex style of the four. *Narrating* and *story* alternate in such a way that the *story* has an effect on the *narrating* (Genette 1980:217). This is especially the case in *epistolary novels where, as we know, the letter is at the same time both a medium of the narrative and an element in the plot.* This type of *narrating* has no bearing on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV).

2.3.2. Narrative levels

Drastically oversimplified, *narrative levels* pertain to a *story within a story.* Some confusion exists with regards to the terminology that the different critics

use to designate these different levels. Rimmon-Kenan (1983:91) refers to *subordination relations* for which she uses the term *hypodiegetic levels.* Genette (1980:228) prefers the term *metadiegetic* for *narratives* on a different level from the *diegetic* one. In his later work (Genette 1988:87) he explains that the so-called *primary narrative* is not necessarily the most important one. In fact, it may be the case that the so-called *secondary narratives* are far more significant and functional than the *primary one.* Therefore the term *hypodiegetic* is not really suitable, because *hypodiegetic* does imply a relationship of subordination. So, by using the term *metadiegetic,* he simply systemises the traditional concept of embedded *narratives.* And he (Genette 1980:228) stresses that the relationship between *primary* and *secondary* levels of *diegesis* is one of dependency, not one of hierarchy.

Genette (1980:228) states: "*We will define this difference in level by saying that any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed."* This definition is rather unclear, therefore a short explanation will be given. A *narrator* is either part of the *story events* he/she is recounting, or not involved at all. In the last case, a *narrator* who stands outside of the *story events*, is on an *extradiegetic level.* A *narrator* who is involved in the story, reports on an *intradiegetic level.* Thus, *diegesis* denotes the *narrative,* and a *narrator* is either outside or inside a particular *diegetic level.*

When an *intradiegetic narrator* tells a story at a different or deeper *diegetic level,* a *secondary narrative* is created on a *metadiegetic level.* As regards the terms *extradiegetic, diegetic* and *metadiegetic,* one must not assume that it is obvious that *extradiegetic* pertains to *story* - or to historical existence - and *diegetic* or *metadiegetic* to fiction (Genette 1980:230). Nothing could be further from the truth. Even a real *author* who assumes the role of an *extradiegetic narrator,* has a fictive role.

1) Metadiegetic narrative

Metadiegetic narrative, a story within a story, or *mise en abyme* is a very old technique that Genette (1980:231-234) traces back to Books IX-XII in the *Odyssey.* But long before the *Odyssey* the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SBV) used the same technique by inserting the *Atrahasis Epic* - the recount of the Deluge - into the primary narrative of Gilgamesh's *story.* This is absolutely a pure form of a *metadiegetic narrative:* Uta-napishtim, who is actually a character in the *primary narrative* becomes the *narrator* of the *secondary* one in which Gilgamesh is the *narratee.*

Genette (1980:232) differentiates three main types of relationships that connect the *metadiegetic narrative* to the main one into which it is inserted:

i) *Direct causality.*

In other words, there is a causal relationship between the first and the second *narrative.* Characters and/or events on the second *narrative level explain* why something on the *first level of diegesis* happened or did not happen. The *narrative* on the second level explains "*what events have led to the present situation"* (Genette 1980:232). The function of the *narrating instance* is to link the two narratives together and it does so by making the direct causal relationship obvious.

ii) *A thematic relationship* (Genette 1980:233).

There is no temporal or spatial connection between *diegesis* and *metadiegesis.* The relationship is purely *thematic* which may be a relationship of *contrast* of one of *analogy.* The *Atrahasis Epic* that is embedded in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* has greater significance, but temporally there is no connection: Uta-napishtim's *story* happened a long time ago that is before and during the Deluge. Spatially there is also no connection: Gilgamesh wishes to live forever in his city, Uruk:

Uta-napishtim used to live in Surripak as a mortal, but now he lives for ever beyond the Waters of Death.

The relationship between the two *narratives* is one of contrast: Uta-napishtim managed to gain life eternal, but Gilgamesh needs to come to terms with the reality that he is going to die. This *indirect* relationship between the *narrating instance* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Atrahasis Epic* is effected by the *narratives* themselves.

iii) *No explicit relationship.*

In this case no *causal* or *thematic* relationship exists between the *diegesis* and the *metadiegesis. Metadiegetic content* does not matter at all, but *it is the act of narrating itself that fulfils a function in the diegesis* (Genette 1980:233). The most classic example of *metadiegetic narratives* of this type is *A Thousand and One Nights.* Scheherezade has to tell a different story every night in order to keep the king interested and to save her life. The *functions* of these kinds of *narratives* are usually *distraction* or *obstruction.*

At this point one may question the Shamhat-Enkidu episode that starts with the creation of Enkidu and ends where Enkidu and Gilgamesh meet. Strictly speaking this is not really a *metadiegetic narrative* because the narrator who is telling the *story* is the same *narrator* of the *primary* one. Yet, the *first narrative* is interrupted, not by means of an *analepsis* or a *prolepsis,* but with a different *narrative* that occurs simultaneously with the *primary* one. It introduces its own main character, Enkidu. Is this a *causal relationship?* Yes, but in this case the *primary narrative caused* the events on the second one to take place, therefore one may perhaps term this relationship as an *inverted causal* one. Then, at a certain point in time the two *narratives* do blend to become one *primary* narrative with its *two* main characters: Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Even after Enkidu's death he is not forgotten - on the contrary!

In this case one may conclude that, although the *Enkidu-narrative* interrupts the *narrative* of Gilgamesh-proper (after all, Gilgamesh was carrying on with his reign of terror in Uruk whilst Enkidu was peacefully roaming the plains), this is still part of the *Gilgamesh-narrative.* The *narrator* simply needs to explain who Enkidu is, where did he come from, and why must he be there. Therefore, the *Enkidu-narrative* seems to be a *secondary narrative* that overtakes the existing *primary narrative* temporarily to become a *primary* one in its own right. Only when it catches up with the *narrative of Gilgamesh,* one is baffled: exactly what is *primary* and/or *secondary?*

Enkidu is a hero. Unlike Uta-napishtim whose introduction is brief and whose disappearance is equally sudden, Enkidu remains an important character until the bitter end. His life as well as his death influences just about everything that happens on the first level of *diegesis.* Somehow a temporal intertwining takes place. The *narratives* of Gilgamesh and Enkidu start off separately, then they become enmeshed. Even after Enkidu is supposed to disappear from the *story,* he is present. His death motivates the theme of the second half of the *Epic:* the quest for life eternal.

Both Gilgamesh and Enkidu have a *narrative.* They met, and their *narratives* interlocked. They became so much part of each other's *story* that the critic cannot determine what is *primary, secondary, diegetic* or *metadiegetic.* And somehow Genette's (1980) analyses do not really help to solve this problem. Perhaps one must conclude that just as inseparable as the *narratives* of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, were the two friends themselves - in life and in death.

2) Metalepsis

Genette (1980:234-235) uses the term *narrative metalepsis* for "*any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.)...*[that] *produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical...or fantastic."* This happens when the

boundaries between the different narrative levels are disturbed (cf also Genette 1988:88), for example when a *real author* or a *real reader* introduces himself or herself into the *fictive world* of the *narrative,* or vice versa, when a *fictive character* introduces itself into the world of the *author* or the *reader.* "*The world in which one tells becomes the world of which one tells"* (Genette 1980:236).

Especially post-modern literature is very aware of a *reality out there* and a *reality on paper* and exploits this realisation to the utmost. *Ontological boundary* is the term that indicates the separation between the world *outside of the text* (the real world), and the *world of the text* (cf McHale 1987:201). Real authors are consciously aware of the fact that they are transgressing an *ontological boundary* when they transpose themselves and their personal experience of *writing this particular novel* into *this particular novel.* He or she may even take a break from the novel, does something else – to take a vacation for a week or so, or to go shopping for groceries. Likewise a *character* of the *world of the text,* may remind the *real author* that he or she has the power to kill off any *character* that happens to be in disfavour within the next few lines. Self-consciousness is the key word in this regard: the author knows that he/she is entering the world on paper, and the characters know that they are transgressing their boundaries of text.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* does not transcend *ontological boundaries* in this dramatic way. However, the *narratee* does get the uncanny feeling of crossing some sort of reality at the *narrator's* personal invitation to climb on top of the walls of Uruk and admire the surroundings (I:11-17). Sure enough, the *narratee* never becomes a *character* but neither does the *narrator.* Both *narrator* and *narratee* remain spectators, witnesses of a real life drama that is playing off in front of their very eyes. Somehow the *world of which is told* becomes the *world in which is being told.*

2.3.3. Person

On reaching this last section of Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980), one starts to realise that the heading *Character* is not going to appear. Nowhere does Genette discuss matters like *flat* or *round characters, character development* or any other special criteria that may be applied to *character*. Is this a shortcoming in Genette's model, or are there reasons for this omission?

Apparently for Genette *character* is so much interwoven into the *structural devices* of the *narrative discourse* that a separate category would be unnecessary. *Character* seems to fuse into denotations of *narrator* and *narratee* (discussion follows), into matters like *focalisation* (cf 2.2.2 of this chapter) and so forth. In other words, c*haracter* is structured by the various devices of the *narrative.* Mimetic or emotional attributes are strictly shunned. The *character* finds himself or herself somewhere inside or outside a particular *narrative level,* partaking either actively or passively in aspects of *tense, mood and voice.* Thus, it appears that Genette regards *character* as being incorporated sufficiently by his other categories, therefore it does not deserve a special heading.

1) Narrator

Genette (1980:243-244) describes the usual terms *first person - or third-person narrative* as "*inadequate, in that they stress variation in the element of the narrative situation that is in fact invariant - to wit, the presence (explicit or implicit) of the 'person' of the narrator."* A *narrator* can be present in his or her *narrative* only in the *first person*: the author or the novelist may choose to have a story told by one of its characters, or by a *narrator* outside of it. For a *narrator* who occupies a position outside of the *story* he or she is telling, Genette (1980:245) uses the term *heterodiegetic,* and for a *narrator* who is also a character in the *story,* he uses the term *homodiegetic.*

The *narrator's* status is defined both by *narrative level* (i.e. *extra- or intradiegetic*) and by its relationship to the *narrative* (Genette 1980:245). There are four basic types of a *narrator's status:*

(1) extradiegetic – heterodiegetic
(2) extradiegetic – homodiegetic
(3) intradiegetic - heterodiegetic
(4) intradiegetic – homodiegetic

The *narrator* in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is obviously an *extradiegetic* one who occupies a *heterodiegetic* position with respect to the *narrative.* He is completely absent from the story he is telling - that is, until one gets the sudden and overwhelming impression that the *narrator* is actually Gilgamesh who is telling his own *story.* However, this only happens in the last lines of the *Epic,* and until then the *narrator* remains an *extradiegetic - heterodiegetic* one.

On a *metadiegic* level, that is on the level of the narrative of the Deluge, Uta-napishtim becomes the *narrator* of his own story. He is thus a narrator with an *intradiegetic-homodiegetic* status. However, Genette (1980:245) points out that not all *narrators* are equally *present* in the story that they tell. A *narrator* can either be the hero of his or her own *story,* or merely be a witness or observer of someone else's *story. Hero-narrators* of the *homodiegetic* kind, Genette calls *autodiegetic.* Utnapishtim is the undisputable *hero* of his own *narrative,* thus becoming a *narrator* with an *autodiegetic intradiegetic - homodiegetic status.*

The primary function of the *narrator* is of course to tell the *story.* But once again Genette (1980:255) points out that this matter is far more complicated than it seems at first sight. The functions of the *narrator* are connected to several aspects of *narrative.*

As it was said, the first and obvious aspect of *narrative* is the *story* to be told. The *function* connected to the *story* is the *narrative function* - to tell. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* the *narrator* tells the *story* of Gilgamesh. The *narrative text* is the second aspect of a *narrative*. The function of the *narrator* in this regard is *metalinguistic*, which pertains to the internal organisation of the *text* by means of articulations, connections and interrelations. This has to do with the way in which the *story material* is arranged, and how the matters of *time, mood and voice* are appropriated. The *narrating situation* is the third aspect of *narrative*. The *narrator* and the *narratee* - present, absent or implied - are involved, because the *function* of the *narrator* is to establish or to maintain a *relationship* with the *narratee.* Genette (1980:256) also calls this function the *function of communication.* It has been said that the *narrator* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* tries to establish this relationship at the very beginning of his *act of narrating*: apparently he assumes that this relationship will be maintained throughout the *narrative discourse* because he never refers to the *narratee* again, except for that open invitation in the beginning of the *Epic.*

The last function is the *testimonial function,* or *the function of attestation.* This function pertains to the relationship the *narrator* has with the *story* that he/she is telling and concerns his or her emotions. The nature of this relationship is affective, but could also be a moral or an intellectual one. "*But the narrator's interventions, direct or indirect, with regard to the story can also take the more didactic form of an authorized* (sic) *commentary on the action. This is an assertion of what could be called the narrator's ideological function;* (Genette 1980:256), and this last function certainly pertains to the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* He witnesses the foolish behaviour of the immature braggart, he empathises with the loss of a dear comrade and friend, and he even partakes in the whole futile quest for life eternal in a very emotional manner. Never does he judge which of these actions are morally acceptable and which are not. He leaves it to the *narratee* who is witnessing along with him to decide for himself of herself. However, he also witnesses at the end that Gilgamesh's life did not work out in the way that he wished. His people were not happy with his arrogance. His

best friend died. He failed two vital tests and came to the depressing realisation that he is not going to obtain life eternal, no matter how hard he tries. And this hard lesson is not told by means of didactic instructions that have to be memorised. It is done by means of telling a story.

2) Narratee

Genette (1980) does not devote many pages to the role of the *narratee* with regards to the *narrative.* Only the last three pages of his book pertain to this *person.* Obviously he does not really say very much. "*Like the narrator, the narratee is not one of the elements in the narrating situation, and he* (sic) *is necessarily located at the same diegetic level; that is, he does not merge a priori with the reader (even an implied reader) any more than the narrator necessarily merges with the author"* (Genette 1980:259). From this follows a relationship of correspondence: an *intradiegetic narrator* would correspond to an *intradiegetic narratee,* whilst an *extradiegetic narrator* addresses an *extradiegetic narratee.* The *Epic of Gilgamesh* starts with the latter case: both *narrator* and *narratee* are *extradiegetic* with regards to the *diegetic level* of the *narrative.* But within the *metadiegetic narrative* Uta-napishtim (a character on the primary level of *diegesis)* becomes the *narrator* of his own story as he addresses Gilgamesh (also a character on the primary level of *diegesis)* who now becomes the *narratee* on the second level of diegesis. And so forth.

However, in terms of the didactic, moral and ideological implications (cf previous discussion), the *narrative* does not end with the return of Gilgamesh to the walls of Uruk. At the end of the *narrative* the *narratee* is witnessing a life style that does not work. However, somehow Gilgamesh must have achieved success - it says so in the beginning of the *narrative.* With this knowledge it is now up to the *narratee* to muster all his or her creative abilities and write his or her own *narrative:* a *narrative* of what really makes sense in life. And all this is done in a very indirect and subtle way: once again, by means of *telling a story*, this time his or her own.

3. Discussion of the *Epic* in terms of Genette's model

One has to admit that Genette's model is rather sophisticated and not all of its components apply to the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* However, some interesting features did come to light. It appeared that the ancient author was not really concerned about exact points in time, therefore many observances on *time* (i.e. *order, duration and frequency)* were inferred indirectly, rather than being deduced from obvious textual information. For example, are Ninsun's dreams *analepses* or *prolepses?* In what way does the *duration* of Enkidu's roaming the plains coincide with the *duration* of Gilgamesh's reign of terror in Uruk? For how *long* did Gilgamesh wander around in search of everlasting life? But do these uncertainties matter?

The category of *frequency* illustrated the relentless nature of the trip towards the Cedar Forest, the urgency of having to complete the journey through the tunnel of the (S)sun in time, and the endless depressing thoughts that occupied Gilgamesh's mind as he ventured in search of life eternal.

The *inclusio* effected by the lines I:16-21 and XI:315-320 makes the actual *duration* of time irrelevant. *Time* itself becomes significant in the way that present, past and future merge exactly because specific durations are omitted. The criteria of *timelessness, agelessness and universal meaning* are those of the *New Critics:* however, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* becomes *timeless, ageless* and universal in a striking manner. It pertains to the past, present and future of everyone who was or is serious about the meaning of life.

Mood illustrated the intimate and lively way in which the *narrator* tells his story. Intense dramatic *scenes* alternating with dialogue in the form of *reported speech* mark the first half of the *Epic.* In the second half of the *Epic, imitated* or *reported* speech dominate, often so drawn out that these dialogues create the impression of being the same monologue, *repeated* over and over. But

Gilgamesh is driven by his grief over the death of his friend and by his own fear for death. *Reported speech* stresses the obsessive-compulsive nature of Gilgamesh's behaviour as he roams the steppe until he reaches Uta-napishtim.

Focalisation (which is a sub-category of *mood*) seemed straightforward at first, until one discovers the *focalisation* that is embedded in the first line of the *Epic.* Then one realises that this whole *narrative* is in fact a *focalisation,* a perspective on life itself.

Voice examined the matter of the *narrator* and various positions the *narrating instance* may occupy with regards to the various *levels of diegesis.* In this case it appeared that the *narrator* of the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* although he occupies an *extra-diegetic* position, is very much concerned about the *story* he is telling. He remains close to the *story events* he is recounting and he wishes to create the same interest in the *narratee* by inviting him or her into the majestic city of Uruk. However, the *didactic ideological function* of the *narrator* is effected by leaving the *narrative* open-ended, by not disclosing any *final message.* By means of circular reasoning to and from Uruk, it is left to the devices of every *narratee* to work out for himself or herself just how did the tear-stained and heart-broken man at the end of the *Epic* become the brave and wise king of the prologue.

Remarks

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* started confidently and proudly on the city walls of Uruk. It ended in exactly the same manner at the same place: on the walls of Uruk. Many events took place within these walls as well as outside of their enclosure. Dreams were dreamt of coming events. Dreams actually came true: a friendship was formed. There was dramatic and intensive action. The ladder of success was being climbed rapidly, regardlessly, too urgently and too quickly for anyone to keep up.

Then death struck. Fear would not leave, it kept on coming back. There were also painful memories that would not go away. The initial success story became one of failure. From the top of the success ladder a process of tumbling down had begun until rock bottom was hit. However, together with shock and humiliation came insight into what life is really all about.

All the events begin and end at Uruk. This points to an important element that is missing in Genette's theory: he has no category for *place.* The reason is fairly obvious: Genette is a structuralist. *Place* – whether Uruk or New York is a *literary construction,* not a place that one can locate on a map. The *walls of Uruk* in the beginning and at the end of the *Epic* serve to form a *literary structural inclusio* to the *Epic* – such an *inclusio* may equally have been effected by *the highways to New York.* For the structuralists the only reality is that which appear on paper – or stone – in other words, reality is textual by nature.

However, these sturdy city walls probably meant to the ancient author and the ancient recipients more than a *literary construct.* To them they symbolised many things: power, honour, cultural progression, civilisation, security (see chapter 3). Furthermore, Uruk was a very special city: she represented the old Sumerian culture, and the glory and romance associated with ancient times.

The following chapter will deal with a critique on structuralist theories in more detail. However, these brief remarks intended to convey the following: a structural narratological analysis does bring matters to the fore which may otherwise be overlooked. But there are also matters that are more than literary constructs – in the frame of reference of authors and readers alike.

CHAPTER 6

MOVEMENT TOWARD READER-ORIENTATED THEORY

Introduction

The previous chapter analysed the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in terms of its narrative structure. This analysis is representative of a text-immanent one: it focuses only on the text and its inherent qualities. A text-immanent analysis is also the most obvious way in which to approach an ancient text – like the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* It is impossible to question its original author or its original readers about the production or the reception of the text: all that really remain are the twelve broken clay tablets on which the *Epic* is inscribed. And modern readers have to rely on their – extremely variable – competencies in Akkadian to understand and to interpret the text.

Structuralism's point of departure is that a literary work is a construct, thereby providing for an analysis of its mechanisms (see chapter 4). Just like any other scientific analysis, the different parts or elements in a literary work can be identified, taken apart, scrutinised and be put together again. A structural analysis of literature leaves no room for personal likes or dislikes. This is an important point in favour of a structural approach: it does provide an objective measure for appreciating a literary work: a text is liked or disliked in terms of its own merits, and not subjected to the whims and fancies of the critic. It is of no concern whether the *Epic of Gilgamesh* appeals to the one who reads it: judged purely on the basis of a structural analysis, the previous chapter indicated the artistic, even aesthetic composition of the narrative.

Thus: a structural approach towards the *Epic of Gilgamesh* proved to be effective – but the question now is: is this approach sufficient?

1. A critique on a structural approach

With regards to the *Gilgamesh Epic,* this thesis did sketch the Mesopotamian background against which the narrative originated and developed (see ch. 3). However, any reader of the twenty first century who has no information about the Ancient near East and who picks up the *Epic* and reads it for the first time, will be completely baffled by many issues. For example, there are many gods with strange names who do strange things. There are monsters. The heavenly realm and the Netherworld are foreign domains. And how come a mortal can be two thirds god and one third human? And so forth.

Thus, there are issues within a text, especially a text that is culturally and historically removed from the situation of the reader that a structural analysis does not address.

Critique on Formalism and its structuralist approach came fairly early from within its very own ranks, namely from Prague structuralist circles (Zima 1999:40; Holub 1984:31; Senekal 1983:3). The important name in this regard is Jan Mukařovský, the most important literary theorist from the Prague Structuralist School. As early as 1930 he pointed out that it is impossible to bracket of a literary text from social realities. He agreed that each individual work of art is a unique structure, but not one that is independent of history. His argument was that history and social realities interpenetrate art (structures), thereby altering them continuously. Art forms are produced and changed by social and historical forces.

Also Macherey in 1965 criticised the implicit assumptions of structural literary analysis (see Young 1990:4-6). His objections are expounded in an essay which he called: *Literary Analysis: the Tomb of Structures.* Macherey protests against the a-historical nature of a structural analysis. He labels it an idealistic system that does not take historical and institutional practices into account. But there are other matters that are problematic as well. In the first place the

discipline of linguistics is simply transposed to literary criticism, which is a different discipline altogether. This practice is not only impermissible, but also unscientific. Furthermore, the whole concept of *structure* as it pertains to linguistics, is not suitable for literature. The *structure* of a language lays bare the grammatical rules: a literary structural analysis assumes that a text is an autonomous entity that also has an own interiority with its own – initially hidden – rules that can be disclosed by using a particular method. But just how valid is this assumption?

His third objection pertains to the contradiction in terms of what a structural analysis aims at doing. A structural analysis proposes to make a reconstruction of the rules underlying the text. In this sense it is a repetition of what has been said, and it asserts that it remains true to the text, not bringing personal feelings or emotions into play. At the same time a structural analysis also proposes to illuminate a new meaning, something has been concealed or invisible previously. In this sense a text has a deeper or original meaning that can only be disclosed by means of a structural analysis. So, the structure that started off as a reflection of the text, is in fact more original than the text itself. The question is: what is the original – the text or its structure?

His last remark is directed to the notion that a text – according to structural principles – exists as a harmonious entity. A text is explained by means of its inherent structure. The material circumstances in which it was produced and received are not taken into account. In other words, the a-historical nature of a structural approach is criticised.

Terry Eagleton (1983:109) agrees with this and sums up the weaknesses of structuralism as being *hair-raisingly unhistorical.* He repeats what has been said: a structural analysis proposes to characterise the underlying system or rules of a literary text. The method by which to achieve this goal is to focus on the text and nothing but the text itself – thus, a text-immanent approach. The text is bracketed off from anything else and stands in isolation. But by

bracketing off the text, the human subject and the world that he or she lives in, are also blocked out. All that remains is a system of rules that has its own independent life (Eagleton 1983:112).

Mukařovský went further and pointed out the *semiotic* nature of an artwork (Zima 1999:44; Holub 1984:31). Art forms are more than basic structures. Art forms act as complex signs that communicate meaning to some recipients. All recipients find themselves in a specific historical, social and cultural milieu, and are therefore products *of social relations* (Zima 1999:45; Holub 1984:32). Thus, the work of art and those receiving it are parts of a larger whole: society. This observation brings another matter to the fore: that of the collective nature with regard to the reception of art (see also Senekal 1983:3). Art forms are seldom received individually and subjectively, they are also part of a collective process. By stressing the collective nature of reception Mukařovský was also answering the critique of the Formalists who maintained that evaluation of art on the part of the recipient was far too personal and subjective to be reliable. He pointed out that it is impossible to isolate an artistic structure as an autonomous entity: on the contrary, every work of art and every recipient were permeated as it were by historical and social influences.

Furthermore, historical and social influences do not stop at the artistic structures and the recipients. They also permeate evaluative norms. Norms for evaluating work of art change from time to time, what was once popular goes out of fashion later. But not only do evaluative norms change, different norms at the same time are often in conflict. Societies are never homogenous – all societies consist of different social levels. An object of art, which is produced at one social level, is usually received differently at another level, according to its different evaluative norms. Holub (1984:33) explains: *Unlike the Formalists, he (Mukařovský) does not restrict his attention to avant-garde or "lofty art", but observes instead the penetration of "lofty art" into various strata of society as well as the influence of folk art in the so-called avant-garde.*

Also the later Formalists needed to acknowledge that it is impossible to detach literature completely from its social and cultural environment. The contributions of Jurij Lotman are significant in this regard (see Shukman 1976:317-338). Lotman was a member of the Moscow Tartu group who continued the project of the Russian Formalists, namely to stress the differences between poetic language and ordinary speech. Lotman was especially interested in a semiotic analysis of poetic texts. He used the term *extra-text* in order to refer to other semiotic codes – those that lie outside of the literary (poetic in Lotman's case) text. A literary/poetic text should be understood in terms of its relationship with other texts of the same genre, as well as in terms of its relationship with the cultural and social community. Shukman 1976:324 states: *What was to prove the most far-reaching of all Lotman's ideas...was his notion of the oppositional relationships between "text" and "extra-text": the idea that the work of art (and he is thinking here specifically of literature) exists, and can be understood, only in terms of the norms, traditions and expectations that make up its "extra-text".* Thus, Lotman agrees that literature and the social cultural world are inter-related, not un-related, as the former Formalists wished to emphasise. In fact, literature is *a manifestation of culture* (see also Senekal 1983:4).

Lotman further observed that readers have a particular relationship with their texts (cf Shukman 1976:324-325). Some literary texts meet the expectations of their readers: such texts operate according to the *aesthetics of identity.* These are texts that meet the current literary norms and traditions, and are mostly stereotype. However, some other texts question or even violate the expectations of their readers: these texts operate according to the *aesthetics of opposition*.

Hereby Lotman has prepared the stage for the entrance of the reader.

Remarks

Structuralism does lay bare those artistic literary devices that a literary work consists of, but nothing else: the reasons for its production and the effects of its consumption are simply of no concern. The blocking out of the human subject who is also primarily involved in a literary text, is the weakest point of structuralism. In other words, a structural analysis does not in any way relate a work to realities outside of the text, not to those conditions that produced it, nor to the actual readers who studied it. Structuralism points out correctly the constructed nature of language, but language certainly involves people, their experiences and their intentions. To dissect literature as a product of language is but one possible analysis: a text is always produced within certain material conditions and is always consumed by readers in various ways.

2. Reader-orientated theories

The work of Mukařovský that originated during the 1930's was not really known in Germany – or elsewhere in the Western literary world, for that matter – until the 1960's (Holub 1984:29). During the first half of the twentieth century the countries of the First World had to grapple with the devastation and the miseries of two World Wars and come to terms with its ugly realities. Once again, it seems that turbulent times create a need for security, a need for firm ground, a need for something that remains true and tangible throughout all the upheavals and downfalls of history, society and culture. This was what the German philosopher Edmund Husserl had in mind after the war and revolutions of the first decade of the twentieth century (Eagleton 1983:54). Husserl was concerned about that which one can be certain of: within a disintegrating society there was a desperate need for absolute certainty: but what was this certainty, and where should one look for it?

Husserl developed a philosophical method that he called *phenomenology* (Selden 1985:111; Eagleton 1983:55; see also Zima 1999:44) that, as the

word conveys, concerns pure *phenomena.* *Phenomena* pertain only to whatever realities are immanent to one's consciousness, and anything beyond this consciousness is irrelevant. However, this so-called *phenomenological reduction* is only the first important move. After all, the contents of one's mind are mostly disorganised, chaotic and often not very certain. *Phenomena* in Husserl's sense are *pure phenomena*; with this he means that within each object or *phenomenon* there is an essence, a universal type, something which is invariable and which of course constitutes the very *phenomenon.* So, real understanding occurs when one understands what is essential and unchanging about a *phenomenon,* that is understanding the *phenomenon* itself.

According to *phenomenological criticism* the inner meaning of a literary work is expressed by its language. But meaning as it is expressed by language pertains to the consciousness of the author (Selden 1986:111; Eagleton 1983:59). The historical circumstances of the production of the text as well as its reception are ignored, therefore *phenomenological criticism* is not really different from text-immanent criticism. The only difference is that a text-immanent criticism like structuralism or formalism also ignores the role of the author: *phenomenological criticism* regards the text as the embodiment of the consciousness of the author. However, this consciousness has nothing to do with the biographical details of his or her life. The focus of *phenomenological criticism* is the experience of the author, the structures of his of her mind, as these are conveyed by the text - and accidentally the text has only language at its disposal to express the thoughts of the author. Somehow meaning appears to be fixed, something which pre-dates language, something which exists even independently of language. Language is hardly more than a convenient tool to express meaning.

Although *phenomenology* is concerned primarily about the thoughts and experiences of the author, its major shift is nevertheless towards the perceiver (Selden 1985:110): its focus is on the contents of human consciousness and not on blocked off objects that exist by themselves. As regards literature, both

Formalism and Structuralism are interested in structures and literary devices, whereas *phenomenology* sees the text as a reality which is organised and experienced by an individual subject, firstly of course the reality which is in the mind of the author, but also as a next step, how this reality is decoded by the reader or the critic. This relates to what is called in German *Lebenswelt* (Eagleton 1983:59). What is at stake is the *world of the writer* that the critic tries to enter into with the greatest sensitivity. A purely subjective appreciation is not encouraged. The critic tries to understand the underlying nature or essence of writings in order to derive at some meaning. So, just like Formalism and Structuralism it aims at understanding as objectively and as unbiased as possible, not the text, but what it felt like to be the author.

Objectivity is the aim. The critic or the reader needs to free him or herself from all prejudices and plunge himself or herself wholly into the *world* of the text. Personal value judgments are to be put aside, for the critic is not allowed to carry these into the text. Literary criticism requires objectivity, is to be performed uncritically and non-evaluatively: *a mere passive reception of the text, a pure transcription of mental essences* (Eagleton 1983:59).

But *phenomenology* makes the same error as both Formalism and Structuralism: it neglects the role of history. Meaning is not something that can be derived from the structures of the text, nor is meaning something that is situated in the contemplations of the author. Human meanings are essentially historical by nature, human meanings are matters of changing, practical transactions between social individuals.

It was Martin Heidegger, one of Husserl's pupils who broke with his teacher's system of thought and who recognised that meaning is historical. The *essentialism* of Husserl is rejected by Heidegger's *existentialism* (Eagleton 1983:62) - *existentialism* focuses on what it feels like to be alive in the world. Human existence is characterised by its givenness - or *Dasein* - (cf. also Selden 1986:111). People do not live in isolation, but people share their lives

with others and with the world of which they are part. It is impossible to look at life objectively, exactly because one is involved in a dialogue with others and with the world. One is subjectively part of a reality, one is subjected to the world simply because one exists in it. This inescapable subjective awareness Heidegger calls *pre-understanding* (Eagleton 1983:62). From here one emerges and projects the things of the world, the objects of one's consciousness. Thus, the perception of reality is something that is subjective and objective at the same time, something that is constituted by the individual, the individual who is constituted by that same reality. So: this process is one of being constituted and of constituting at the same time, and the individual who is part of this process recognises the existing possibilities but also realises the fresh possibilities of being.

Existence, this matter of fresh possibility is always problematic, because a human being is constituted by history or by time (Eagleton 1983:63), and is therefore part of a concrete situation. Furthermore human beings exist and partake within this concrete situation, this reality or this world - by means of language. For Heidegger being human is constituted by time and made up of language. Here then Heidegger seems to agree with the ideas of structuralism about language: language constitutes the world in which people live, language is not simply a vehicle for communication, for expressing ideas, for conveying inner thoughts. Language is the very dimension of being.

But Heidegger does not view history in the broader socio-political and economical realm. For Heidegger history pertains to one's own inward, authentic or existential history, *a mastering of dread and nothingness, a resoluteness towards death, a 'gathering in' of my powers* (Eagleton 1983:65) - exactly that which Gilgamesh realises at the end of the *Epic.* Understanding is a dimension of being, of *Dasein*, something which happens through inner experiences and self-transcendences, but which is also caught up in a concrete situation that needs to be surpassed. Understanding is the very structure of human existence.

Art - or literature - is a medium which speaks to an authentic being. Where Husserl focused on the inner thoughts of the writer, Heidegger is only concerned about the reader. But literary interpretation is not something that the reader actively and constructively does, it is something that happens passively: the reader needs to open himself of herself to the very being of the text in a receptive way. However, by emphasising the authentic being of art or of literature, Heidegger is in fact echoing the formalists: art or literature is characterised by defamiliarising the familiar.

The Formalists give the reader a superior position to literature by claiming that one can get a grip on the meaning of a text by means of a method - a structural analysis. The position of the reader is for Heidegger exactly the opposite - that is one of total submission to the text, almost delivered into the power of its being. So, although Heidegger recognises the fact that one can never be objective, can never escape one's involvement with the world in which one lives, he fails to see history as part of human interrelations, as a part of social institutions, as a part of power relationships in a greater framework. For Heidegger, history is one's personal history of existence (Eagleton 1983:65).

Heidegger's philosophy is referred to as *hermeneutical phenomenology.* Initially this terminology was used to distinguish Heidegger's philosophy from Husserl's *transcendental philosophy* (Eagleton 1983:66). *Hermeneutics* is a term which philosophy borrowed from theology: originally *hermeneutics* had to do only with the interpretation of sacred scripture. Nevertheless, during the course of the nineteenth century *hermeneutics* came to pertain to the problem of textual interpretation as a whole - also with regards to literary non-biblical texts.

So, when Hans-Georg Gadamer rose to the occasion, the road was paved to apply Heidegger's situational approach to literary theories (Selden 1986:111). Gadamer emphasised the historical situation of the reader. A literary work *does not pop into the world as a finished and neatly parceled bundle of*

meaning (Selden 1986:112). Several other aspects need to be kept in mind when one approaches a text. Seemingly an objective approach is totally out of the question. But is it possible to ascertain the intentions of the author if he or she is unknown? And what about literary texts that originated in different cultures? What about ancient literary texts, those texts that are not only culturally but also historically removed from the context of the present reader? Is there any hope at all for understanding literary texts?

Gadamer elaborated on Heidegger's idea that language is a social matter (Selden 1986:111; Eagleton 1983:71; see also Zima 1999:56-57). The meaning of a literary work can never be exhausted. The intentions of the author is but one aspect of meaning, but as a text passes from one context to another - be it a cultural or a historical one - new meanings are derived from it. These meanings are not those of the author, nor those of the contemporary audience. Interpretation is something that happens in a context: a context that consists of a situation and a culture.

Thus, the reader can never dissociate himself or herself from his or her present context. Objective understanding is impossible. Interpretation is *situational, shaped and constrained by the historically relative criteria of a particular culture; there is no possibility of knowing the literary text 'as it is'* (Eagleton 1983:71). The past speaks to the present that questions the past that answers the present - and so forth. Interpretation of a literary work is a continuous dialogue between past and present (cf also Selden 1985:115). The ancient text questions past concerns, but raises new questions that ask for different answers. Therefore one needs to go back in time and ask which questions the original text addressed, and how these agree or differ from the present situation. Every text is a dialogue with its own history. Understanding or meaning is something that can never be fixed or grasped exhaustively.

Within every text there are new potential meanings, different understandings. For Gadamer there is not a break between past and present, but a *living*

continuity (Eagleton 1983:71): the present can only be understood through the past. Gadamer speaks of the *fusion of horizons.* The past has a *horizon of understanding* of its own, but so does the present. Understanding *happens* when these horizons fuse - historical meanings and assumptions meet those of present meanings and assumptions. The ancient and alien world is encountered, but at the same time this distant world is assimilated into the present world of here and now. *Rather than leaving home...we come home* (Eagleton 1983:72).

But present prejudices, those cultural preconceptions and pre-understandings do not affect the appreciation of a literary work negatively. On the contrary, one needs to realise that the literary work itself is an integral part of such prejudices and preconceptions. These are part of the tradition of the literary work that starts in the past, which includes the present and which reaches into the future. Prejudices are therefore positive and creative values, they are not to be regarded as values that are negative and obstructive by nature. The tradition is authoritative enough to sought out which prejudices are legitimate and which are not.

This line of philosophical reflection paved the way for new theories to take shape with regards to literary criticism. In due course it became apparent to the Western world – that which Mukařovský realised in the 30's – that literary texts are unthinkable without a reader. With the focus on the reader, many *reader orientated* theories of literary criticism developed. Many names are associated with *reader response criticism*: Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Gerald Prince, Michael Riffaterre, Jonathan Culler, Norman Holland, David Bleich, Roman Ingarden – to name but a few (see Selden 1985:106-127; Eagleton 1083:77-88). Although these critics agree on the importance of the role of the reader, they differ considerably in the way that they appropriate their various theories. This thesis chose to single out the views of Hans Robert Jauss as an exponent of a *reader orientated approach* that may contribute towards a better

understanding of the discourse of the *Gilgamesh Epic* – the reasons for this choice will become clear in due course.

During the 1960's the Konstanz School of Literary Studies in Germany developed a *Rezeptionsästhetic* (cf. De Man in Jauss 1982:viii; Segers 1978:9). *Rezeptionsästhetic* – or *reception aesthetics* as it is usually translated in English - was directed against the traditional way that literary criticism was conducted at the time, that is the concept that a literary text existed as an objective and autonomous unit (Structuralism), or that good literature consisted of certain eternal values (New Criticism). Instead, the text was regarded as a medium of communication that had various other relationships: with its social cultural milieu, with other texts, as well as with the reader (Senekal 1983:4). Thus, it was unacceptable to reduce a literary work to its structure.

2.1. A choice for the theory of Hans Robert Jauss

German *Rezeptionsästhetic* derives from the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (Zima 1999:57-59; De Man in Jauss 1982:xi), in fact, one of Gadamer's pupils, Hans Robert Jauss became one of the most important exponents of the *Rezeptionästhetic* approach (Senekal 1983:6; Segers 1978:10). [Wolfgang Iser is another name associated with the Konstanz School, however, his approach differs significantly from that of Jauss and will not be discussed in this thesis.] Jauss is deeply influenced by Gadamer's hermeneutical idea of *a horizon of understanding* and the dialogue between different *horizons of understanding* especially because Jauss, just like Gadamer is concerned about a dialectic between past and present, the realisation that the present is always being shaped and re-shaped by the past (Selden 1985:115-116).

Jauss (1982:16-18) credits but also criticises Formalist and Marxist theories. His main critique against the Formalists is that they ignore history, whereas Marxism social theories tend to ignore the text. From the very start he (Jauss

1982:19) foregrounds the role of the reader: whether one criticises a literary work, whether one actually produces a literary work as an author, or whether one is involved in some way or another in the classification or canonisation of literature, one starts off simply as a reader. All critics, authors and literary historians were readers in the first place. Reception of a literary work is the result of an active engagement with the text, an engagement that may even lead to the production of new text. Thus, there is a complex and dynamic relationship between text, author and reader that changes continuously.

Jauss is mainly concerned about *literary history* – about those texts that reach the literary canon of a country (in his case Germany), and why they do so. Why are some texts regarded as *serious literature* and taken up in the literary canon for the acknowledgement of future generations, and why are some texts read only for a limited period of time and discarded afterwards? Put differently: why is Shakespeare still read and Barbara Cartland not? Jauss endeavours to answer this question by means of seven theses (Jauss 1982:21-38).

Thesis 1: *A renewal of literary history demands the removal of the prejudices of historical observation and the grounding of the traditional aesthetics of production and representation in an aesthetics of reception and influence. The historicity of literature rests not on an organization* (sic) *of "literary facts" that is established post festum, but rather on the preceding experience of the literary work by its readers* (Jauss 1982:20).

This thesis refutes the idea of historical objectivism. Jauss foregrounds the historical reading public and its ever-changing expectations and reception of texts. Literary works are not appreciated according to stable objective criteria that are valid for all times and ages. Literary appreciation is rather dependent on the experience that readers have of a text, and on the degree that this text influenced their lives – or for that matter, the life of the society as a whole. However, the important point is that reception and influence are not stable and invariable matters: these change according to different readers and the different

historical periods in which they live. With this thesis Jauss once again affirms that a literary text can neither be detached from the circumstances that produced it, nor from the audience that received it.

People are made up of memories (Jauss 1982:21). This is true of readers and authors. New information and new insight are being continuously compared to existing knowledge. Existing knowledge is either refuted or transformed by different responses to what is new. Exactly the same happens with literature. Both author and reader do not read a literary work as though he or she had never read anything before. On the contrary! Authors and readers usually read widely and therefore have knowledge of many literary works that all have an particular effect on them. An author appropriates any new knowledge to create something new for a specific – often different – purpose. A reader may either reject what he or she reads new, or respond to it by taking it to heart.

Put very differently and very briefly: real literature should make one think and make one do.

Thesis 2: *The analysis of literary experience of the reader avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology if it describes the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetical and practical language* (Jauss 1982:22).

This thesis warns against the concept that *anything goes,* that it is for the reader to judge personally whether he or she likes a work or not. There does exist something like literary categories – or genre. Every literary work falls into a particular literary genre, for example a poem, a novel, a letter, a satire and so forth. A reader reads a poem differently than he or she would read a letter (although some letters can be extremely poetic, nevertheless!). So, a reader approaches a text with certain expectations.

Reader response theories are often criticised that they emphasise the response of the reader, that they neglect the text and only pay attention to the subjective impressions of the reader. This second thesis of Jauss provides a cover-up. Impressions of the reader are subjected to the genre he or she is dealing with. A reader always compares a text that he or she is reading with texts that he or she has read. A reader therefore approaches any new text expecting something from it. Admittedly, these expectations may be violated. On the one hand a reader may find in a poem or a novel everything he or she expects. On the other hand a reading of a novel or a poem may turn everything upside down and demand from the reader to think differently and change his or her existing expectations.

Familiar expectations Jauss (1982:23-24) labels *horizon of expectations.* These pertain to the memories a reader has from earlier texts. A *horizon of expectations* is construed on the basis of familiarity with the norms of existing texts, the relations of the text with other texts from the same historical period, and the measure in which a new text deviates from existing norms. A new text may either soothe or challenge an existing *horizon of expectations* by appropriating the very disciplines of a genre in a different way. The reader then needs to replace, correct, vary or alter his or her *horizon of expectations* accordingly.

This thesis of Jauss seems to correspond to the Formalists' notion of *defamiliarisation.* However, for Jauss *horizon of expectations* is a broader concept than what one may expect from a particular literary genre. More than literary conventions, *horizon of expectations* also indicates the expectations and beliefs from a particular historical period in time. Especially the latter cannot be examined objectively because they are never stated overtly. The historical consciousness of a particular period exists in a subconscious manner that is impossible to be defined objectively: neither author, nor contemporary readers or later recipients are able to do so (De Man in Jauss 1982:xii).

Thesis 3: *Reconstructed in this way, the horizon of expectations of a work allows one to determine its artistic character by the kind and degree of its influence on a presupposed audience. If one characterizes* (sic) *as aesthetic distance the disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work whose reception can result in a "change of horizons" through negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness, then this aesthetic distance can be objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience's reactions and criticism's judgment (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding)* (Jauss 1982:25).

Aesthetic distance is the key word in this thesis. Jauss uses this concept to distinguish between *literature* and *writing*, in other words, to answer the question: when does *writing* become *literature,* and when is it only suitable for *entertainment*? As has been stated, a reader approaches a new text with a particular *horizon of expectations.* If the text simply affirms that which the reader expects from it, he or she does not need to adjust his or her expectations in any way. In other words, the *aesthetic distance* is small. On the other hand, if the text demands from a reader to adjust or to change his or her existing expectations, the *aesthetic distance* is significant. In this sense *aesthetic distance* serves as a measure for estimating the literary value of a text. Pleasurable reading, soothing bed-time romances probably would fall into the category of texts that have little or no *aesthetic distance* from the *reader's horizons of expectations.* These texts are also hardly likely to be taken up in a *literary canon* of any sort. On the other hand there are texts that leave the reader uneasy, upset, or downright confused. These are the texts that challenge the *aesthetical distance* and *horizons of expectations* of readers.

Thesis 4: *The reconstruction of the horizon of expectations in the face of which a work was created and received in the past enables one on the one hand to pose questions that the text gave an answer to and thereby discover how the*

contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work. This approach corrects the mostly unrecognized (sic) *norms of a classicist or modernizing* (sic) *understanding of art and avoids the circular recourse to a general "spirit of the age". It brings to view the hermeneutic difference between the former and the current understanding of a work; it raises to consciousness the history of its reception which mediates both positions; and it thereby calls into question as a platonizing* (sic) *dogma of philological metaphysics the apparently self-evident claims that in a literary text, literary (Dichtung) is eternally present, and that its objective meaning, once and for all, is at all times immediately accessible to the interpreter* (Jauss 1982:28).

Jauss points out in this thesis that meaning is not fixed. Meaning can change. The meaning of a text cannot be disclosed by means of some or other method. The meaning of a literary text changes as its receptive audience changes. In other words, the meaning of a text has to do with the way in which its contemporary recipients understood it, the way in which a new or later audience receives it, with the differences taken into account. What is at stake is the history of the reception of a text.

However, this is all easier said than done. When one deals with ancient texts, the author, his or her intentions and the response of the audience are only indirectly accessible. Ancient horizons of understanding are very distant and difficult to penetrate into. For Jauss (1982:28) this problem may be addressed by means of inter-textual references – those contemporary texts that the author assumes his or her readers were aware of. Nevertheless, it remains impossible to reconstruct an exact *horizon of expectations* of the distant past, because the shadow of an existing *horizon* is ever present. The past is *enveloped* by the present, as it were (Jauss 1982:30).

Consequently it would be unfair to consider a literary work only in terms of its actual creation and reception. In other words, a literary work should not be restricted to the period of its origination because its reception may reach

beyond its immediate context (Jauss 1982:31). A literary work may address immediate problems within an immediate context; however, at the same time such a work may embed issues of an imaginary future. As the various stages of historical reception unfold, meaning is actualised anew within every different stage.

Thus, the meaning of a literary work is not something that can be fixed or pinned down to a certain historical period. An aesthetics of reception demands imagination on the part of its message: besides addressing direct questions of its time, it should also imagine future problems, perceptions and experiences. In this way the distance between the actual and the virtual significance of a literary work becomes pregnant with meaning. A creative tension exists between the *horizon of expectations* of the distant past and *the horizon of expectations* of the present. Within this tension lies the potential of meaning.

Thesis 5: *The theory of the aesthetics of reception not only allows one to conceive the meaning and form of a literary work in the historical unfolding of its understanding. It also demands that one insert the individual work into its "literary series" to recognize* (sic) *its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature. In the step from a history of the reception of works to an eventful history of literature, the latter manifests itself as a process in which the passive reception is on the part of the authors. Put another way, the next work can solve formal and moral problems left behind by the last work, and present new problems in turn (*Jauss 1982:32).

Once again Jauss (1982:32-33) criticises the approach of the Formalists that focuses on matters like literary devices and defamiliarisation to designate *literary evolution*. Everything seems to boil down to an automatic process where new forms simply substitute existing ones: in due course the once new forms become institutionalised, only to replaced with other new forms. And so forth. Such an approach is one-sided and limits understanding.

The transition from and old form to a new form is a far more complex process in which the interaction between the work and its recipients is of the utmost importance. *Recipients* pertain not only to contemporary readers: *recipients* are the whole audience, the critics, and the new producer (Jauss 1982:34). Furthermore the interaction between past and successive reception also come into play. In other words, the *horizon of expectations* of the present needs to enter into dialogue with the *horizon of expectations* of the past. A recipient can never detach himself or herself from his or her own experiences, moreover, this should not be done. Present experiences are vital in the whole historical process of aesthetic reception and production.

An important implication of Jauss's view of *literary evolution* as opposed to that of the Formalists is that the meaning or the interpretation of a literary work can never be exhausted. Furthermore, *literary evolution* does not pertain to *formal* matters only. In the process of *literary evolution* the aesthetic distance increases with every *new* reception. It may happen that a work's original significance was not recognised within the first *horizon* of its understanding; only within a later and distant horizon the unexpected is encountered and realised for the first time – new.

Thesis 6: *The achievements made in linguistics through the distinction and methodological interrelation of diachronic and synchronic analysis is the occasion for overcoming the diachronic perspective – previously the only one practiced – in literary history as well. If the perspective of the history of reception always bumps up against the functional connections between the understanding of new works and the significance of older ones when changes in aesthetic attitudes are considered, it must also be possible to take a synchronic cross-section of a moment in the development to arrange the heterogeneous multiplicity of contemporaneous works in equivalent, opposing, and hierarchical structures, and thereby to discover an overarching system of relationships in the literature of a historical moment. From this the principle of representation of a new literary history could be developed, if further cross-*

sections diachronically before and after were so arranged as to articulate historically the change in literary structures in its epoch – making moments (Jauss 1982:37).

Literary texts do not exist in a vacuum. A literary work forms part of a literary milieu. Every text is preceded by others, exists contemporaneously with others and is followed by more texts. Furthermore, literature does not exist for its own sake or by its own means. Literature engages into a dialogue with its world – explaining, criticising, and understanding what is happening around it. And somehow the world *out there* finds its way back into literature – changing and reshuffling the literary system (Jauss 1982:38). The transformation of literary forms and contents involve more than the automatic defamiliarisation of form and content.

Thesis 7: *The task of literary history is thus only completed when literary production is not only represented synchronically and diachronically in the succession of its systems, but also seen as "special history" in its own unique relationship to "general history". This relationship does not end with the fact that a typified, idealized* (sic) *satiric or utopian image of social existence can be found in the literature of all times. The social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his* (sic) *lived praxis, performs his understanding of the world and thereby also has an effect on his* (sic) *social behavior* (Jauss 1982:39).

Literature – language – does not merely reflect or represent the given reality, it actually has the power to transform it. The creative capabilities are not restricted to artistic formal literary devices: literature influences experiences, makes new perceptions possible. Aesthetic perception becomes accompanied by moral reflection (Jauss 1982:41). In this way literature is not only an *object of artistic or aesthetic beauty.* Literature influences ethical and social values as well. A literary work succeeds in breaking through an existing *horizon of*

expectations of its readers, thereby confronting them with new questions that demand a revision of those existing *horizons.* Often existing canonised morals, whether these are religious or official by nature are challenged by literature: often challenging literature is banned by religious or official authorities.

Literature directs the reader towards the answer it demands. But the reader is forever decoding his or her perception in a to and fro manner. At a certain stage the answering of the question of literature becomes reversed and the reader becomes aware of the fact that he or she is in fact working out what the problem is. In this process the perception of the world and problem which literature is addressing, becomes decoded. Thus, literature has the power to unmask, to transform, to free human kind from its natural, religious and social bonds.

Remarks

It appeared that although a structural approach can be useful for the analysis of the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* certain matters are still unclear. Genette's (1980) model illuminated the interesting and artistic way in which *stories* were interwoven with other *stories* and also the way in which the *Epic* moved forward and slowed down according to its own unique rhythm. However, most readers today would need some explanation with regards to the gods, the monsters, and so forth.

It was then argued that it is not really possible to detach a text from its historical and cultural environment. Literary texts are produced by and received within material circumstances. Consequently the focus shifted from the *text* to the *reader.* The reader is not some abstract or objective entity that deals passively and in a remote way with a text: on the contrary! The process of reading involves a dynamic interaction with the text. The *reader* is not only someone who does something to the *text,* but the *text* has the ability – power if you like – to influence the *reader,* even the whole of society and to change prevailing ideas and ideologies altogether.

Of the many *reader-response* critics, this study focused on the *reception-aesthetics* of Hans Robert Jauss. His *seven theses* were then explored in more detail. It appeared that he takes the extra-textual social and historical matters into account – in other words, he also examines the forces of production, reception and alteration associated with a literary text. Furthermore, two very important aspects are foregrounded: *horizons of expectation* and *aesthetic distance.*

Jauss's *reception-aesthetics* is especially appropriable to the *Gilgamesh Epic,* because this narrative has a long history of production and reception, underwent some changes and also is received anew today. The next chapter will deal with these.

CHAPTER 7

THE *GILGAMESH EPIC* AND JAUSS's THEORY

Introduction

Hans Robert Jauss indicated that every *narrative* is part of many more *narratives:* a *narrative* of production, and a *narrative* of reception. The process of production and reception is not static, but a dynamic one of re-production and re-interpretation – provided that a given text is worth re-interpreting and re-producing! And, as Jauss also indicated, re-production and re-interpretation happen especially when existing *horizons of expectations* are challenged to provide *aesthetic distances* that demand from the reader to adapt or even to change his or her existing ideas.

1. Sumerian origins

The oral poems of Bilgames have their roots in Sumerian soil, within the larger settled communities that were later called *city-states.* Because writing was mainly appropriated for mercantile purposes, it is impossible to know exactly by whom these poems were composed, to whom they were addressed, and what their purpose was. However, an intelligent guess is possible: the background is unmistakably the royal court of a Sumerian king, politics and religion are likewise Sumerian by nature (see chapter 3, 2.3).

Thus, one may assume that the poems on Bilgames very much echoed *the horizon of expectation* of the recipients. The *aesthetic distance* was small. Bilgames is a Sumerian king in a Sumerian city-state - most probably Uruk - and he says and he does everything that is expected from a Sumerian king. Within this horizon the function of the Bilgames poems was most probably to provide entertainment in the royal court of the Sumerian kings of Uruk. With regard to their literary value one may label them *culinary* or *entertainment* art –

that is, if one assumes that reception was restricted to the royal court. Whether any one outside the palace walls took note of what the court musicians and poets did, is to be doubted.

However, the person of *Bilgames* crystallised as a main character, the prototype of a king: why he and not any of his contemporaries or successors remains a mystery. And whether these poems originated in the royal court of the real king Bilgames, is impossible to determine. But by the time that these poems were recited after his death, the first *historical distance* was achieved. *Bilgames* became a literary poetic construction: the poets were now free to manipulate the character without fear that they may tread on sensitive toes.

2. The Ur III period

Within the royal courts of Ur-Nammu and Shulgi, the Bilgames-poems continued to be sung or recited for the amusement of the king, but also for promoting Sumerian culture and ideology (see chapter 3, 3.3). However, during the Ur III period, the poems were also being written down – probably for preserving them in memory, but also for educational purposes. Nevertheless, although the *historical distance* was considerably larger after the lapse of several centuries since the Sumerian age, the *aesthetic distance* was still small, and the *horizon of expectations* of the poems and that of the recipients very much overlapped quite neatly. This was the time of the *Sumerian renaissance*: the kings of the Ur III period conducted their reign in Sumerian style and did what they could to promote Sumerian culture – politics, religion and ideology. Sumerian entertainment suited the purpose.

3. The time had come to pass...

In due course writing and the scribal art took on new dimensions. Besides recording mercantile transactions, scribes were developing their inherent creative abilities. They started to realise the power of the word – of language.

They had at their disposal the old Sumerian poems of a certain king Bilgames. He and his age became obsolete soon after the Ur III period. But something stuck: a name and some stories. These were remote enough not to give offence to any of the present royalties, however, contemporary kings needed to be instructed according to conservative principles of reign. Bilgames and his Sumerian background suited this purpose excellently.

The first major shift in *horizons of expectations* probably occurred during the time of the composition of the first *Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh*. Akkadian literature was blooming (see chapter 3, 3.5.1). New literature was composed, but at the same time the existing canon underwent a change of form. The poems of Bilgames were reinterpreted: instead of five short individual poems, a new literary genre took shape – one long poetic narrative that would later be called an *epic.* And instead of five individual recounts, a central theme was wrought around one person: the Akkadian Gilgamesh.

A further *aesthetic distance* was achieved. The Babylonian pantheon differed from the Sumerian one. Marduk was the head. Ninsun and Sakan had disappeared. The other deities were known by Akkadian names (chapter 3, 3.5.2). Individual city-states had disappeared; instead there was the centralised authority of the Babylonian empire.

Also at this stage scribal art was firmly founded as an academic discipline. Scribes were no longer mainly accountants. Although an elitist few, scribes exercised considerable influence by means of their medium: language. They appropriated what they had at their disposal creatively. They exploited the possibilities of the Sumerian poems as well as the *aesthetic distance* – by doing so they could underscore the existing Babylonian kingship ideology without coming into any trouble with the present reigning authorities.

However, familiar *horizons of expectations* were not challenged as yet. The *Old Babylonian* king Gilgamesh was still the one who was supposed to *surpass all*

other kings. He still had the answers to most of life's problems. In short: he was a hero, despite bad luck. But already the *Old Babylonian Epic* addresses the perplexing question: how does one – even a king – cope with the reality of death?

Already at this stage the *Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* started to reach beyond its immediate context. No longer was it restricted to its perspective of the past. Not only was it addressing direct questions, it was also imagining future ones, those perceptions and experiences that were to come: in other words, the *historical understanding* was starting to unfold.

True enough, the *Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* had manifold purposes. Initially it was experimental of a new literary form, something that was vibrant and creative, and something that challenged the existing Sumerian canon. In due course it became institutionalised, suitable for educational and pedagogical practices (see chapter 3, 6). But somehow this was not the end.

4. Sîn-lēqi-unninni

Matters took a turn for the worse. The Babylonian empire was crumbling. Nothing was predictable. No matter how good a king, he would die and his reign would come to an end. Furthermore, it was not guaranteed that his legitimate heir would succeed him. Foreign powers were closing in. The gods seemed remote, even hostile. The logic of cause and effect seemed to backfire. The harsh events of history replaced the easy solution of myth (see chapter 3, 5.1).

This was the background of Sîn-lēqi-unninni. He was faced with the reality of the futility of human endeavours: everything comes to an end. Kings and paupers die alike. Heroic achievement is of little value. Whether one defies men, gods or monsters, eventually one shall venture towards the Netherworld where Ereshkigal lies. This grim reality is the only security. What now?

So Sîn-lēqi-unninni first exploits the *aesthetic distance* that his forerunners had created. He zooms into the Sumerian milieu with its city state of Uruk and all the ancient deities. However, he adheres to their now familiar Akkadian names. He also appropriates the literary form of the longer narrative poem – the *epic.* But this time he challenges the *horizon of expectations* of his royal audience. Instead of a hero who *surpasses all other kings,* Gilgamesh is a rogue. His arrogant endeavours of conquering Humbaba and spurning Ishtar only brings along misery and sorrow.

Sîn-lēqi-unninni casts Gilgamesh into the depths of his own fear and humiliation. Gilgamesh is stripped from his kingliness and godliness, he is but a man. He sinks into the despair of incompetence and the shame of his own filth. He cries for help in vain. Eventually he is turned down: he is thrown to his own resources. There is nobody that can help him. He is all alone.

Everything happens on the walls of Uruk. Sîn-lēqi-unninni invites his reader by means of a reflective prologue to extend his or her *horizon of expectations* and to reach back to ancient Sumer, to climb with him onto the walls of Uruk and to witness the life of a king – a man – a person. Thus the reader's *horizon of expectations* is also challenged in terms of an *aesthetic distance*: the narrative pertains to events that took place before time and history, furthermore, the narrative is not really the traditional success story. Gilgamesh – the king -has the familiar aspiration of doing something worthwhile with his life, but he goes about the whole matter rather foolishly. *Doing* rather than *being* is his motto. He wants to *do* many things: firstly he wants to erect monuments of heroic deeds during his lifetime, then he wishes to challenge the *Grim Reaper* itself by means of tangible achievements. But nothing works out. The king is not in control.

A disparity is created between the *horizon of expectations* of the text and that of its recipients. A *change of horizons* is demanded on the part of the reader for the text to make sense.

Gilgamesh finds himself back on the walls of Uruk, together with the reader. They are looking in retrospect at his life – one of failure and shame. This is the stark reality of life. No-one is infallible. Suffering is part of life, it cannot be avoided. Sooner or later everyone shall die, even a king. Back on the walls of Uruk Gilgamesh changes his *horizon of expectations* about the meaning of life. Whether one is remembered afterwards for death-defying heroic deeds is not really of any concern. Neither is it possible to obtain everlasting life. What is at stake is life itself and the way that it is lived. Put differently: the meaning of life is living in full, living meaningfully whilst life lasts. To understand this, the reader also needs to change his or her *horizons of expectations* – together with Gilgamesh.

Remarks

In the course of the many centuries since the Sumerian Age until the end of the Middle Babylonian Empire, the story of *Bilgames/Gilgamesh* underwent considerable re-interpretations. Within the first Sumerian poems lay a pregnant potential of meaning. However, this meaning unfolded and was actualised only within the various stages of historical reception. This process also involved a formal innovation of the genre: a longer narrative one with one central theme replaced short individual unconnected poems.

This change was not the result of a clever and objective manipulation of the formal aspects of the Sumerian poetic devices, rather, the new form was mediated by the interaction between the work and its recipients (thesis 2 of Jauss). The audience was Babylonian, therefore the new producers had to communicate in a new recognisable fashion. In no way did the later interpreters of the Sumerian Bilgames detach themselves from their own experiences

(thesis 1 of Jauss). However, the new literary form reopened access to literature that may had been forgotten otherwise. The past was drawn back into the present and realised anew. And Sîn-lēqi-unninni made diachrony and synchrony intersect on the walls of Uruk (thesis 7 of Jauss). The *historic* and *aesthetic* distances were far enough not to be too personal, however, the Sumerian heritage was still alive in the memories of the late Middle Babylonian society (theses 2 & 3 of Jauss). Perhaps vague and distant, but Old Sumer was not to be forgotten easily.

In due course the *Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* became canonised, institutionalised and part of the *literary canon* together with works like *Enūma eliš*, the most famous Babilonian literary composition besides the *Epic, Ludlul bēl nēmeqi,* the Marduk prayers and some other texts (theses 5 & 6 of Jauss). The relationship of the *Epic* with its contemporaneous literature has been discussed in chapter 3 (point 6) and will therefore not be repeated. Suffice it to say that canonised literature of the high Mesopotamian culture found its way into the royal libraries of king Ashurbanipal – 668-627 (George 1999:xxi - xxii) – in his capital Nineveh. However, soon afterwards Nineve was sacked – but more about this a few paragraphs later.

Before proceeding towards a discussion of modern reception, it may be necessary to reflect on Jauss's theory of *reception-aesthetics* and how this theory contributed to a better understanding of the *discourse of the Epic.*

The main contribution is that the continuous dialogue between text and readers became clear. Existing *horizons of expectations* were violated time and again, thereby creating considerable *aesthetic distances.* This became a never-ending process: *Gilgamesh* addressed every new audience in a new way and demanded new ways of perception – every time. Put differently: the *meaning* of the *Gilgamesh Epic* was re-activated in a different manner for its different audiences, therefore the text was kept alive. This may also be the reason for the recent *hype* – as Hanson (16 November 2001) states.

5. Gilgamesh in post-cuneiform tradition

Nearly two millennia after the Old Babylonian period cuneiform writing ceased to be taught (George 2003:60). The old medium of writing was abandoned, and so also its associated literary compositions. New texts and new genres saw the light. New cultures from east and west were infiltrating the old region of Sumer and Akkad and made sure to leave their mark indelibly. Mesopotamian history, culture and religion gradually started to fade away firstly with the Persian newcomers, then the Greeks, and eventually the Romans. So, what became of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* midst the changes of times and tides?

Apparently *Gilgamesh* survived in the post-cuneiform period, however in a different capacity. Fragments from the *Book of the Giants* of the Qumran community call him *Gilgamêš* and portray him as a figure in Jewish mythology. According to this tradition he was one of the evil giants of ante-diluvian times – a race that was spawned by the fallen angels who corrupted the human beings on earth and consequently also God's good creation. Another one of these evil giants bears the name Hôbābīš who most probably is Humbaba (George 2003:60).

The followers of Mani adopted the *Book of the Giants* as scripture in the third century AD. Unfortunately many sections of this text are lost. However, Gilgamesh and some other wicked characters survived in memory into late medieval times. As late as the fifteenth century AD a certain Al-Suyūṭi an expert with regards to Islamic magic, composed some conjurations against evil spirits of which one is the malevolent demon *Jiljamis* (George 2003:61).

Gilgamesh also not escaped the attention of the Greek rhetorician Aelian. He wrote *On the Nature of animals* approximately at the turn of the second century AD (George 2003:61). With this work he wished to illustrate the love that animals have for human beings, and for this purpose he recorded the tale of

Gilgamesh's miraculous birth and survival. The king of Babylonia, Seuechoros (i e Enmerkar) was warned that the child borne by his daughter – at that stage unmarried and not pregnant as yet – would someday usurp the throne. Rather alarmed the king took the best precautions he could to obstruct this course of events – he had his daughter locked up in a citadel. However, in due course she became pregnant – by a *nobody* – and gave birth to a son. From this fortress the baby was mercilessly slung, however miraculously saved by an eagle. The bird carried the baby to a gardener who nursed him and cared for him until he grew up. He became Gilgamesh who ruled over Babylonia, *fulfilling his destiny.*

This narrative seems partly influenced by the one of Sargon's birth, nevertheless it has several points in common with the tradition around Gilgamesh. In the first place Gilgamesh was a successor of Enmerkar. In the second place he was of uncertain parentage. And thirdly he was a king associated with Babylonia (George 2003:61). Although this legend is not informed directly by the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, it does reflect some knowledge of ancient Babylonian tradition with regards to Gilgamesh.

Theodor bar Kanai was a Nestorian Christian writer who lived some six centuries after Aelian. He drew up a list of twelve post-diluvian kings who allegedly reigned during the ages between Peleg – a descendant of Noah's son Shem – and Abraham the patriarch. The tenth king he called *gmyws* or *gmngws*; the twelfth, the king during whose reign Abraham was supposed to be born, he called *gnmgws* of *glmgws*. Both names probably *represent garbled spellings of Gilgamesh* (George 2003:61).

Thus Gilgamesh survives in post-cuneiform tradition. He is represented either as a legendary figure of ancient times who is connected to miraculous events, or as an evil demonised being within the later pagan mythology. However, it is important to note that these later sources only attest to the name and the figure of Gilgamesh – they have no direct dependence on the original narrative

recorded in the *Epic* itself. It seems that the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* was to remain buried in Ashurbanipal's palace for the many centuries to come.

George (2003:62-70) discusses the research of some present day scholars who propose to present evidence for the adaptation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* into other Near Eastern languages. According to these scholars some episodes and themes of the ancient *Epic* did survive into the post-cuneiform period and found their way into other narratives. He refutes all these proposals convincingly and concludes: *the epic that we know died with the cuneiform writing system, along with the large proportion of the traditional scribal literature that was of no practical, scientific or religious use in a world without cuneiform* (George 2003:70). Thus, no more scribes to train, no pedagogical purpose, and no more wisdom to learn: the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was obsolete.

6. Modern reception

Nineveh was sacked by the Median and Babylonian alliance in 612 BC. The *Standard Babilonian Gilgamesh Epic by the mouth of Sîn-lēqi-unninni* so neatly copied out and catalogued was crushed and shattered and *lay in pieces on the floors of Ashurbanipal's royal palaces, not to be disturbed for nearly 2 500 years* (George 1999:xxii).

Then matters changed. Austen Henry Layard and his assistant Hormuzd Rassam, an Assyrian Christian ventured towards Nineveh during the 1850's in search of Assyrian sculpture. However, what they did discover instead were the first broken cuneiform tablets of Ashurbanipal's libraries in his ransacked city. Gilgamesh's peaceful rest was disturbed. Although the two archaeologists were unable to read the tablets, they knew that these were extremely valuable and sent what they had found to the British Museum. So also Gilgamesh, fragment for fragment, made his way to the British Museum. And the painstaking process of deciphering cuneiform had begun.

Gilgamesh hit the headlines in 1872. George Smith, one of the most renowned scholars of Assyriology was sorting through the Assyrian tablets in the British Museum. He was given a tablet that happened to be the eleventh one of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, also the best preserved one, namely the story of the Deluge. George (1999:xxiii) describes what followed: *Smith took the tablet and began to read over the lines which Ready [the conservator who had cleaned the tablet] had brought to light; and when he saw that they contained the portion of the legend he had hoped to find there, he said, "I am the first man to read that after two thousand years of oblivion." Setting the tablet on the table, he jumped up and rushed about the room in a great state of excitement and, to the astonishment of those present, began to undress himself!* Gilgamesh created a stir. Quite frankly, I must confess: I had the urge to do likewise when I held some original tablets of the *Gilgamesh Epic* in my hands right there in the very British Museum, except, it was London, November, and bitterly cold. However, it must be pointed out that this response on the part of the *reader* is rather extreme, most readers would respond to great literature in a more controlled and sober manner.

Nevertheless, Gilgamesh was back in circulation. Since Smith's time extensive scholarly work was done with regards to the *Gilgamesh Epic.* The following names need to be mentioned: Paul Haupt (1891) and Peter Jensen (1900) who did much of the pioneering work in collecting, transliterating and translating; R Campbell Thompson provided the first *coherent* edition of the *Epic* in the 1930's with the sources that he had at his disposal; also in the 1930's and 1940's Samuel Noah Kramer indicated the importance of the Sumerian Bilgames poems with regard to the *Epic* (see George 1999:xi). In 1982 Jeffrey Tigay incorporated, consolidated and updated all the previous research into his well-known edition: *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic.* This was considered the standard work on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* until Andrew George's latest updating in 2003: *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic.*

Furthermore many scholarly articles are published on various aspects of the Epic. George's 2003 edition indicates some of these in the many footnotes. Occasionally their merits as well as their blunders are pointed out. In another study somewhat earlier this year I did research on parallel motifs and lines of thought between the *Gilgamesh Epic* and the *Old Testament.* A discussion of this research falls outside the scope of the present thesis, however, suffice to remark that the *Gilgamesh Epic* receives considerable attention also from biblical scholars and theologians.

Much information regarding *Gilgamesh* is also available electronically – there are lists measured by the yardstick of articles that pertain to *Gilgamesh.* However, some caution is necessary. Not everything that one may find attests to scholarly research. But the purpose of this thesis is not to go into the detail of everything that has been published on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as such: however, it does propose that *Gilgamesh* is catching the attention of recipients anew.

Reference has been made to *De Volkskrant* and the journalist Hansen's remark that the *Gilgamesh Epic* is recently experiencing *een opvallende wedergeboorte* (see chapter 1, 1). Gilgamesh is reviving. One of the reasons for this revival that Hanson proposes, is that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is able to enter into the actual experiences of modern readers, especially religious experiences. Everybody – in ancient times as well as in modern times – wishes for divine intervention in a time of crisis. But Gilgamesh's gods are really not much of a help – even Shamash, although sympathetic to the case of the hero – remains distant and far. *Where is/was God?* is a question that is frequently asked in times of distress, by believers and atheists alike. There are times when trust in a good and almighty God simply does not make sense. There are times when a person realises with a dreadful shock that he or she is left to his/her own devices. When he or she is left alone to make sense out of a mess, looking backwards and forwards...mostly a vision blurred by tears.

Just like Gilgamesh, on the walls of Uruk.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is translated into many different modern languages – mostly in English, but also in Dutch, in French and in German for example. Some translations, especially those with a more scholarly inclination follow a literal word for word order, indicating all gaps and lacunae in the text. Andrew George's 2003 translation is such a scholarly one. Other translators like Danny Jackson (1992) chooses for what one may call a poetic paraphrase. Such a translation reads more smoothly, more easily but is deceptive with regards to the real fragmented state of the *Epic.*

The Epic of Gilgamesh is also encountered within academic circles. It forms part of the curriculum for the study of *Ancient Literature, Assyriology,* studies of the *Ancient Near East,* as well as for the study of *Akkadian* and cuneiform writing. Thus, once again *Gilgamesh* revives in centers of learning, serving its purpose of instructing students in various ways.

7. Other genres, other forms of art

However, besides scholarly research, translations and paraphrases on the *Gilgamesh Epic,* creative minds are also experimenting with other forms of art. The Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu gives a musical interpretation in 1955 in the form of an oratorio. Martinu's composition is based on the translation of Campbell Thomas (despite its datedness) and also does he not appropriate all twelve tablets. Part one is based on the first two tablets, part two on Tablets VII, VIII and X, and part three on Tablet XII. Probably the choice for these tablets was based on their suitability for a musical performance.

On the literary side Raoul Schrott (2001) re-cast the *Epic* in the form of a drama – a play. Apparently this is less successful. Hansen in *De Volkskrant* (16 November 2001) evaluates: *Helaas heeft hij het nodig geoordeeld om behalve*

een vertaling een toneelstuk van zijn hand op te nemen dat sterk gebaseerd is op Gilgamesj. Wat stoort mij er eigenlijk zo aan? De ironie, die godezijdank in Gilgamesj zelf afwezig is? Het determinisme waarmee het stuk doordrenk blijk te zijn? Die psychologische nuanceringen, die het krachtige beeld dat de oorspronkelijke Gilgamesj van de personen oproept, doen verwateren? Ik weet het nie precies, maar ik word er kriegel van. The re-interpretation in the new formal genre added additional undertones that are perhaps implicit in the *Epic,* however by foregrounding these, the beauty of the original poem is marred. In this case the original work is received much more positively than its reworking in a different genre.

Gilgamesh is clad in a completely different robe by the Australian author Joan London. Her novel *Gilgamesh* (2003) has nothing to do with the ancient world – it focuses on the new. The setting is the Great Depression and World War II. The *heroine* is a young Australian girl – Edith - who falls unwontedly pregnant by her educated English cousin's Armenian friend. In a very indirect and perhaps a very far-fetched manner one may infer that Edith takes on the roles of both Shamhat and Ninsun. In the first place Edith seduces the Armenian Aram (Enkidu?), the illegitimate father of her child. In the second place her son Jim, misplaced, an outcast, also labeled a *bastard* needs all her support - and prayer ?

Exclusive Books regarded this novel as one their best in 2003. It reverses the *Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh* completely. Instead of a hero, there is a heroine. Instead of the royal Sumerian court, there is the struggle to make ends meet on an Australian farm. The main point of correspondence between London's novel and that of the *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* is that of a long journey as an escape of circumstances, perhaps in search for a more tangible truth. Traditions around *Gilgamesh* rather than the *Epic* proper are reflected in this novel (see also the review of Cobb: Aug 22, 2003. 10:24 AM at www.chron.com/cs/CDA/printstory.hts/ae/books/reviews/2059744.

Remarks

The reception history of the *Gilgamesh Epic* reflects the dialectical process between production and reception. Current conditions changed the *reception* of the *Epic* in Babylonian times, likewise present *recipients* hold the ancient text against their own present *horizons of expectations.* These differ, whether in Germany or in Australia. Somehow there seems to be a vital link between the Babylonian past and the global present. At a certain point *horizons* of the past overlap with those of the present to give birth to something new.

Time and again *Gilgamesh* appears in different guises: long before the time of the *Standard Babylonian Epic* – that is since the early second millennium and onwards - episodes concerning Gilgamesh's heroic enterprises were depicted visually on bronze situlas, clay plaques and cylinder seals (see George 2003:100-101). And as it was indicated in previous chapters, parts of the *Epic* may have been sung or recited aloud in the royal courts of Mesopotamian kings. That modern recipients rework the *Epic* in the form of music, drama or a novel, should come as no surprise.

At this point a valid question is whether it is important for the present reader to know all the detail of the ancient world? For example, is it important to know all the Mesopotamian deities and what their different functions are? What about city states: would ignorant readers be inclined to think of Uruk in the same manner as he or she would think of Paris, London or New York? Is the intermingling of the natural and the supernatural worlds necessarily a problem?

The rather lengthy discussion in chapter 3 of first the Sumerian and then the Babylonian backgrounds should make it clear that an understanding of the world of the Epic's setting is certainly a help. A background of religion is perhaps more illuminating than historical processes, yet, history also explains

some major changes wrought to the *Epic.* Furthermore, it should be obvious that a direct transposition of the ancient world on top of the present one creates hermeneutical problems. On the other hand any reader who enjoys reading *science fiction* and texts like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, should be able to appreciate also the *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* as a masterpiece in its own right. It is not always necessary to explain everything.

8. Critique on response-orientated theories

At first glance it seems that the life of a text is dependent on its engagement with the reader (Holub 1984:148). The reader is the one who takes initiative and who evaluates a text as meaningful or simply casts it aside. Thus, it seems that *reader orientated theories* shift radically from a text-immanent approach to yet another one-sided theory: the reader is in full control.

However, reader orientated theories do not aim at reducing the meaning of a text to the interpretation of the reader, rather they propose to indicate the interaction between the text and its reader (De Jongh 1983:43). For texts have their own story. Texts wish to communicate something to their readers, but more important, texts also wish to have an effect on their readers. In other words, texts aim to elicit a *response* from readers. Texts have a power of their own. The major breakthrough of *reader orientated* theories is the emphasis that they place on both *reader* and *text* – not only the one or the other. This – the *reader-text-interaction* – is the strongest argument in favour of *reader-response orientated theories.*

Jauss's *reception aesthetics* is appreciated as well as criticised by some scholars. Segers (1978:11-12) agrees that the concept of *horizon of expectations* is valuable, but he raises a question mark over the matter of *aesthetical distance.* The latter is far more complicated that Jauss cares to admit. To violate an existing *horizon of expectations* does not necessarily lead to an *aesthetic experience.* A far more serious point of critique pertains to the *reconstruction of a particular horizon of expectations.* Just how reliable is such

a construction? Especially with regard to ancient texts, the original readers who could be of some help are no longer there, and more often than not, historical sources are also lacking.

Kloek (1978:88) also point out the limits of a hypothetical reception – especially with regards to ancient texts. For example, in this thesis I proposed that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* transgressed the *horizon of expectations* of its readers – his disgraceful conduct as young and arrogant king - but I have no documentation. There are no clay-tablet reviews discussing the latest literary editions. My whole supposition rests on my own image of what the Sumerian/Akkadian/Babilonian *horizon of expectations* was. Therefore, a hypothetical reception is bound to many limits. And Eagleton (1983:84) agrees: the whole problem with Jauss is of an epistemological nature. Jauss proposes that a text be measured against a particular expectation of that very text – but is that reconstructed expectation anything more than the critic's own reconstruction?

Once again, subjectivity creeps in. The problem is that *readers' responses* are extremely variable. A *structural analysis* at least provided a tangible model, measures by which to recognise and to appreciate literary devices: *reader orientated theories* are more vague and rather indicate *directions* for the way in which a reader may deal with the text. The main question in this regard is again: can one determine whether one interpretation is more valid than the next? And on what grounds?

To this question *reader response* theories would answer that a text has its own rights, it sets its own parameters for interpretation (De Jongh 1983:55). Thus, the reader is not in control, he or she needs to engage into a serious and responsible dialogue with the text before deriving at that something called *meaning.* Both texts and readers are caught up in historical circumstances that determine *horizons of expectations* and influence the interaction between the two parties. Interpretation –the meaning ascribed to a text – thus reflects an

interaction rather than the text itself (De Jongh 1983:55) – exactly what *reception theories* propose to highlight.

But who is the reader? Who actualises meaning: the intended reader or the real reader (Holub 1984:152; De Jongh 1983:49)? How does one distinguish between an *imaginary reader, an appropriate reader, an ideal reader and an idealised reader* (Holub 1984:153)? Furthermore, is the matter of transition from one stage of reception to another really a smooth process? Do different *horizons of expectations* simply meet, be extended and then merge – do they not sometimes clash? Is *aesthetic distance* necessarily a positive criterion, or may such a difference just border on alienation?

A problem with *reader-orientated* theories are that there are so many of them. Different exponents were mentioned, for example Jauss, Iser and Fish (see Seldon 1986:112-118 for a brief but informative overview). However, the most serious critique that can be launched against *reader orientated* theories is that they fall yet again into the trap of positivism. Regardless of how open, or how accommodating these theories are with regards to the role of the *reader*, the dichotomy subject/object is still implied. The reader is the (human) subject – its object is the literary text. *Interpretation* is still the key word (Tompkins 1980:225). Just like *formalist theories, reader orientated theories* also regard the text as the primary unit of meaning.

But now, at this point I decide to call a halt. Where does one stop? This thesis aimed at illuminating Gilgamesh's world and his story, not to give a powerful performance of literary analysis. Of course there are more possible literary models than the two that were appropriated in this study – furthermore, the models of both Jauss and Genette are anything but perfect!

The ancient world did not regard language as a system of signs (Tompkins 1980:203). Literature was not an object for critical investigation. Meaning was not something that had to be derived at by means of appropriating

sophisticated critical apparatus. In the ancient world language was a force that acted upon the world. The prime concern was not the literary analysis of a text, nor the discovery of its meaning, but *what did the text do to its recipients*. Language was meant to have an effect on whoever was listening or reading. In short, language was a form of power.

Thus, in the final instance one may ask: what did the *Epic of Gilgamesh* do to its recipients, both ancient and modern?

Well, it made me write this thesis.

I don't know about you.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This thesis centered on the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* The title is: **Understanding Gilgamesh: his world and his story.** The aim was to get a better, perhaps more comprehensive understanding of the *Epic* as a whole. Two issues were pursued: (i) a closer look at the *world* (sources) of Gilgamesh and (ii) an appraisal of the *story* as literature (discourse). The following hypothesis was proposed: ***The hermeneutical dimensions of the Epic of Gilgamesh will benefit by a thorough examination of its (i) extra-textual sources and reception, as well as its (ii) internal textual narrative discourse.***

The first part of this thesis examined the *sources* – the world of Gilgamesh. The investigation was fairly extensive and covered a wide range. A historical overview was given: history for *Gilgamesh* starts in Sumerian times and reaches into the Middle Babylonian period, the time during which the *Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* was finalised. Besides history, Mesopotamian religion, culture, language and particular ideologies were also illuminated as these developed in the course of time. Many of these are also reflected the literary development of the *Epic of Gilgamesh.*

Consequently the literary evolution of the *Epic* itself was sketched – its Sumerian origins, the Old Babylonian reworking of the poems into an *Epic,* and the final changes wrought during the Middle Babylonian period, probably by Sîn-lēqi-unninni. Some teasing questions – the rejection of Ishtar and the addition of tablet XII - were also addressed. Furthermore, the academic life of the *Epic* was pointed out: *Gilgamesh* was certainly an entertaining story, but it definitely formed part of the formal academic curriculum for scribal training.

And finally it appeared that life of the *Gilgamesh Epic* did not end during or after the Middle Babylonian period. Somewhat like Sleeping Beauty he was abruptly

put to sleep when Nineve was sacked, but noisy archeologists disturbed him – some thousand years later than Sleeping Beauty! And eventually he was kissed awake by the overawed George Smith, almost stripping himself naked with excitement.

Today Gilgamesh seems alive and well and present in many guises: translations, poems, music. Why?

The second part aimed at looking at Gilgamesh from a recent angle. Because Gilgamesh is a text, a literary angle was chosen. Two literary theories were briefly outlined, and then appropriated to the *Standard Babylonian Epic.*

Firstly the *Epic* was analysed in terms of its *narrative structure* according to the model of Gérard Genette. This analysis conveyed the artistic beauty of the *Epic* in terms of its unique rhythm: events that either rush forward or slow down with deliberate intention. The journey towards the Cedar Forest is long and monotonous. Likewise there seems no end to Gilgamesh's mourning over his friend's decease. On the other hand the fight with Humbaba is violent and intense. The return to Uruk is sudden and final.

The interesting aspect of *focalisation* illuminated that Gilgamesh is actually the one that is looking at his life. Together with Genette's definition of *narrator,* it becomes clear that Gilgamesh is also telling his own story. However, this inside-out interweaving means of narrating is done so skillfully that the *penny drops* only after reading the very last lines of the *Epic.* And the reader is re-directed back to the very beginning, to start reading yet again, suddenly realising that he or she had not understood at all.

However, it appeared that a structural narrative analysis was not comprehensive enough. Therefore a response-oriented theory was sought. Jauss's theory of reception-aesthetics seemed appropriate, especially because he also emphasises the historical reception of texts. Consequently his *seven*

theses of reception aesthetics were examined in some detail. This section was shorter than the one on Genette, mainly because many of the background historical issues and the literary development of the *Epic* were dealt with in chapter 3.

What Jauss's theory did illustrate, was that the *Gilgamesh Epic* never ceased to communicate with its readers. Jauss's theory has two key concepts: *horizon of expectations* and *aesthetical distance.* The communicative capabilities of a text depend on whether it is able to keep the interests of its readers alive in these two matters. Therefore it has to retain its contact with the past, but equally important, it also has to address burning issues of the present: and if that is not enough, a text should also anticipate future questions.

In this sense Jauss's theory explains why *Gilgamesh* did not become *obsolete literature,* like most of its contemporaries. *Enūma Eliš* which is as *Gilgamesh* one of the better known literary texts of ancient times, attracts attention mainly because it is so different from the *Creation Narrative* of the Bible.

It appeared that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a broken narrative. In the first sense, the meaning is literally. The clay tablets on which the *Epic* is recorded, are broken. Pieces and fragments are scattered over the world. George (2003:977-986) indicates the whereabouts: Aleppo, Ankara, Baghdad, Berlin, Boğazkale, Chicago, Istanbul, Jena, Jerusalem, London (the most of the *Gilgmesh* tablets are in the British Museum), New Haven, Oxford, Philadelphia, the private collection of Schøyen in Norway, and some other private collections by anonymous owners. Thus: a very broken narrative in a very real sense.

The *Epic* originated and developed also in a rather broken way. The first seeds were sown on Sumerian soil – perhaps these first compositions were not intended as poetic achievements at all. A more likely scenario is that the jester of the court needed an income to fill his belly. Further he had to keep the king happy, therefore he performed to keep his job and to save his life.

But whatever the case, the Sumerian poems underwent radical changes and took on a completely new shape – that of an *Epic.* Somewhat positivistic, the new narrative conveys heroic traits. Gilgamesh is very much the king-hero who *surpasses other kings.* He embarks on dangerous journeys, he manages to establish an everlasting name. Even the death of his friend compels him to venture into yet another unknown region: the region of Uta-napishtim, the Distant.

Positivism is broken down by sober reflection. The self-confidence of Youth has made way for Mature introspection. Gilgamesh is a man broken by sorrow and failure. Life is difficult. Life is complex. Life is a broken narrative.

So, in the last instance the *Epic of Gilgamesh* tells the story of one man. His story may be the story of anybody, anywhere, any place, any time. His story is the story of human broken-ness – anybody's story. It is a story of success and honour, but it is also a story of failure, loss, humiliation and shame. Yet there is hope: from the walls of Uruk Gilgamesh gathers the broken and scattered fragments of his life and assumes responsibility, here and now.

The broken narrative of *Gilgamesh* is the broken narrative of life.

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ANNEXURE: THE AKKADIAN TEXT

From the walls of Uruk - and back: the *inclusio*

The whole prologue of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is cited. The *inclusio* pertains only to I:16-21 which is echoed in XI:315-320. This *inclusio* is one of the reasons (amongst others which is pointed out in chapter 6) that scholars regard Tablets I - XI as the *Epic proper* and consider Tablet XII to be an addendum.

Tablet I:1-46

1	*ša nagba īmuru lušēdi māti*	Of the Deep that he saw, I must tell the country
2	*ša kullati īdû kalāma ḫassu*	of (him) who knew everything, total reminiscence.
3	*iḫītma miṯḫāriš kibrāti*	He equally explored regions,
4	*napḫar nēmēqi ša kalāmi īḫuz*	he grasped the totality of all wisdom -
5	*niṣirta īmurma katimta ipte*	he saw the secret, he uncovered the hidden.
6	*ubla ṭēma ša lām abūbi*	He brought a message of that (which was) before the Deluge,
7	*urḫa rūqta illikamma aniḫ u šupšuḫ*	he went a distant road, weary, though calm,
8	*iḫruṣ ina narê kalu mānaḫti*	he inscribed all his labours on a stela.
9	*ušēpiš dūru ša Uruk supūri*	He built the city wall of Uruk-the-sheepfold
10	*ša Eanna qudduši šutummi elim*	of holy Eanna, the sacred treasure
11	*amur dūrsu ša kīma qû nēbḫūšu*	See its wall! Like bronze its friezes!
12	*itaplas samētašu ša lā umaššalu mamma*	Look at its parapet that has no equal!
13	*ṣabatma askuppati ša ultu ullânu*	Seize the threshold of ancient times!
14	*qitrub ana Eanna šubat Ištar*	Draw closer to Eanna, the abode of Ishtar
15	*ša šarru arkû lā umaššalū amēlu mamma*	that no later king can equal, nor any man.

Lines 16-21 are also repeated in **XI:315-320**: *inclusio*

16	*elima ana eli dūri ša Uruk itallak*	Go up, onto the wall of Uruk, walk around,
17	*temennu ḫiṭma libitta ṣubbu*	Take note of the foundation, inspect the brickwork!
18	*šumma libittašu lā agurrat*	Is its brickwork not burnt brick?
19	*u uššišu lā iddū 7 muntaliki*	Did the 7 sages not lay its foundations?
20	*1 šar ālu 1 šar kirû 1 šar issû pitir bītu Ištar*	One sar is city, one sar is orchard, one sar is clay pit, open ground, the house of Ishtar.
21	*3 šar u pitru Uruk tamḫu*	3 sar and open ground, Uruk, (its) measurement!

Tablet I resumes:

22	*še'īma tupšinna ša erû*	Search for the tablet-box of copper,
23	*puṭur ḫargallišu ša siparru*	release its clasp of bronze,
24	*petema pû ša niṣirti*	open the lid of the secret,
25	*išima ṭuppi uqnû šitassi*	find the tablet of lapis lazuli read out aloud
26	*ša šu Gilgameš alāku kalu marṣāti*	of all misfortunes that Gilgamesh went through.
27	*šūtur eli šarrī šanu' udu adi gatti*	Surpassing all kings, impressive of stature,
28	*qardu lillid Uruk rīmu muttakpu*	a hero, native of Uruk, wild butting bull.
29	*illak ina pāni ašared*	He walks in front, first:
30	*arka illakma tukulti aḫūšu*	he walks behind, supporting his brothers.
31	*kibru dannu ṣulūl ummannišu*	a mighty bank, the protection of his troops;
32	*agû ezzu muabbit dūru abnu*	a violent flood-wave that smashes a stone wall!
33	*emu ša Lugalbanda Gilgameš gitmālu emūqi*	Gilgamesh: perfect of strengh, son-in-law of Lugalbanda
34	*māru arḫi ṣīrti sinništu Ninsun*	son of the noble cow, Wild Cow Ninsun,
35	*šu Gilgameš gitmālu rašubbu*	Gilgamesh, perfect terror!
36	*petû nērebeti ša ḫuršāni*	He opened passes in mountains,
37	*ḫerû būrī ša kišādu sadî*	he dug wells on the hill-flanks,
38	*ebir tâmtu tâmati rapāšuti adi ṣit šamši*	he crossed the wide ocean of oceans, as far as sunrise.
39	*ḫiṭ kibrāti mušte'u balaṭi*	World-regions he explored - seeking life,
40	*kašid dannūssu ana Utnapistim rūqi*	by his strength he reached Uta-Napishtim, the Distant.

41	*mutir māḫāzi ana ašrišunu ša uḫalliqū abūbu*	He restored the cult-centres in their place that the Deluge swept away.
42	*mannumma ina niši apâtu*	Who among the people of mankind,
43	*ša ittišu iššannanu ana šarrūti*	that (can) rival with him, for king?
44	*ša kī Gilgameš iqabbu anākuma šarru*	and can say like Gilgamesh: 'I am king!'?
45	*Gilgameš ištu ūmum i'aldu nabi šumšu*	Gilgamesh: since the day of birth, bright was his name.

A brave man? The hunter sees Enkidu: I:96-104

96	*ṣayyādu ḫabbilu amēlu*	A hunter, a trapper-man
97	*ina pūt mašqi šâsu uštamḫiršu*	came face to face with him before the water-hole.
98	*išten ūme šana u šalša ina pūt mašqi*	The first, the second and the third day was he before the water-hole.
99	*īmuršuma ṣayyādu uštaḫriru pānušu*	The hunter saw him, his face became petrified,
100	*šu u būlišu bituššu irūma*	He and his herds went home,
101	*ītadir ušḫarir iqūlma*	he was frightened, dumbstruck, silent,
102	*lummun libbašu pānušu arpu*	his heart depressed, his face cloudy,
103	*ibašši nissatu ina karšišu*	worry was inside him,
104	*ana alik urḫi rūquti pānušu mašlu*	his face was like one who has travelled distant roads.

His complaint to his father: 1:109-111

109	*ittanallak ina eli šadi kayyāna*	He wanders on the hills all the time,
110	*kayyānamma itti būlim šammi ikkal*	he eats grass with the herd, all the time,
111	*kayyānamma šēpūšu ina pūt mašqi išakkan*	all the time he is with his feet in the water-hole.

Who is the brave one? 1:171-180

171	*urtammi Šamḫat dīdāša*	Shamhat let loose her underware,
172	*ūrša iptema kuzubša ilqi*	she opened her vagina, he took her charm,
173	*ul išḫuṭ iltiqi nappissu*	She was not afraid, she took his scent:
174	*lubūsiša umaṣṣima eliša išlal*	She spread her clothing and he slept on her,
175	*īpussuma lullâ šipir sinnište*	she did to him, the primitive man, the art of a woman.
176	*dādusu iḫbubu eli ṣēriša*	his lust made love on her open country -
177	*6 urrī 7 mūšī Enkidu tebima Šamḫat irḫi*	6 days and 7 nights, Enkidu, erect, poured (into) Shamhat.
178	*ultu išbu lalāša*	After he was sated with her delights,
179	*pānišu ištakan ana ṣēri būlišu*	he turned his face to the plains of his herd.
180	*īmurašūma Enkidu irappūda ṣabītū*	The gazelles saw Enkidu and ran away

Sîn-lēqi-unninni gives the *Epic of Gilgamesh* an ironic twist. The brave trapper-man, the hunter does not have the courage to face the savage: he runs to his daddy and asks for help. Help is not provided by means of a band of men, heavily armoured, but Shamḫat, a defenceless woman is told to go along with the petrified hunter. When Enkidu does appear, the hunter vanishes completely out of the narrative altogether. Šamḫat faces the savage: what are her weapons? Nothing. She gets rid of all the protection she did have: her clothes. And it seems to work very well (see above)!

Analepsis: Shamhat explaining to Enkidu that Gilgamesh dreamt about him: I:226-228

226	*lām tallika ulta šadimma*	Before you came from the hilltops,
227	*Gilgameš ina libbu Uruk inaṭṭala šunateka*	Gilgamesh in the heart of Uruk saw your dream.
228	*itbima Gilgameš šunat pašar zakra ummišu*	Gilgamesh arose, to solve the dream he told his mother.

Prolepsis: Ninsun revealing Gilgamesh's dream about his future friend: I:250-255

250	*illakakumma dannu tappū mušezib ibri*	A mighty comrade, saviour of a friend will come to you,
251	*ina māti dan emūqi īšu*	in the land he has mighty power,
252	*kīma kiṣri ša Anu dunnuna emūqašu*	like a bolt from Anu is his mighty power.
253	*tarâmšuma kī aššati elīšu taḫbubu*	You will love him like a wife, on him you will make love.
254	*[x x x] uštenezibka kâša*	[x x x] he will always safely protect you.
255	*damqat šuqurat šunatka*	Your dream is favourable.

The problematic nature of the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu:

239 *arâmšuma kī aššati elīšu aḫbub*
253 *tarâmšuma kī aššati elīšu taḫbubu*
263 *arâmšuma kī aššati elīšu aḫbub*
268 *tarâmšuma kī aššati taḫabbub elīšu*

The word in question is *ḫabābu*. Both Andrew George's translations (2003:553-557; 1999:10-11) follow the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD) and interpret *elīšu* together with the different conjugated forms of *ḫabābu* as caress and embrace. Parpola (1997) apparently agrees with CAD: at the end of his transliteration of the Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic he supplies a glossary in which he translates ḫabābu with to make love. However, Wolfram von Soden's Akkadisches Handwörterbuch translates *ḫabābu* with 'murmeln, zirpen, zwitschern' - murmel, chirp, twitter. *ḫabābu* in this particular Gilgamesh-episode, he renders as 'flüstere' - to whisper. Such an interpretation would indeed soften the homosexual undertones - or overtones if you wish. However, most translations do interpret *ḫabābu* and

Its conjugated forms in the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic as having to do with sex: therefore also the discussion in chapter 6 on the matter.

The fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu - II:77-97

77	*illak Enkidu ina pāni u Šamḫat arkišu*	Enkidu goes in front and Shamhat after him.
78	*īrumba una libbi Uruk supūri*	He went into the heart of Uruk-the-sheepfold
79	*ipḫur ummannu ina ṣērišu*	The crowd gathered on the square.
80	*izzizamma ina sūqi ša Uruk supūri*	He is stood in the street of Uruk-the-sheepfold,
81	*[x x x] ibēš dannutima*	he produced a strong bifurcation
82	*iptaras alakta ša Gilgameš.*	he blocked the path of Gilgamesh.
83	*Uruk mātu izzaz elīšu*	The Uruk-folk stood around him,
84	*mātu puḫḫurat ina muḫḫišu*	the crowd gathered around him,
85	*idappir ummanni eli ṣērišu*	the mob frequented the one from the steppe,
86	*eṭlū uktammarū elišu*	the young men piled up around him -
87	*kī šerrī la'î unūašaqū šēpūšu*	like young children they kissed his feet:
88	*ullânumma eṭlu bani lānšu*	"There (is) a young man - his figure (is) good!
89	*ana Išḫāra mayyāl mūšiti nadima*	For Ištar the bed of the night is thrown,
90	*ana Gilgameš kīma ili šakiššu miḫru*	for Gilgamesh like a god, his placing is equal!"
91	*Enkidu ina nābi bīti emūti ipterik šēpīšu*	Enkidu had blocked the door to the wedding-house with his feet,
92	*Gilgameš ana šurubi ul innaddin*	Gilgamesh was not allowed to enter.
93	*iṣṣabtūma ina bābi bīti muti*	They seized each other in the door of the groom's house,
94	*ina sūgi ittegrū ikbit mātu*	in the street they fought, the land became weighty.
95	*sippi īrubū igāra itūš*	They entered the doorjamb: the wall shook.
96	*Gilgameš u Enkidu iṣṣabtūma kīma lê iludī*	Gilgamesh and Enkidu seized each other like young bulls...
97	*ikmisma Gilgameš ina qaqqari šēpušu*	Gilgamesh knelt, his foot on the ground.

Scholars differ with regard to who the winner of this fight is. The verb *kamāsu* means to squat or to kneel. Obviously it would suit the plot to have Gilgamesh the winner, therefore most translations also render Gilgamesh as the victor. Indeed, cylinder seals do depict figures that are engaged in some kind of wrestling activities, presumably similar to the struggle between Gilgamesh and Enkidu (George 2003:191). However, one has to admit that the poetic nature of the narrative is highly structured and therefore one should rather hesitate before concluding too quickly that Gilgamesh is indeed the victor and Enkidu the defeated one. In fact, Jacobsen (1976:199) interprets that it is the other way around: Gilgamesh has lost the fight! The fight ends with Enkidu's words to Gilgamesh :

104	*šarrūta ša nīši iššimka Enlil*	Enlil made you king of the people.

Jacobsen regards this declaration as a magnanimous acknowledgement of Enkidu. He has won the fight. He does not wish to humiliate the king further. Moreover, he respects the decision of the god Enlil the god who appoints and dismisses rulers as he pleases. Fair enough, Enlil made Gilgamesh king of the people and he, Enkidu accepts that. In this regard I want to point out a certain catch-line effect between lines 98 and 99. The introduction is from line 74:

74	*ana zikri eṭli īriqu pānušu*	On the words of the young man, his (Enkidu's) face was green.

Enkidu and Šamḫat have just arrived in Uruk and the young man had told them about the king's habit of coupling with the bride-to-be before the groom does so. Enkidu's face becomes (yellow) green [*(w)arāku*] presumably with anger. Why else would he pick up a fight with the notorious king?

Then, just after the fight, and Gilgamesh is kneeling with his foot on the ground (see II 97). The text continues:

98	*ipšiḫ uzzašuma inūḫ irassu*	his anger relents, his breast comes to rest:
99	*ištu irassu inūḫu*	as his breast comes to rest,
100	*Enkidu ana šâšuma izakkar ana Gilgameš*	Enkidu says to Gilgamesh....

Enkidu was the one who was angry (74) and whose anger subsided (98) after he realised that he has won the fight. He does not wish to pursue the matter further. Instead, he reaches out a hand to the defeated. Furthermore, this interpretation also agrees with Jauss's theory of *violating an existing horizon of expectations*. The *existing horizon of expectations* was certainly that Gilgamesh would gain the upper hand. With an ingenious poetic twist, he does not: therefore I agree with Jacobsen's interpretation.

Towards the Cedar Forest: IV:1-20

1	*ana 20 bērī iksupū kusāpu*	at 20 double hours they broke bread;
2	*ana 30 bērī iškunū nubattum*	at 30 double hours they pitched camp;
3	*50 bērī illikū kal ūmu*	50 double hours they travelled the whole (of) the day,
4	*mālak arḫiti u ūmu 15 ina šalši ūmi iṭḫū ana šadî Labānu*	a month and a half's journey by the third day; they drew near to Mount Lebanon.
5	*ana pān šamši uḫarrū būru*	to the face of the sun they dug a well,
6	*mê iškunū ina nādīmšunu*	they put water in their waterskins.
7	*īlima Gilgameš ina muḫḫi šadî*	Gilgamesh went up to the top of the mountain,
8	*maṣḫatusu utteqqa ana [x x]*	he offered a flour-offering to [x x].
9	*šadû bila šutta amat Šamši damqi*	O Mountain, bring me a dream, a word from good Šamaš.
10	*ipušašuma Enkidu ana [x x x]*	Enkidu made for him [x x x]
11	*etiq šarbilli irteti [x x x]*	he erected a bypass (for) a breeze [x x x]
12	*ušnilšuma ina kippatti [x x x]*	he made him lie down in a circle [x x x]
13	*šu kî še'u māti [x x x]*	he, like corn of the land [x x x]
14	*Gilgameš ina kinṣišu utameda zuqatsu*	Gilgamesh rested his chin on his knees,
15	*šittum reḫat nišī elīšu imqut*	sleep that spills over people fell upon him.
16	*ina qabliti šittašu uqatti*	in the middle his sleep ended.
17	*itbema ītama ana ibrišu*	He arose and spoke to his friend:
18	*ibrī ul talsanni ammīni êreku*	My friend, why did you not call me, why am I awake?
19	*ul talputananni ammīni šašaku*	You did not touch me, why am I confused?
20	*ul ilu ētiq ammīniḫamû šīrūa*	A god did not pass by, why is (my) flesh benumbed?

These 20 lines are repeated five times in this tablet: 1-20; 73-92; 109-129; 145-163; 192-197. The slight deviations and omissions from the first 20 lines are discussed in chapter 4 under the heading *Frequency*. Obviously this trip is not a pleasure ride. Gilgamesh and Enkidu do not stop to admire their scenery. They do what is necessary to move ahead as fast as possible: travel, eat, sleep.

It is remarkable though, that the whole of Tablet IV is an account of the trip to the Cedar Woods in its purpose driven stages. The whole of Tablet V - or what remains of it - relates the encounter with Ḫ*umbaba*. However, at the very end of Tablet V (line 253) the two heroes return to Uruk:

253 *u Gilgameš qaqqadu Ḫumbaba [x x x]* and Gilgamesh [x x x] the head of Humbaba.

There are no next tablet to describe the journey back. The return is suddenly. And the victory is final.

Humbaba is slayed. Gilgamesh and Enkidu are the heroes. Ishtar falls in love with Gilgamesh. She proposes, but her turns her offer down in no uncertain terms. She retaliates with her beloved pet, the Bull of Heaven, but Gilgamesh and Enkidu slay this monster as well. They celebrate their victory regardless of Ishtar's sorrow.

That night the great gods are in counsel. Gilgamesh and Enkidu have pushed their luck too far. Their time has run out. One of them shall die. It shall be Enkidu.

Gilgamesh cracks up. He becomes clinically depressed. He cannot do his work. He does not take care of his appearance. Clad only in the skin of a lion, he roams the steppe.

A long lament: re-inventing Enkidu

Gilgamesh is roaming the steppe. Wild, unkempt as Enkidu once had been, he is now. Gilgamesh is Enkidu re-invented. The only difference is that when Enkidu roamed the steppe, he was care-free and contented: Gilgamesh on the other hand is deeply worried and driven by fear. Here, in Tablet X, he has just met Siduri, the barmaid:

47	Gilgameš ana šašima izakkara ana sābitum	Gilgamesh said to her, to the barmaid:
48	kī lā akla lētaīa lā quddudu pānūa	Should my cheeks not be hollow, my face not sunken?
49	lā lummun libbī lā qatu zīmūa	Should my heart not be wretched, my features not wasted?
50	lā ibašši nissatu ina karšīa	Should agony not exist in my stomach,
51	ana alik urḫi rūqati pānūa lā mašlu	and my face be like one who has travelled a distant road?
52	ina sarbi u ṣeti lā qummu pānūa	Should not my face be burnt by frost and heat,
53	maški labbi lā labšakuma lā arappud ṣeri	should I not wear a lion-skin, should I not roam the plains?
54	ibrī kūdanu ṭardu akkannu ša šadî nimru ša ṣeri	My friend, a mule on the run, a wild donkey of the hills, panther of the steppe,
55	Enkidu ibrī kūdanu ṭardu KI.MIN	Enkidu, my friend, a mule on the run, a wild donkey of the hills, panther of the steppe,
56	ša ninnenduma nīlu šadâ	We joined (forces), we went up the mountain,
57	nišbatuma alâ ināru	we seized the Bull of Heaven, we slayed (him),
58	nušalpitu ḫumbaba ša ina qišti erēni ašbu	we overcame ḫumbaba who lived in the Cedar Woods,
59	ina nērebetī ša šadî nidūku nēsī	in mountain passes we killed lions.
60	ibrī ša arâmmu danniš ittīa ittallaku kalâ marṣāti	My friend whom I love deeply(who) with me went through every danger,
61	Enkidu ša arâmu danniš ittīa ittalaku KI.MIN	Enkidu whom I love deeply, (who) with me went through every danger,
62	ikšudu šīmat amēluti	the fate of mankind overtook him!
63	6 urrī u 7 mūšātī elšu abki	Six days and seven nights I wept over him
64	ul addišu ana qebēri	I did not give him up for burial
65	adi tūltu imqut ina appišu	until a maggot fell from his nostril.
66	ādurma mūta aplaḫma arappud ṣēri	I was scared, I feared death, I roamed the steppe.
67	amat ibrīa kabtat elīa	The case of my friend is heavy on me,
68	urḫa rūqata arappud ṣeri	(on) a distant road I roam the steppe.
69	amat Enkidu ibrīa KI.MIN	The case of Enkidu is heavy on me
70	ḫarrānu rūqata arappud ṣeri	(on) a distant path I roam the steppe.
71	kīkî luskut kīkî luqūl	How can I be silent? How can I be quiet?
72	ibrī ša arâmmušu ītemi ṭiṭṭiš	My friend whom I loved, turned to clay,

73	Enkidu ibrī ša arâmmu ītemi ṭiṭṭiš	Enkidu whom I loved, turned to clay.
74	anāku ul kî šâšuma anēlamma	I, shall I not lie down like him?
75	ul atebba dūr dār	Shall I not rise, for ever (and) ever?

This long lament occurs thrice in Tablet X: 47- 75; 121-146; 221-248. What Gilgamesh has said to Siduri, he repeats firstly to Urshanabi and then to Uta-napištim. Obsessive compulsive thoughts about death and dying were triggered by the death of a beloved friend. Now he cannot get rid of them, regardless of any good advice. Gilgamesh's reasoning remains stuck until he is shocked back to reality - not by means of success but by means of failure.

Yet, surprisingly a narrative of failure, of shame turns into one of success, of honour. Exactly how this happens is a mystery. The *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* does not have *Seven Steps to Success* or anything likewise. Its pedagogical nature is disguised by *narrative*. Perhaps the ancient readers did have *Seven Steps to Success*. Readers today have *success-recipies* that fit the time. But *success formulae* that are directed to a specific time and place are bound to become dated.

The *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* invites its reader to pause on the walls of his or her life: to look at it, but from a distance. Only then can life be re-interpreted and the narrative of one's own story be re-written, hopefully differently focalised.

In the end the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is also *narû*–literature for the twenty first century. In a positivist success-driven society, one is easily discouraged by failure. No-one likes to admit failure. In submitting a CV for a job-application, no-one would dream of including those rather embarrassing moments when life did not turn out too well, those moments of failure, of despondency. *The Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* would certainly not be a recommendation for a job these days.

Somehow the *Epic of Gilgamesh* becomes strikingly post-modern wisdom. King Gilgamesh obtained life everlasting not by means of success, but by means of failure. Why not admit failure? Why not learn by one's mistakes? Why not embrace the paradox of life? Why not embrace life? Why not live?