The Epic of Gilgamesh[1]

Tablet I

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

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

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

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

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

Two-thirds of him was divine, one-third of him was human!
The Lady of Birth drew his body's image,
The God of Wisdom brought his stature to perfection.

He was perfection in height,
Ideally handsome

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

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

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

[*Anu speaks.*]

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

They summoned the birth goddess, Aruru:

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

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

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

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

A hunter, a trapping-man,
Encountered him at the edge of the water hole.
One day, a second, and a third he encountered him at the edge of the water hole.
When he saw him, the hunter stood stock-still with terror,
As for Enkidu, he went home with his beasts.
Aghast, struck dumb,
His heart in a turmoil, his face drawn,
With woe in his vitals,
His face like a traveler's from afar,
The hunter made ready to speak, saying to his father:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gilgamesh said to him, to the hunter:

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

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

There he is, Shamhat, open your embrace,
Open your embrace, let him take your charms!
Be not bashful, take his vitality!

When he sees you, he will approach you,
Toss aside your clothing, let him lie upon you,
Treat him, a human, to woman's work!
His wild beasts that grew up with him will deny him,
As in his ardor he caresses you!

Shamhat loosened her garments,
She exposed her loins, he took her charms.
She was not bashful, she took his vitality.
She tossed aside her clothing and he lay upon her,
She treated him, a human, to woman's work,
As in his ardor he caressed her.
Six days, seven nights was Enkidu aroused, flowing into Shamhat.
After he had his fill of her delights,
He set off towards his beasts.
When they saw him, Enkidu, the gazelles shied off,
The wild beasts of the steppe shunned his person.
Enkidu had spent himself, his body was limp,
His knees stood still, while his beasts went away.
Enkidu was too slow, he could not run as before,
But he had gained reason and expanded his understanding.

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

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

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

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

[*Shamhat speaks.*]

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

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

[*The scene shifts to Uruk.*]

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

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

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

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

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

Means there will come to you a strong one,
A companion who rescues a friend.
He will be mighty in the land, strength will be his,
Like the force of heaven, so mighty will be his strength.
You will fall in love with him and caress him like a woman.
He will be mighty and rescue you, time and again.

He had a second dream,
He arose and went before the goddess, his mother,
Gilgamesh said to her, to his mother:

Mother, I had a second dream.
An axe was thrown down in a street of ramparted Uruk,
They were crowding around it,
The whole of Uruk was standing by it,
The people formed a crowd around it,
A throng was jostling towards it.
I carried it off and laid it down before you,
I fell in love with it, like a woman I caressed it,
Then you were making it my partner.

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

My son, the axe you saw is a man.
Your loving it like a woman and caressing it,
And my making it your partner
Means there will come to you a strong one,
A companion who rescues a friend,
He will be mighty in the land, strength will be his,
Like the strength of heaven, so mighty will be his strength.

Gilgamesh said to her, to his mother:

Let this befall according to the command of the great
counselor Enlil,
I want a friend for my own counselor,
For my own counselor do I want a friend!

Even while he was having his dreams,
Shamhat was telling the dreams of Gilgamesh to Enkidu,
Each was drawn by love to the other.

Tablet II

While Enkidu was seated before her,
Each was drawn by love to the other.
Enkidu forgot the steppe where he was born,
For six days, seven nights Enkidu was aroused and flowed
into Shamhat.
The harlot said to him, to Enkidu:

You are handsome, Enkidu, you are become like a god,
Why roam the steppe with wild beasts?
Come, let me lead you to ramparted Uruk,
To the holy temple, abode of Anu,
Let me lead you to ramparted Uruk,
To hallowed Eanna, abode of Ishtar,
The place of Gilgamesh, who is perfect in strength,
And so, like a wild bull, he lords it over the people.
You are just like him,
You will love him like your own self.
Come away from this desolation, bereft even of shepherds.

He heard what she said, accepted her words,
He was yearning for one to know his heart, a friend.
The counsel of Shamhat touched his heart.
She took off her clothing, with one piece she dressed him,
The second she herself put on.
Clasping his hand, like a guardian deity she led him,
To the shepherds' huts, where a sheepfold was,
The shepherds crowded around him,
They murmured their opinions among themselves:

This fellow, how like Gilgamesh in stature,
In stature tall, proud as a battlement.
No doubt he was born in the steppe,
Like the force of heaven, mighty is his strength.

They set bread before him,
They set beer before him.
He looked uncertainly, then stared,
Enkidu did not know to eat bread,
Nor had he ever learned to drink beer!
The harlot made ready to speak, saying to Enkidu:

Eat the bread, Enkidu, the staff of life,
Drink the beer, the custom of the land.

Enkidu ate the bread until he was sated,
He drank seven juglets of the beer.
His mood became relaxed, he was singing joyously,
He felt lighthearted and his features glowed.
He treated his hairy body with water,
He anointed himself with oil, turned into a man,
He put on clothing, became like a warrior.
He took his weapon, hunted lions,
The shepherds lay down to rest at night.
He slew wolves, defeated lions,
The herdsmen, the great gods, lay down to sleep.
Enkidu was their watchman, a wakeful man,
He was tall.

He was making love with Shamhat.
He lifted his eyes, he saw a man.
He said to the harlot:

Shamhat, bring that man here!
Why has he come?
I will ask him to account for himself.

The harlot summoned the man,
He came over, Enkidu said to him:

Fellow, where are you rushing?
What is this, your burdensome errand?

The man made ready to speak, said to Enkidu:

They have invited me to a wedding,
Is it not people's custom to get married?
I have heaped high on the festival tray
The fancy dishes for the wedding.
People's veils are open for the taking.
For Gilgamesh, king of ramparted Uruk,
People's veils are open for the taking!
He mates with the lawful wife,
He first, the groom after.
By divine decree pronounced,
From the cutting of his umbilical cord, she is his due.[8]

At the man's account, his face went pale.

Enkidu was walking in front, with Shamhat behind him.

When he entered the street of ramparted Uruk,
A multitude crowded around him.
He stood there in the street of ramparted Uruk,
With the people crowding around him.
They said about him:

He is like Gilgamesh in build,
Though shorter in stature, he is stronger of frame.
This man, where he was born,
Ate the springtime grass,
He must have nursed on the milk of wild beasts.

The whole of Uruk was standing beside him,
The people formed a crowd around him,
A throng was jostling towards him,
Young men were mobbed around him,
Infantile, they groveled before him.

8. This means that by his birthright Gilgamesh can take brides on their wedding nights, then leave them to their husbands.

In Uruk at this time sacrifices were underway,
Young men were celebrating.
The hero stood ready for the upright young man,
For Gilgamesh, as for a god, the partner was ready.
For the goddess of lovemaking, the bed was made,
Gilgamesh was to join with the girl that night.

Enkidu approached him,
They met in the public street.
Enkidu blocked the door to the wedding with his foot,
Not allowing Gilgamesh to enter.
They grappled each other, holding fast like wrestlers,
They shattered the doorpost, the wall shook.
Gilgamesh and Enkidu grappled each other,
Holding fast like wrestlers,
They shattered the doorpost, the wall shook!
They grappled each other at the door to the wedding,
They fought in the street, the public square.
It was Gilgamesh who knelt for the pin, his foot on the ground.
His fury abated, he turned away.
After he turned away,
Enkidu said to him, to Gilgamesh:

> As one unique did your mother bear you,
> The wild cow of the ramparts, Ninsun,
> Exalted you above the most valorous of men!
> Enlil has granted you kingship over the people.

They kissed each other and made friends.

[*Gilgamesh speaks.*]

> Enkidu has neither father nor mother,
> His hair was growing freely,
> He was born in the steppe.

Enkidu stood still, listening to what he said,
He shuddered and sat down.
Tears filled his eyes,
He was listless, his strength turned to weakness.
They clasped each other,
They joined hands.

Gilgamesh made ready to speak,
Saying to Enkidu:

> Why are your eyes full of tears,
> Why are you listless, your strength turned to weakness?

Enkidu said to him, to Gilgamesh:

> Cries of sorrow, my friend, have cramped my muscles,
> Woe has entered my heart.

Gilgamesh made ready to speak,
Saying to Enkidu:

There dwells in the forest the fierce monster Humbaba,
You and I shall kill him
And wipe out something evil from the land.

Enkidu made ready to speak,
Saying to Gilgamesh:

My friend, I knew that country
When I roamed with the wild beasts.
The forest is sixty double leagues in every direction,
Who can go into it?
Humbaba's cry is the roar of a deluge,
His maw is fire, his breath is death.
Why do you want to do this?
The haunt of Humbaba is a hopeless quest.

Gilgamesh made ready to speak,
Saying to Enkidu:

I must go up the mountain forest,
I must cut a cedar tree
That cedar must be big enough
To make whirlwinds when it falls.

Enkidu made ready to speak,
Saying to Gilgamesh:

How shall the likes of us go to the forest of cedars, my friend?
In order to safeguard the forest of cedars,
Enlil has appointed him to terrify the people,
Enlil has destined him seven fearsome glories.[9]
That journey is not to be undertaken,
That creature is not to be looked upon.
The guardian of [. . .], the forest of cedars,
Humbaba's cry is the roar of a deluge,
His maw is fire, his breath is death.
He can hear rustling in the forest for sixty double leagues.
Who can go into his forest?
Adad is first and Humbaba is second.
Who, even among the gods, could attack him?
In order to safeguard the forest of cedars,
Enlil has appointed him to terrify the people,
Enlil has destined him seven fearsome glories.
Besides, whosoever enters his forest is struck down by disease.

9. It was believed that divine beings were surrounded by an awe-inspiring radiance. In the older versions of *Gilgamesh*, this radiance was considered removable, like garments or jewelry.

Gilgamesh made ready to speak,
Saying to Enkidu:

Why, my friend, do you raise such unworthy objections?
Who, my friend, can go up to heaven?
The gods dwell forever in the sun,
People's days are numbered,
Whatever they attempt is a puff of air.
Here you are, even you, afraid of death,
What has become of your bravery's might?
I will go before you,
You can call out to me, "Go on, be not afraid!"
If I fall on the way, I'll establish my name:
"Gilgamesh, who joined battle with fierce Humbaba," they'll say.

You were born and grew up on the steppe,
When a lion sprang at you, you knew what to do.
Young men fled before you

You speak unworthily,
How you pule! You make me ill.
I must set my hand to cutting a cedar tree,
I must establish eternal fame.
Come, my friend, let's both be off to the foundry,
Let them cast axes such as we'll need.

Off they went to the craftsmen,
The craftsmen, seated around, discussed the matter.
They cast great axes,
Axe blades weighing 180 pounds each they cast.
They cast great daggers,
Their blades were 120 pounds each,
The cross guards of their handles thirty pounds each.
They carried daggers worked with thirty pounds of gold,
Gilgamesh and Enkidu bore ten times sixty pounds each.

Gilgamesh spoke to the elders of ramparted Uruk:

Hear me, O elders of ramparted Uruk,
The one of whom they speak
I, Gilgamesh, would see!
The one whose name resounds across the whole world,
I will hunt him down in the forest of cedars.
I will make the land hear
How mighty is the scion of Uruk.
I will set my hand to cutting a cedar,
An eternal name I will make for myself!

The elders of ramparted Uruk arose,
They responded to Gilgamesh with their advice:

You are young, Gilgamesh, your feelings carry you away,
You are ignorant of what you speak, flightiness has taken you,

You do not know what you are attempting.
We have heard of Humbaba, his features are grotesque,
Who is there who could face his weaponry?
He can hear rustling in the forest for sixty double leagues.
Who can go into it?
Humbaba's cry is the roar of a deluge,
His maw is fire, his breath is death.
Adad is first and Humbaba is second.
Who, even among the gods, could attack him?
In order to safeguard the forest of cedars,
Enlil has appointed him to terrify the people,
Enlil has destined him seven fearsome glories.
Besides, whosoever enters his forest is struck down by disease.

When Gilgamesh heard the speech of his counselors,
He looked at his friend and laughed:

Now then, my friend, do you say the same:
"I am afraid to die"?

Tablet III

The elders spoke to him, saying to Gilgamesh:

Come back safely to Uruk's haven,
Trust not, Gilgamesh, in your strength alone,
Let your eyes see all, make your blow strike home.
He who goes in front saves his companion,
He who knows the path protects his friend.
Let Enkidu walk before you,
He knows the way to the forest of cedars,
He has seen battle, been exposed to combat.
Enkidu will protect his friend, safeguard his companion,
Let him return, to be a grave husband.[1]
We in our assembly entrust the king to you,
On your return, entrust the king again to us.

Gilgamesh made ready to speak,
Saying to Enkidu:

Come, my friend, let us go to the sublime temple,
To go before Ninsun, the great queen.
Ninsun the wise, who is versed in all knowledge,
Will send us on our way with good advice.

1. "Grave husband" plays on the words for "bride" and "interment" (grave); the phrase seems to portend Enkidu's death.

Clasping each other, hand in hand,
Gilgamesh and Enkidu went to the sublime temple,
To go before Ninsun, the great queen.
Gilgamesh came forward and entered before her:

O Ninsun, I have taken on a noble quest,
I travel a distant road, to where Humbaba is,
To face a battle unknown,
To mount a campaign unknown.
Give me your blessing, that I may go on my journey,
That I may indeed see your face safely again,
That I may indeed reenter joyfully the gate of ramparted Uruk,
That I may indeed return to hold the festival for the new year,
That I may indeed celebrate the festival for the new year twice over.
May that festival be held in my presence, the fanfare sound!
May their drums resound before you!

Ninsun the wild cow heard them out with sadness,
The speeches of Gilgamesh, her son, and Enkidu.
Ninsun entered the bathhouse seven times,
She bathed herself in water with tamarisk and soapwort.[2]
She put on a garment as beseemed her body,
She put on an ornament as beseemed her breast,
She set [. . .] and donned her tiara.
She climbed the stairs, mounted to the roof terrace,
She set up an incense offering to Shamash.
She made the offering, to Shamash she raised her hands in prayer:

Why did you endow my son Gilgamesh with a restless heart?
Now you have moved him to travel
A distant road, to where Humbaba is,
To face a battle unknown,
To mount an expedition unknown.
Until he goes and returns,
Until he reaches the forest of cedars,
Until he has slain fierce Humbaba,
And wipes out from the land the evil thing you hate,
In the day, when you traverse the sky,
May Aya,[3] your bride, not fear to remind you,
"Entrust him to the watchmen of the night."

While Gilgamesh journeys to the forest of cedars,
May the days be long, may the nights be short,
May his loins be girded, his arms strong!
At night, let him make a camp for sleeping,
Let him make a shelter to fall asleep in.
May Aya, your bride, not fear to remind you,

2. A medicinal plant used in cleansing and magic.
3. Goddess of dawn and wife of Shamash, the sun god, often called upon in prayers to intercede with her husband.

When Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and Humbaba meet,
Raise up for his sake, O Shamash, great winds against Humbaba,
South wind, north wind, east wind, west wind, moaning wind,
Blasting wind, lashing wind, contrary wind, dust storm,
Demon wind, freezing wind, storm wind, whirlwind:
Raise up thirteen winds to blot out Humbaba's face,
So he cannot charge forward, cannot retreat,
Then let Gilgamesh's weapons defeat Humbaba.
As soon as your own [radiance] flares forth,
At that very moment heed the man who reveres you.
May your swift mules [. . .] you,
A comfortable seat, a bed is laid for you,
May the gods, your brethren, serve you your favorite foods,
May Aya, the great bride, dab your face with the fringe of her spotless garment.

Ninsun the wild cow made a second plea to Shamash:

O Shamash, will not Gilgamesh [. . .] the gods for you?
Will he not share heaven with you?
Will he not share tiara and scepter with the moon?
Will he not act in wisdom with Ea in the depths?
Will he not rule the human race with Irnina?[4]
Will he not dwell with Ningishzida[5] in the Land of No Return?

[*Ninsun apparently inducts Enkidu into the staff of her temple.*]

After Ninsun the wild cow had made her plea,
Ninsun the wild cow, knowing and wise, who understands everything,
She extinguished the incense, [she came down from the roof terrace],
She summoned Enkidu to impart her message:

Mighty Enkidu, though you are no issue of my womb,
Your little ones shall be among the devotees of Gilgamesh,
The priestesses, votaries, cult women of the temple.

She placed a token around Enkidu's neck:

As the priestesses take in a foundling,
And the daughters of the gods bring up an adopted child,
I herewith take Enkidu, as my adopted son,
may Gilgamesh treat him well.

His dignitaries stood by, wishing him well,
In a crowd, the young men of Uruk ran along behind him,

4. Another name for Ishtar and a local form of the goddess.

5. Literally "Lord of the Upright Tree," a netherworld deity.

While his dignitaries made obeisance to him:

Come back safely to Uruk's haven!
Trust not, Gilgamesh, in your strength alone,
Let your eyes see all, make your blow strike home.
He who goes in front saves his companion,
He who knows the path protects his friend.
Let Enkidu walk before you,
He knows the way to the forest of cedars.
He has seen battle, been exposed to combat.
Enkidu will protect his friend, safeguard his companion,
Let him return, to be a grave husband.
We in our assembly entrust the king to you,
On your return, entrust the king again to us.

The elders hailed him,
Counseled Gilgamesh for the journey:

Trust not, Gilgamesh, in your own strength,
Let your vision be clear, take care of yourself.
Let Enkidu go ahead of you,
He has seen the road, has traveled the way.
He knows the ways into the forest
And all the tricks of Humbaba.
He who goes first safeguards his companion,
His vision is clear, he protects himself.
May Shamash help you to your goal,
May he disclose to you what your words propose,
May he open for you the barred road,
Make straight the pathway to your tread,
Make straight the upland to your feet.
May nightfall bring you good tidings,
May Lugalbanda stand by you in your cause.
In a trice accomplish what you desire,
Wash your feet in the river of Humbaba whom you seek.
When you stop for the night, dig a well,
May there always be pure water in your waterskin.[6]
You should libate cool water to Shamash
And be mindful of Lugalbanda.

Tablet IV

At twenty double leagues they took a bite to eat,
At thirty double leagues they made their camp,
Fifty double leagues they went in a single day,
A journey of a month and a half in three days.
They approached Mount Lebanon.
Towards sunset they dug a well,
Filled their waterskin with water.

6. Travelers carried drinking water in leather bags.

Gilgamesh went up onto the mountain,
He poured out flour for an offering, saying.

O mountain, bring me a propitious dream!

Enkidu made Gilgamesh a shelter for receiving dreams,
A gust was blowing, he fastened the door.
He had him lie down in a circle of flour,
And spreading out like a net, Enkidu lay down in the doorway.
Gilgamesh sat there, chin on his knee.
Sleep, which usually steals over people, fell upon him.
In the middle of the night he awoke,
Got up and said to his friend:

My friend, did you not call me? Why am I awake?
Did you not touch me? Why am I disturbed?
Did a god not pass by? Why does my flesh tingle?
My friend, I had a dream,
And the dream I had was very disturbing.

The one born in the steppe,
Enkidu explained the dream to his friend:

My friend, your dream is favorable,
The dream is very precious as an omen.
My friend, the mountain you saw is Humbaba,
We will catch Humbaba and kill him,
Then we will throw down his corpse on the field of battle.
Further, at dawn the word of Shamash will be in our favor.

At twenty double leagues they took a bite to eat,
At thirty double leagues they made their camp,
Fifty double leagues they went in a single day,
A journey of a month and a half in three days.
They approached Mount Lebanon.
Towards sunset they dug a well,
They filled their waterskin with water.
Gilgamesh went up onto the mountain,
He poured out flour for an offering, saying:

O mountain, bring me a propitious dream!

Enkidu made Gilgamesh a shelter for receiving dreams,
A gust was blowing, he fastened the door.
He had him lie down in a circle of flour,
And spreading out like a net, Enkidu lay down in the doorway.
Gilgamesh sat there, chin on his knee.
Sleep, which usually steals over people, fell upon him.
In the middle of the night he awoke,

Got up and said to his friend:

My friend, did you not call me? Why am I awake?
Did you not touch me? Why am I disturbed?
Did a god not pass by? Why does my flesh tingle?
My friend, I had a second dream,
And the dream I had was very disturbing.
A mountain was in my dream, an enemy.
It threw me down, pinning my feet,
A fearsome glare grew ever more intense.
A certain young man, handsomest in the world, truly handsome he was,
He pulled me out from the base of the mountain,
He gave me water to drink and eased my fear,
He set my feet on the ground again.

The one born in the steppe,
Enkidu explained the dream to his friend:

My friend, your dream is favorable,
The dream is very precious as an omen.
My friend, we will go [. . .]
The strange thing was Humbaba,
Was not the mountain, the strange thing, Humbaba?
Come then, banish your fear.

At twenty double leagues they took a bite to eat,
At thirty double leagues they made their camp,
Fifty double leagues they went in a single day,
A journey of a month and a half in three days.
They approached Mount Lebanon.
Towards sunset they dug a well,
They filled their waterskin with water.
Gilgamesh went up onto the mountain,
He poured out flour as an offering, saying:

O mountain, bring me a propitious dream!

Enkidu made Gilgamesh a shelter for receiving dreams,
A gust was blowing, he fastened the door.
He had him lie down in a circle of flour,
And spreading out like a net, Enkidu lay down in the doorway.
Gilgamesh sat there, chin on his knee.
Sleep, which usually steals over people, fell upon him.
In the middle of the night he awoke,
Got up and said to his friend:

My friend, did you not call me? Why am I awake?
Did you not touch me? Why am I disturbed?
Did a god not pass by? Why does my flesh tingle?
My friend, I had a third dream,
And the dream I had was very disturbing.

The heavens cried out, the earth was thundering,
Daylight faded, darkness fell,
Lightning flashed, fire shot up,
The flames burgeoned, spewing death.
Then the glow was dimmed, the fire was extinguished,
The burning coals that were falling turned to ashes.
You who were born in the steppe, let us discuss it.

Enkidu [explained], helped him accept his dream,
Saying to Gilgamesh:

[*Enkidu's explanation is mostly lost, but perhaps it was that the volcanolike explosion was Humbaba, who flared up, then died.*]

Humbaba, like a god [. . .]
[. . .] the light flaring [. . .]
We will be victorious over him.
Humbaba aroused our fury,
we will prevail over him.
Further, at dawn the word of Shamash will be in our favor.

At twenty double leagues they took a bite to eat,
At thirty double leagues they made their camp.
Fifty double leagues they went in a single day,
A journey of a month and a half in three days.
They approached Mount Lebanon.[7]
Towards sunset they dug a well,
They filled their waterskin with water.
Gilgamesh went up onto the mountain,
He poured out flour as an offering, saying:

O mountain, bring me a propitious dream!

Enkidu made Gilgamesh a shelter for receiving dreams,
A gust was blowing, he fastened the door.
He had him lie down in a circle of flour,
And spreading out like a net, Enkidu lay down in the doorway.
Gilgamesh sat there, chin on his knee.
Sleep, which usually steals over people, fell upon him.
In the middle of the night he awoke,

My friend, did you not call me? Why am I awake?
Did you not touch me? Why am I disturbed?
Did a god not pass by? Why does my flesh tingle?
My friend, I had a [fourth] dream,
The dream I had was very disturbing.
My friend, I saw a fourth dream,
More terrible than the other three.

7. Mountain ranges along the Mediterranean coast of present-day Lebanon.

I saw the lion-headed monster-bird Anzu[8] in the sky.
He began to descend upon us, like a cloud.
He was terrifying, his appearance was horrible!
His maw was fire, his breath death.

[*Enkidu explains the fourth dream.*]

The lion-headed monster-bird Anzu who descended upon us, like a cloud,
Who was terrifying, whose appearance was horrible,
Whose maw was fire, whose breath was death,
Whose dreadful aura frightens you.
The young man you saw was mighty Shamash.

[*It is not clear how many dreams there were in all though one version refers to five. A poorly preserved manuscript of an old version includes the following dream that could be inserted here, as portions of it are fulfilled in Tablet* VI.]

I was grasping a wild bull of the steppe!
As it bellowed, it split the earth,
It raised clouds of dust, blotting out the sky.
I crouched down before it,
It seized my hands, pinioned my arms.
Someone pulled me out,
He stroked my cheeks, he gave me to drink from his waterskin.

[*Enkidu explains the dream.*]

It is the god, my friend, to whom we go,
The wild bull was no enemy at all,
The wild bull you saw is Shamash, the protector,
He will take our hands in need.
The one who gave you water to drink from his waterskin
Is your god who proclaims your glory, Lugalbanda.
We should rely on one another,
We will accomplish together a deed unheard of in the land.

[*Something has happened to discourage Gilgamesh, perhaps an unfavorable oracle. Shamash comes to their aid with timely advice, just before they hear Humbaba's cry.*]

[Before Shamash his tears flowed down]:

Remember, stand by me, hear [my prayer],
Gilgamesh, scion of [ramparted Uruk]!

8. Monstrous bird with the head of a lion. He appears in a mythological story, where he steals power from the god Enlil but is defeated in battle by Enlil's son Ninurta.

Shamash heard what he said,
From afar a warning voice called to him from the sky:

Hurry, confront him, do not let him go off into the forest,
Do not let him enter the thicket!
He has not donned all of his seven fearsome glories,
One he has on, six he has left off!

They charged forward like wild bulls.
He let out a single bloodcurdling cry,
The guardian of the forest shrieked aloud,
Humbaba was roaring like thunder.

Gilgamesh made ready to speak,
Said to Enkidu:

Humbaba [. . .]
We cannot confront him separately.

Gilgamesh spoke to him, said to Enkidu:

My friend, why do we raise such unworthy objections?
Have we not crossed all the mountains?
The end of the quest is before us.
My friend knows battle,
You rubbed on herbs, you did not fear death,
Your battle cry should be dinning like a drum!
Let the paralysis leave your arm, let weakness quit your knees,
Take my hand, my friend, let us walk on together!
Your heart should be urging you to battle.
Forget about death,
He who marches first, protects himself,
Let him keep his comrade safe!
Those two will have established fame down through the ages.

The pair reached the edge of the forest,
They stopped their talk and stood there.

Tablet V

They stood at the edge of the forest,
They gazed at the height of the cedars,
They gazed at the way into the forest.
Where Humbaba would walk, a path was made,
Straight were the ways and easy the going.
They saw the cedar mountain, dwelling of the gods, sacred to the goddess Irnina.
On the slopes of that mountain, the cedar bears its abundance,
Agreeable is its shade, full of pleasures.
The undergrowth is tangled, the [thicket] interwoven.

[*In older versions, they begin to cut trees and Humbaba hears the noise. In the standard version, they meet Humbaba first.*]

Humbaba made ready to speak, saying to Gilgamesh:

How well-advised they are, the fool Gilgamesh and the yokelman!
Why have you come here to me?
Come now, Enkidu, small-fry, who does not know his father,
Spawn of a turtle or tortoise, who sucked no mother's milk!
I used to see you when you were younger but would not go near you.
Had I killed the likes of you, would I have filled my belly?
You have brought Gilgamesh before me,
You stand there, a barbarian foe!
I should cut off your head, Gilgamesh, throat and neck,
I should let cawing buzzard, screaming eagle, and vulture feed
on your flesh.

Gilgamesh made ready to speak, saying to Enkidu:

My friend, Humbaba's features have grown more grotesque,
We strode up like heroes to vanquish him.

Enkidu made ready to speak, saying to Gilgamesh:

Why, my friend, do you raise such unworthy objections?
How you pule! You make me ill.
Now, my friend, this has dragged on long enough.
The time has come to pour the copper into the mold.
Will you take another hour to blow the bellows,
An hour more to let it cool?
To launch the flood weapon, to wield the lash,
Retreat not a foot, you must not turn back,
Let your eyes see all, let your blow strike home!

[*In the combat with Humbaba, the rift valley of Lebanon is formed by their circling feet.*]

He struck the ground to confront him.
At their heels the earth split apart,
As they circled, the ranges of Lebanon were sundered!
The white clouds turned black,
Death rained down like fog upon them.
Shamash raised the great winds against Humbaba,
South wind, north wind, east wind, west wind, moaning wind,
Blasting wind, lashing wind, contrary wind, dust storm,
Demon wind, freezing wind, storm wind, whirlwind:
The thirteen winds blotted out Humbaba's face,
He could not charge forward, he could not retreat.
Then Gilgamesh's weapons defeated Humbaba.

Humbaba begged for life, saying to Gilgamesh:

You were once a child, Gilgamesh, you had a mother who bore you,
You are the offspring of Ninsun the wild cow.
You grew up to fulfill the oracle of Shamash, lord of the mountain:
"Gilgamesh, scion of Uruk, is to be king."

O Gilgamesh, spare my life!
Let me dwell here for you [as your . . .],
Say however many trees you [require . . .],
For you I will guard the myrtle wood [. . .].

Enkidu made ready to speak, saying to Gilgamesh:

My friend! Do not listen to what Humbaba says,
Do not heed his entreaties!

[*Humbaba is speaking to Enkidu.*]

You know the lore of my forest,
And you understand all I have to say.
I might have lifted you up, dangled you from a twig at the entrance to my forest,
I might have let cawing buzzard, screaming eagle, and vulture feed on your flesh.
Now then, Enkidu, mercy is up to you,
Tell Gilgamesh to spare my life!

Enkidu made ready to speak, saying to Gilgamesh:

My friend! Humbaba is guardian of the forest of cedars,
Finish him off for the kill, put him out of existence.
Humbaba is guardian of the forest of cedars,
Finish him off for the kill, put him out of existence,
Before Enlil the foremost one hears of this!
The great gods will become angry with us,
Enlil in Nippur, Shamash in Larsa.[9]
Establish your reputation for all time:
"Gilgamesh, who slew Humbaba."

May the pair of them never reach old age!
May Gilgamesh and Enkidu come across no graver friend to bank on![1]

9. Nippur and Larsa are cities in Babylonia with important temples to Enlil and Shamash, respectively.

1. This is one of the elaborate, sometimes obscure wordplays in *Gilgamesh*. In Humbaba's curse, *cross* sounds like *friend* and *bank* echoes *grave*, so that the giant's words can mean either "May they not cross water safely to the opposite bank" or "May they not find a friend to rely on."

[*An old version contains the following exchange between Gilgamesh and Enkidu concerning the seven fearsome glories of Humbaba.*]

Gilgamesh said to Enkidu:

Now, my friend, let us go on to victory!
The glories will be lost in the confusion,
The glories will be lost and the brightness will [. . .].

Enkidu said to him, to Gilgamesh:

My friend, catch the bird and where will its chicks go?
Let us search out the glories later,
They will run around in the grass like chicks.
Strike him again, then kill his retinue.

[*Gilgamesh kills Humbaba. In some versions he has to strike multiple blows before the monster falls.*]

Gilgamesh heeded his friend's command,
He raised the axe at his side,
He drew the sword at his belt.
Gilgamesh struck him on the neck,
Enkidu, his friend, [. . .].
They pulled out [. . .] as far as the lungs,
He tore out the [. . .],
He forced the head into a cauldron.
[. . .] in abundance fell on the mountain,
He struck him, Humbaba the guardian, down to the ground.
His blood [. . .]
For two leagues the cedars [. . .].
He killed the glories with him.
He slew the monster, guardian of the forest,
At whose cry the mountains of Lebanon trembled,
At whose cry all the mountains quaked.
He slew the monster, guardian of the forest,
He trampled on the broken [. . .],
He struck down the seven glories.
The battle net [. . .], the sword weighing eight times sixty pounds,
He took the weight of ten times sixty pounds upon him,
He forced his way into the forest,
He opened the secret dwelling of the supreme gods.
Gilgamesh cut down the trees,
Enkidu chose the timbers.
Enkidu made ready to speak, said to Gilgamesh:

You killed the guardian by your strength,
Who else could cut through this forest of trees?
My friend, we have felled the lofty cedar,
Whose crown once pierced the sky.
I will make a door six times twelve cubits high, two times twelve cubits wide,

One cubit shall be its thickness,
Its hinge pole, ferrule, and pivot box shall be unique.[2]
Let no stranger approach it, may only a god go through.
Let the Euphrates bring it to Nippur,
Nippur, the sanctuary of Enlil.
May Enlil be delighted with you,
May Enlil rejoice over it!

They lashed together a raft
Enkidu embarked
And Gilgamesh [. . .] the head of Humbaba.

Tablet VI

He washed his matted locks, cleaned his head strap,
He shook his hair down over his shoulders.
He threw off his filthy clothes, he put on clean ones,
Wrapping himself in a cloak, he tied on his sash,
Gilgamesh put on his kingly diadem.
The princess Ishtar coveted Gilgamesh's beauty:

Come, Gilgamesh, you shall be my bridegroom!
Give, oh give me of your lusciousness!
You shall be my husband and I shall be your wife.
I will ready for you a chariot of lapis and gold,
With golden wheels and fittings of gemstones,
You shall harness storm demons as if they were giant mules.
Enter our house amidst fragrance of cedar,
When you enter our house,
The splendid exotic doorsill shall do you homage,
Kings, nobles, and princes shall kneel before you,
They shall bring you gifts of mountain and lowland as tribute.
Your goats shall bear triplets, your ewes twins,
Your pack-laden donkey shall overtake the mule,
Your horses shall run proud before the wagon,
Your ox in the yoke shall have none to compare!

Gilgamesh made ready to speak,
Saying to the princess Ishtar:
What shall I give you if I take you to wife?
Shall I give you a headdress for your person, or clothing?
Shall I give you bread or drink?
Shall I give you food, worthy of divinity?
Shall I give you drink, worthy of queenship?
What would I get if I marry you?
You are a brazier that goes out when it freezes,

2. Mesopotamian doors did not use hinges but were made of a panel attached to a post. It was this post, or "hinge pole," that rotated when the door was opened or closed, sometimes on a piece of metal, or "ferrule," at the bottom. The top of the post was cased or enclosed so the hinge pole would not slip off its pivot point.

A flimsy door that keeps out neither wind nor draught,
A palace that crushes a warrior,
A mouse that gnaws through its housing,
Tar that smears its bearer,
Waterskin that soaks its bearer,
Weak stone that undermines a wall,
Battering ram that destroys the wall for an enemy,
Shoe that pinches its wearer!
Which of your lovers lasted forever?
Which of your heroes went up to heaven?
Come, I call you to account for your lovers:
He who had jugs of cream on his shoulders and [. . .] on his arm,
For Dumuzi,[3] your girlhood lover,
You ordained year after year of weeping.
You fell in love with the brightly colored roller bird,
Then you struck him and broke his wing.
In the woods he sits crying "My-wing!"
You fell in love with the lion, perfect in strength,
Then you dug for him ambush pits, seven times seven.
You fell in love with the wild stallion, eager for the fray,
Whip, goad, and lash you ordained for him,
Seven double leagues of galloping you ordained for him,
You ordained that he muddy his water when he drinks,
You ordained perpetual weeping for his mother, divine Silili.
You fell in love with the shepherd, keeper of herds,
Who always set out cakes baked in embers for you,
Slaughtered kids for you every day.
You struck him and turned him into a wolf,
His own shepherd boys harry him off,
And his own hounds snap at his heels!
You fell in love with Ishullanu,[4] your father's gardener,
Who always brought you baskets of dates,
Who daily made your table splendid.
You wanted him, so you sidled up to him:
"My Ishullanu, let's have a taste of your vigor!
Bring out your member, touch our sweet spot!"
Ishullanu said to you,
"Me? What do you want of me?
Hath my mother not baked? Have I not eaten?
Shall what I taste for food be insults and curses?
In the cold, is my cover to be the touch of a reed?"
When you heard what he said,
You struck him and turned him into a scarecrow,
You left him stuck in his own garden patch,
His well sweep goes up no longer, his bucket does not descend.

3. Shepherd god. He was a youthful lover of Ishtar, who let him be taken to the netherworld when she had to provide a substitute for herself.

4. According to a Sumerian myth, Ishtar seduced a gardener named Ishullanu whom she then sought to kill.

As for me, now that you've fallen in love with me, you will treat me
like them!
When Ishtar heard this,
Ishtar was furious and went up to heaven,
Ishtar went sobbing before Anu, her father,
Before Antum, her mother, her tears flowed down:

Father, Gilgamesh has said outrageous things about me,
Gilgamesh's been spouting insults about me,
Insults and curses against me!

Anu made ready to speak,
Saying to the princess Ishtar:

Well now, did you not provoke the king, Gilgamesh,
And so Gilgamesh spouted insults about you,
Insults and curses against you?

Ishtar made ready to speak,
Saying to Anu, her father:

Well then, Father, pretty please, the Bull of Heaven,
So I can kill Gilgamesh on his home ground.
If you don't give me the Bull of Heaven,
I'll strike [. . .] to its foundation,
I'll raise up the dead to devour the living,
The dead shall outnumber the living!

Anu made ready to speak,
Saying to the princess Ishtar:

If you insist on the Bull of Heaven from me,
Let the widow of Uruk gather seven years of chaff,
Let the farmer of Uruk raise seven years of hay.

Ishtar made ready to speak,
Saying to Anu, her father:

The widow of Uruk has gathered seven years of chaff,
The farmer of Uruk has raised seven years of hay.
With the Bull of Heaven's fury I will kill him!

When Anu heard what Ishtar said,
He placed the lead rope of the Bull of Heaven in her hand,
Ishtar led the Bull of Heaven away.

When it reached Uruk,
It dried up the groves, reedbeds, and marshes,
It went down to the river, it lowered the river by seven cubits.
At the bull's snort, a pit opened up,
One hundred young men of Uruk fell into it.
At its second snort, a pit opened up,
Two hundred young men of Uruk fell into it.

At its third snort, a pit opened up,
Enkidu fell into it, up to his middle.
Enkidu jumped out and seized the bull by its horns,
The bull spewed its foam in his face,
Swished dung at him with the tuft of its tail.
Enkidu made ready to speak,
Saying to Gilgamesh:

I have seen, my friend, the strength of the Bull of Heaven,
So knowing its strength, I know how to deal with it.
I will get around the strength of the Bull of Heaven,
I will circle behind the Bull of Heaven,
I will grab it by the tuft of its tail,
I will set my feet on its [. . .],
Then you, like a strong, skillful slaughterer,
Thrust your dagger between neck, horn, and tendon!

Enkidu circled behind the Bull of Heaven,
He grabbed it by the tuft of its tail,
He set his feet on its [. . .],
And Gilgamesh, like a strong, skillful slaughterer,
Thrust his dagger between neck, horn, and tendon!

After they had killed the Bull of Heaven,
They ripped out its heart and set it before Shamash.
They stepped back and prostrated themselves before Shamash,
Then the two comrades sat down beside each other.
Ishtar went up on the wall of ramparted Uruk,
She writhed in grief, she let out a wail:

That bully Gilgamesh who demeaned me, he's killed the Bull of Heaven!

When Enkidu heard what Ishtar said,
He tore off the bull's haunch and flung it at her:

If I could vanquish you, I'd turn you to this,
I'd drape the guts beside you!

Ishtar convened the cult women, prostitutes, harlots,
She set up a lament over the haunch of the bull.

Gilgamesh summoned all the expert craftsmen,
The craftsmen marveled at the massiveness of its horns,
They were molded from thirty pounds each of lapis blue,
Their outer shell was two thumbs thick!
Six times three hundred quarts of oil, the capacity of both,
He donated to anoint the statue of his god, Lugalbanda.
He brought them inside and hung them up in his master bedroom.

They washed their hands in the Euphrates,
Clasping each other, they came away,

Paraded through the streets of Uruk.
The people of Uruk crowded to look upon them.
Gilgamesh made a speech
To the servant-women of his palace:

Who is the handsomest of young men?
Who is the most glorious of males?
Gilgamesh is the handsomest of young men!
Gilgamesh is the most glorious of males!
She at whom we flung the haunch in our passion,
Ishtar, she has no one in the street to satisfy her.

Gilgamesh held a celebration in his palace.
The young men slept stretched out on the couch of night.
While Enkidu slept, he had a dream.

Tablet VII

My friend, why were the great gods in council?

Enkidu raised,
spoke to the door as if it were human:[5]

O bosky door, insensate,
Which lends an ear that is not there,
I sought your wood for twenty double leagues,
Till I beheld a lofty cedar.
No rival had your tree in the forest.
Six times twelve cubits was your height, two times twelve cubits was your width,
One cubit was your thickness,
Your hinge pole, ferrule, and pivot box were unique.
I made you, I brought you to Nippur, I set you up.
Had I known, O door, how you would requite me,
And that this your goodness towards me [. . .],
I would have raised my axe, I would have chopped you down,
I would have floated you as a raft to the temple of Shamash,
I would have set up the lion-headed monster-bird Anzu at its gate,
Because Shamash heard my plea
He gave me the weapon to kill Humbaba.
Now then, O door, it was I who made you, it was I who set you up.
I will tear you out!
May a king who shall arise after me despise you,
May he alter my inscription and put on his own![6]

5. Because there is a gap in the text, it is unclear why Enkidu curses the door so violently. Since it is made of cedar wood from the forest, it might embody the adventure that results in Enkidu's death.

6. These concluding words of Enkidu's curse of the cedar door parody traditional Mesopotamian inscriptions affixed to monuments, which called the wrath of the gods upon anyone who damaged, removed, or usurped the monument.

He tore out his hair, threw away his clothing.

When he heard out this speech, swiftly, quickly his tears flowed down,
When Gilgamesh heard out Enkidu's speech, swiftly, quickly, his tears flowed down.

Gilgamesh made ready to speak, saying to Enkidu:

My friend, you are rational but you say strange things,
Why, my friend, does your heart speak strange things?
The dream is a most precious omen, though very frightening,
Your lips are buzzing like flies.
Though frightening, the dream is a precious omen.
The gods left mourning for the living,
The dream left mourning for the living,
The dream left woe for the living!
Now I shall go pray to the great gods,
I will be assiduous to my own god, I will pray to yours,
To Anu, father of the gods,
To Enlil, counselor of the gods,
I will make your image of gold beyond measure.
You can pay no silver, no gold can you [. . .],
What Enlil commanded is not like the [. . .] of the gods,
What he commanded, he will not retract.
The verdict he has scrivened, he will not reverse nor erase.
People often die before their time.

At the first glimmer of dawn,
Enkidu lifted his head, weeping before Shamash,
Before the sun's fiery glare, his tears flowed down:

I have turned to you, O Shamash, on account of the precious days of my life,
As for that hunter, the entrapping-man,
Who did not let me get as much life as my friend,
May that hunter not get enough to make him a living.
Make his profit loss, cut down his take,
May his income, his portion evaporate before you,
Any wildlife that enters his traps, make it go out the window!

When he had cursed the hunter to his heart's content,
He resolved to curse the harlot Shamhat:

Come, Shamhat, I will ordain you a destiny,
A destiny that will never end, forever and ever!
I will lay on you the greatest of all curses,
Swiftly, inexorably, may my curse come upon you.
May you never make a home that you can enjoy,
May you never caress a child of your own,
May you never be received among decent women.
May beer sludge impregnate your lap,
May the drunkard bespatter your best clothes with vomit.

May your swain prefer beauties,
May he pinch you like potter's clay.
May you get no alabaster,
May no table to be proud of be set in your house.
May the nook you enjoy be a doorstep,
May the public crossroads be your dwelling,
May vacant lots be your sleeping place,
May the shade of a wall be your place of business.
May brambles and thorns flay your feet,
May toper and sober slap your cheek.[7]
May riffraff of the street shove each other in your brothel,
May there be a brawl there.
When you stroll with your cronies, may they catcall after you.
May the builder not keep your roof in repair,
May the screech owl roost in the ruins of your home.
May a feast never be held where you live.

May your purple finery be expropriated,
May filthy underwear be what you are given,
Because you diminished me, an innocent,
Yes me, an innocent, you wronged me in my steppe.

When Shamash heard what he said,
From afar a warning voice called to him from the sky:

O Enkidu, why curse Shamhat the harlot,
Who fed you bread, fit for a god,
Who poured you beer, fit for a king,
Who dressed you in a noble garment,
And gave you handsome Gilgamesh for a comrade?
Now then, Gilgamesh is your friend and blood brother!
Won't he lay you down in the ultimate resting place?
In a perfect resting place he will surely lay you down!
He will settle you in peaceful rest in that dwelling sinister,
Rulers of the netherworld will do you homage.
He will have the people of Uruk shed bitter tears for you,
He will make the pleasure-loving people burdened down for you,
And, as for him, after your death, he will let his hair grow matted,
He will put on a lion skin and roam the steppe.

When Enkidu heard the speech of the valiant Shamash,
His raging heart was calmed,
his fury was calmed:

Come, Shamhat, I will ordain you a destiny,
My mouth that cursed you, let it bless you instead.
May governors and dignitaries fall in love with you,
May the man one double league away slap his thighs in excitement,
May the man two double leagues away let down his hair.

7. That is, may anyone hit her, drunk or not.

May the subordinate not hold back from you, but open his trousers,
May he give you obsidian, lapis, and gold,
May ear bangles be your gift.
To the man whose wealth is secure, whose granaries are full,
May Ishtar of the gods introduce you,
For your sake may the wife and mother of seven be abandoned.

Enkidu was sick at heart,
He lay there lonely.
He told his friend what weighed on his mind:

My friend, what a dream I had last night!
Heaven cried out, earth made reply,
I was standing between them.
There was a certain man, his face was somber,
His face was like that of the lion-headed monster-bird Anzu,
His hands were the paws of a lion,
His fingernails were the talons of an eagle.
He seized me by the hair, he was too strong for me,
I hit him but he sprang back like a swing rope,
He hit me and capsized me like a raft.
Like a wild bull he trampled me,
"Save me, my friend!"—but you did not save me!
He trussed my limbs like a bird's.
Holding me fast, he took me down to the house of shadows,
the dwelling of hell,
To the house whence none who enters comes forth,
On the road from which there is no way back,
To the house whose dwellers are deprived of light,
Where dust is their fare and their food is clay.
They are dressed like birds in feather garments,
Yea, they shall see no daylight, for they abide in darkness.
Dust lies thick on the door and bolt,
When I entered that house of dust,
I saw crowns in a heap,
There dwelt the kings, the crowned heads who once ruled the land,
Who always set out roast meat for Anu and Enlil,
Who always set out baked offerings, libated cool water from
waterskins.
In that house of dust I entered,
Dwelt high priests and acolytes,
Dwelt reciters of spells and ecstatics,[8]
Dwelt the anointers of the great gods,
Dwelt old King Etana[9] and the god of the beasts,
Dwelt the queen of the netherworld, Ereshkigal.[1]

8. Reciters of spells were learned scholars, while prophets, or "ecstatics," were people who spoke in a trance without having studied their words. Ecstatics were sometimes social outcasts or people without education.

9. Ancient king who was said to have flown up to heaven on an eagle to find a plant that would help him and his wife have a child.

1. Queen of the netherworld and jealous sister of the goddess Ishtar.

Belet-seri,[2] scribe of the netherworld, was kneeling before her,
She was holding a tablet and reading to her,
She lifted her head, she looked at me:
"Who brought this man?"
I who went with you through all hardships,
Remember me, my friend, do not forget what I have undergone!
My friend had a dream needing no interpretation.

The day he had the dream, his strength ran out.
Enkidu lay there one day, a second day he was ill,
Enkidu lay in his bed, his illness grew worse.
A third day, a fourth day, Enkidu's illness grew worse.
A fifth, a sixth, a seventh,
An eighth, a ninth, a tenth day,
Enkidu's illness grew worse.
An eleventh, a twelfth day,
Enkidu lay in his bed.
He called for Gilgamesh, roused him with his cry:

My friend laid on me the greatest curse of all!
I feared the battle but will die in my bed,
My friend, he who falls quickly in battle is glorious.

[*Enkidu dies.*]

Tablet VIII

At the first glimmer of dawn,
Gilgamesh lamented his friend:

Enkidu, my friend, your mother the gazelle,
Your father the wild ass brought you into the world,
Onagers raised you on their milk,
And the wild beasts taught you all the grazing places.
The pathways, O Enkidu, to the forest of cedars,
May they weep for you, without falling silent, night and day.
May the elders of the teeming city, ramparted Uruk, weep for you,
May the crowd who blessed our departure weep for you.
May the heights of highland and mountain weep for you,
May the lowlands wail like your mother.
May the forest of balsam and cedar weep for you,
Which we slashed in our fury.
May bear, hyena, panther, leopard, deer, jackal,
Lion, wild bull, gazelle, ibex, the beasts and creatures of the steppe,
weep for you.[3]
May the sacred Ulaya River[4] weep for you, along whose banks we once strode erect,
May the holy Euphrates weep for you,
Whose waters we libated from waterskins.

2. Literally "Lady of the Steppe," scribe and bookkeeper in the netherworld.
3. This refers to an episode that does not appear in the extant portions of the epic.
4. Karun River in the southwest of modern Iran.

May the young men of ramparted Uruk weep for you,
Who watched us slay the Bull of Heaven in combat.
May the plowman weep for you at his plow,
Who extolled your name in the sweet song of harvest home.
May they weep for you, of the teeming city of Uruk,
Who exalted your name at the first [. . .].
May the shepherd and herdsman weep for you,
Who held the milk and buttermilk to your mouth,
May the nurse weep for you,
Who treated your rashes with butter.
May the harlot weep for you,
Who massaged you with sweet-smelling oil.
Like brothers may they weep for you,
Like sisters may they tear out their hair for your sake.
Enkidu, as your father, your mother,
I weep for you bitterly.

Hear me, O young men, listen to me,
Hear me, O elders of Uruk, listen to me!
I mourn my friend Enkidu,
I howl as bitterly as a professional keener.
Oh for the axe at my side, oh for the safeguard by my hand,
Oh for the sword at my belt, oh for the shield before me,
Oh for my best garment, oh for the raiment that pleased me most!
An ill wind rose against me and snatched it away!
O my friend, swift wild donkey, mountain onager, panther of the steppe,
O Enkidu my friend, swift wild donkey, mountain onager, panther of the steppe!
You who stood by me when we climbed the mountain,
Seized and slew the Bull of Heaven,
Felled Humbaba who dwelt in the forest of cedar,
What now is this sleep that has seized you?
Come back to me! You hear me not.

But, as for him, he did not raise his head.
He touched his heart but it was not beating.
Then he covered his friend's face, like a bride's.
He hovered round him like an eagle,
Like a lioness whose cubs are in a pitfall,
He paced to and fro, back and forth,
Tearing out and hurling away the locks of his hair,
Ripping off and throwing away his fine clothes like something foul.

At the first glimmer of dawn,
Gilgamesh sent out a proclamation to the land:

Hear ye, blacksmith, lapidary,[5] metalworker, goldsmith, jeweler!
Make an image of my friend,
Such as no one ever made of his friend!

5. Gem carver.

I will lay you down in the ultimate resting place,
In a perfect resting place I will surely lay you down.
I will settle you in peaceful rest in that dwelling sinister,
Rulers of the netherworld will do you homage.
I will have the people of Uruk shed bitter tears for you,
I will make the pleasure-loving people burdened down for you,
And, as for me, now that you are dead, I will let my hair grow matted,
I will put on a lion skin and roam the steppe!

He slaughtered fatted cattle and sheep, heaped them high for his friend,
They carried off all the meat for the rulers of the netherworld.
He displayed in the open for Ishtar, the great queen,
Saying: "May Ishtar, the great queen, accept this,
May she welcome my friend and walk at his side."

He displayed in the open for Ninshuluhha,[6] housekeeper of the netherworld,
Saying: "May Ninshuluhha, housekeeper of the crowded netherworld, accept this,
May she welcome my friend and walk at his side.
May she intercede on behalf of my friend, lest he lose courage."
The obsidian knife with lapis fitting,
The sharpening stone pure-whetted with Euphrates water,
He displayed in the open for Bibbu, meat carver of the netherworld,
Saying: "May Bibbu, meat carver of the crowded netherworld, accept this,
Welcome my friend and walk at his side."

Tablet IX

Gilgamesh was weeping bitterly for Enkidu, his friend,
As he roamed the steppe:

Shall I not die too? Am I not like Enkidu?
Oh woe has entered my vitals!
I have grown afraid of death, so I roam the steppe.
Having come this far, I will go on swiftly
Towards Utanapishtim,[7] son of Ubar-Tutu.
I have reached mountain passes at night.
I saw lions, I felt afraid,
I looked up to pray to the moon,
To the moon, beacon of the gods, my prayers went forth:
"Keep me safe!"

6. A netherworld deity in charge of ritual washing.
7. Akkadian name for the sage who, together with his wife, survived the Great Flood and became immortal. He resembles the biblical Noah and his name literally means "He Found Life." He is called "Ziusudra" in Sumerian and "Ullu" in Hittite.

[At night] he lay down, then awoke from a dream.
He rejoiced to be alive.
He raised the axe at his side,
He drew the sword from his belt,
He dropped among them like an arrow,
He struck the lions, scattered, and killed them.

[*Gilgamesh approaches the scorpion monsters who guard the gateway to the sun's passage through the mountains.*]

The twin peaks are called Mashum.
When he arrived at the twin peaks called Mashum,
Which daily watch over the rising and setting of the sun,
Whose peaks thrust upward to the vault of heaven,
Whose flanks reach downward to hell,
Where scorpion monsters guard its gateway,
Whose appearance is dreadful, whose venom is death,
Their fear-inspiring radiance spreads over the mountains,
They watch over the sun at its rising and setting,
When Gilgamesh saw their fearsomeness and terror,
He covered his face.
He took hold of himself and approached them.

The scorpion monster called to his wife:

This one who has come to us, his body is flesh of a god!

The wife of the scorpion monster answered him:

Two-thirds of him is divine, one-third is human.

The scorpion monster, the male one, called out,
To Gilgamesh, scion of the gods, he said these words:

Who are you who have come this long way?

[*The scorpion monster apparently warns Gilgamesh that he has only twelve hours to get through the sun's tunnel before the sun enters it at nightfall.*]

The scorpion monster made ready to speak, spoke to him,
Said to Gilgamesh, [scion of the gods]:

Go, Gilgamesh!

He opened to him the gateway of the mountain,
Gilgamesh entered the mountain.
He heeded the words of the scorpion monster,
He set out on the way of the sun.
When he had gone one double hour,

Dense was the darkness, no light was there,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone two double hours,
Dense was the darkness, no light was there,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone three double hours,
Dense was the darkness, no light was there,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone four double hours,
Dense was the darkness, no light was there,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone five double hours,
Dense was the darkness, no light was there,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone six double hours,
Dense was the darkness, no light was there,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone seven double hours,
Dense was the darkness, there was no light,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone eight double hours, he rushed ahead,
Dense was the darkness, there was no light,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone nine double hours, he felt the north wind,
Dense was the darkness, there was no light,
It would not let him look behind him.
When he had gone ten double hours,
The time for the sun's entry was drawing near.
When he had gone eleven double hours, just one double hour was left,
When he had gone twelve double hours, he came out ahead of the sun!
He had run twelve double hours, bright light still reigned!
He went forward, seeing the trees of the gods.
The carnelian bore its fruit,
Like bunches of grapes dangling, lovely to see,
The lapis bore foliage,
Fruit it bore, a delight to behold.

[*The fragmentary lines that remain continue the description of the wonderful grove.*]

Tablet X

[*Gilgamesh approaches the tavern of Siduri, a female tavern keeper who lives at the end of the earth. This interesting personage is unknown outside this poem, nor is it clear who her clientele might be in such a remote spot.*]

Siduri[8] the tavern keeper, who dwells at the edge of the sea,
For her was wrought the cuprack,[9] for her the brewing vat of gold,
Gilgamesh made his way towards her,
He was clad in a skin,
He had flesh of gods in his body.
Woe was in his vitals,
His face was like a traveler's from afar.
The tavern keeper eyed him from a distance,
Speaking to herself, she said these words,
She debated with herself:

This no doubt is a slaughterer of wild bulls!
Why would he make straight for my door?

At the sight of him the tavern keeper barred her door,
She barred her door and mounted to the roof terrace.
But he, Gilgamesh, put his ear to the door,
He lifted his chin.

Gilgamesh said to her, to the tavern keeper:

Tavern keeper, when you saw me why did you bar your door,
Bar your door and mount to the roof terrace?
I will strike down your door, I will shatter your doorbolt,

Gilgamesh said to her, to the tavern keeper:

I am Gilgamesh, who killed the guardian,
Who seized and killed the bull that came down from heaven,
Who felled Humbaba who dwelt in the forest of cedars,
Who killed lions at the mountain passes.

The tavern keeper said to him, to Gilgamesh:

If you are indeed Gilgamesh, who killed the guardian,
Who felled Humbaba who dwelt in the forest of cedars,
Who killed lions at the mountain passes,
Who seized and killed the bull that came down from heaven,
Why are your cheeks emaciated, your face cast down,
Your heart wretched, your features wasted,
Woe in your vitals,
Your face like a traveler's from afar,

8. Literally, "Maiden" in Hurrian, a language of northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia that was not related to Sumerian or Akkadian.

9. Some Mesopotamian drinking cups were conical, with pointed bottoms, so they were set on a wooden rack to hold them up.

Your features weathered by cold and sun,
Why are you clad in a lion skin, roaming the steppe?

Gilgamesh said to her, to the tavern keeper:

My cheeks would not be emaciated, nor my face cast down,
Nor my heart wretched nor my features wasted,
Nor would there be woe in my vitals,
Nor would my face be like a traveler's from afar,
Nor would my features be weathered by cold and sun,
Nor would I be clad in a lion skin, roaming the steppe,
But for my friend, swift wild donkey, mountain onager, panther of the steppe,
But for Enkidu, swift wild donkey, mountain onager, panther of the steppe,
My friend whom I so loved, who went with me through every hardship,
Enkidu, whom I so loved, who went with me through every hardship,
The fate of mankind has overtaken him.
Six days and seven nights I wept for him,
I would not give him up for burial,
Until a worm fell out of his nose.
I was frightened.
I have grown afraid of death, so I roam the steppe,
My friend's case weighs heavy upon me.
A distant road I roam over the steppe,
My friend Enkidu's case weighs heavy upon me!
A distant road I roam over the steppe,
How can I be silent? How can I hold my peace?
My friend whom I loved is turned into clay,
Enkidu, my friend whom I loved, is turned into clay!
Shall I too not lie down like him,
And never get up forever and ever?

[*An old version adds the following episode.*]

After his death I could find no life,
Back and forth I prowled like a bandit in the steppe.
Now that I have seen your face, tavern keeper,
May I not see that death I constantly fear!

The tavern keeper said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Gilgamesh, wherefore do you wander?
The eternal life you are seeking you shall not find.
When the gods created mankind,
They established death for mankind,
And withheld eternal life for themselves.
As for you, Gilgamesh, let your stomach be full,
Always be happy, night and day.
Make every day a delight,
Night and day play and dance.

Your clothes should be clean,
Your head should be washed,
You should bathe in water,
Look proudly on the little one holding your hand,
Let your mate be always blissful in your loins,
This, then, is the work of mankind.

Gilgamesh said to her, to the tavern keeper:

What are you saying, tavern keeper?
I am heartsick for my friend.
What are you saying, tavern keeper?
I am heartsick for Enkidu!

[*The standard version resumes.*]

Gilgamesh said to her, to the tavern keeper:

Now then, tavern keeper, what is the way to Utanapishtim?
What are its signs? Give them to me.
Give, oh give me its signs!
If need be, I'll cross the sea,
If not, I'll roam the steppe.

The tavern keeper said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Gilgamesh, there has never been a place to cross,
There has been no one from the dawn of time who could ever cross this sea.
The valiant Shamash alone can cross this sea,
Save for the sun, who could cross this sea?
The crossing is perilous, highly perilous the course,
And midway lie the waters of death, whose surface is impassable.
Suppose, Gilgamesh, you do cross the sea,
When you reach the waters of death, what will you do?
Yet, Gilgamesh, there is Ur-Shanabi,[1] Utanapishtim's boatman,
He has the Stone Charms with him as he trims pine trees in the forest.
Go, show yourself to him,
If possible, cross with him, if not, then turn back.

[*Gilgamesh advances and without preamble attacks Ur-Shanabi and smashes the Stone Charms.*]

When Gilgamesh heard this,
He raised the axe at his side,
He drew the sword at his belt,
He crept forward, went down towards them,
Like an arrow he dropped among them,
His battle cry resounded in the forest.
When Ur-Shanabi saw the shining [. . .],

1. Servant of Utanapishtim, ferryman who crosses the ocean and the waters of death.

He raised his axe, he trembled before him,
But he, for his part, struck his head [. . .] Gilgamesh,
He seized his arm [. . .] his chest.
And the Stone Charms, the protection . . . of the boat,
Without which no one crosses the waters of death,
He smashed them and threw them into the broad sea,
Into the channel he threw them, his own hands foiled him,
He smashed them and threw them into the channel!

Gilgamesh said to him, to Ur-Shanabi:

Now then, Ur-Shanabi, what is the way to Utanapishtim?
What are its signs? Give them to me,
Give, oh give me its signs!
If need be, I'll cross the sea,
If not, I'll roam the steppe.

Ur-Shanabi said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Your own hands have foiled you, Gilgamesh,
You have smashed the Stone Charms, you have thrown them into the channel.

[*An old version has the following here.*]

The Stone Charms, Gilgamesh, are what carry me,
Lest I touch the waters of death.
In your fury you have smashed them,
The Stone Charms, they are what I had with me to make the crossing!

Gilgamesh, raise the axe in your hand,
Go down into the forest, cut twice sixty poles each five times twelve cubits long,
Dress them, set on handguards,
Bring them to me.

When Gilgamesh heard this,
He raised the axe at his side,
He drew the sword at his belt,
He went down into the forest, cut twice sixty poles each five times twelve cubits long,
He dressed them, set on handguards,
He brought them to him.
Gilgamesh and Ur-Shanabi embarked in the boat,
They launched the boat, they embarked upon it.
A journey of a month and a half they made in three days!
Ur-Shanabi reached the waters of death,
Ur-Shanabi said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Stand back, Gilgamesh! Take the first pole,
Your hand must not touch the waters of death,
Take the second, the third, the fourth pole, Gilgamesh,
Take the fifth, sixth, and seventh pole, Gilgamesh,

Take the eighth, ninth, and tenth pole, Gilgamesh,
Take the eleventh and twelfth pole, Gilgamesh.

With twice sixty Gilgamesh had used up the poles.
Then he, for his part, took off his belt,
Gilgamesh tore off his clothes from his body,
Held high his arms for a mast.
Utanapishtim was watching him from a distance,
Speaking to himself, he said these words,
He debated to himself:

Why have the Stone Charms, belonging to the boat, been smashed,
And one not its master embarked thereon?
He who comes here is no man of mine.

[*In the fragmentary lines that follow, Gilgamesh lands at Utanapishtim's wharf and questions him.*]

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Why are your cheeks emaciated, your face cast down,
Your heart wretched, your features wasted,
Woe in your vitals,
Your face like a traveler's from afar,
Your features weathered by cold and sun,
Why are you clad in a lion skin, roaming the steppe?

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim:

My cheeks would not be emaciated, nor my face cast down,
Nor my heart wretched, nor my features wasted,
Nor would there be woe in my vitals,
Nor would my face be like a traveler's from afar,
Nor would my features be weathered by cold and sun,
Nor would I be clad in a lion skin, roaming the steppe,

But for my friend, swift wild donkey, mountain onager, panther of the steppe,
But for Enkidu, my friend, swift wild donkey, mountain onager, panther of the steppe,
He who stood by me as we ascended the mountain,
Seized and killed the bull that came down from heaven,
Felled Humbaba who dwelt in the forest of cedars,
Killed lions at the mountain passes,
My friend whom I so loved, who went with me through every hardship,
Enkidu, whom I so loved, who went with me through every hardship,
The fate of mankind has overtaken him.
Six days and seven nights I wept for him,
I would not give him up for burial,
Until a worm fell out of his nose.
I was frightened.
I have grown afraid of death, so I roam the steppe,

My friend's case weighs heavy upon me.
A distant road I roam over the steppe,
My friend Enkidu's case weighs heavy upon me!
A distant path I roam over the steppe,
How can I be silent? How can I hold my peace?
My friend whom I loved is turned into clay,
Enkidu, my friend whom I loved, is turned into clay!
Shall I too not lie down like him,
And never get up, forever and ever?

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim:

So it is to go find Utanapishtim, whom they call the "Distant One,"
I traversed all lands,
I came over, one after another, wearisome mountains,
Then I crossed, one after another, all the seas.
Too little sweet sleep has smoothed my countenance,
I have worn myself out in sleeplessness,
My muscles ache for misery,
What have I gained for my trials?
I had not reached the tavern keeper when my clothes were worn out,
I killed bear, hyena, lion, panther, leopard, deer, ibex, wild beasts
of the steepe,
I ate their meat, I [. . .] their skins.
Let them close behind me the doors of woe,
Let them seal them with pitch and tar.

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Why, O Gilgamesh, did you prolong woe,
You who are formed of the flesh of gods and mankind,
You for whom the gods acted like fathers and mothers?
When was it, Gilgamesh, you [. . .] to a fool?

You strive ceaselessly, what do you gain?
When you wear out your strength in ceaseless striving,
When you torture your limbs with pain,
You hasten the distant end of your days.
Mankind, whose descendants are snapped off like reeds in a canebrake!
The handsome young man, the lovely young woman, death [. . .]
No one sees death,
No one sees the face of death,
No one hears the voice of death,
But cruel death cuts off mankind.
Do we build a house forever?
Do we make a home forever?
Do brothers divide an inheritance forever?
Do disputes prevail in the land forever?
Do rivers rise in flood forever?
Dragonflies drift downstream on a river,
Their faces staring at the sun,

Then, suddenly, there is nothing.
The sleeper and the dead, how alike they are!
They limn not death's image,
No one dead has ever greeted a human in this world.
The supreme gods, the great gods, being convened,
Mammetum, she who creates destinies, ordaining destinies with them,
They established death and life,
They did not reveal the time of death.

Tablet XI

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

As I look upon you, Utanapishtim,
Your limbs are not different, you are just as I am.
Indeed, you are not different at all, you are just as I am!
Yet your heart is drained of battle spirit,
You lie flat on your back, your arm idle.
You then, how did you join the ranks of the gods and find eternal life?

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

I will reveal to you, O Gilgamesh, a secret matter,
And a mystery of the gods I will tell you.
The city Shuruppak,[2] a city you yourself have knowledge of,
Which once was set on the bank of the Euphrates,
That aforesaid city was ancient and gods once were within it.
The great gods resolved to send the deluge,
Their father Anu was sworn,
The counselor the valiant Enlil,
Their throne-bearer Ninurta,
Their canal-officer Ennugi,[3]
Their leader Ea was sworn with them.
He repeated their plans to the reed fence:
"Reed fence, reed fence, wall, wall!
Listen, O reed fence! Pay attention, O wall!
O Man of Shuruppak, son of Ubar-Tutu,
Wreck house, build boat,
Forsake possessions and seek life,
Belongings reject and life save!
Take aboard the boat seed of all living things.
The boat you shall build,
Let her dimensions be measured out:
Let her width and length be equal,
Roof her over like the watery depths."
I understood full well, I said to Ea, my lord:
"Your command, my lord, exactly as you said it,

2. City in Babylonia reputed to antedate the flood, long abandoned at the time the epic was written.
3. Minor deity in charge of water courses.

I shall faithfully execute.
What shall I answer the city, the populace, and the elders?"
Ea made ready to speak,
Saying to me, his servant:
"So, you shall speak to them thus:
'No doubt Enlil dislikes me,
I shall not dwell in your city.
I shall not set my foot on the dry land of Enlil,
I shall descend to the watery depths and dwell with my lord Ea.
Upon you he shall shower down in abundance,
A windfall of birds, a surprise of fishes,
He shall pour upon you a harvest of riches,
In the morning cakes in spates,
In the evening grains in rains.'"

At the first glimmer of dawn,
The land was assembling at the gate of Atrahasis:[4]
The carpenter carried his axe,
The reed cutter carried his stone,
The old men brought cordage,
The young men ran around,
The wealthy carried the pitch,
The poor brought what was needed.
In five days I had planked her hull:
One full acre was her deck space,
Ten dozen cubits, the height of each of her sides,
Ten dozen cubits square, her outer dimensions.[5]
I laid out her structure, I planned her design:
I decked her in six,
I divided her in seven,
Her interior I divided in nine.
I drove the water plugs into her,
I saw to the spars and laid in what was needful.
Thrice thirty-six hundred measures of pitch I poured in the oven,
Thrice thirty-six hundred measures of tar I poured out inside her.
Thrice thirty-six hundred measures basket-bearers brought
aboard for oil,
Not counting the thirty-six hundred measures of oil that the offering
consumed,
And the twice thirty-six hundred measures of oil that the boatbuilders
made off with.
For the builders I slaughtered bullocks,
I killed sheep upon sheep every day,
Beer, ale, oil, and wine
I gave out to the workers like river water,
They made a feast as on New Year's Day,

4. Literally, "Super-wise," another Akkadian name of the immortal flood hero Utanapishtim.
5. The proportions of the boat suggest standard measures of both ship building and the construction of ziggurats, pyramidal temple towers.

I dispensed ointment with my own hand.
By the setting of Shamash,[6] the ship was completed.
Since boarding was very difficult,
They brought up gangplanks, fore and aft,
They came up her sides two-thirds of her height.
Whatever I had I loaded upon her:
What silver I had I loaded upon her,
What gold I had I loaded upon her,
What living creatures I had I loaded upon her,
I sent up on board all my family and kin,
Beasts of the steppe, wild animals of the steppe, all types of skilled craftsmen I sent up on board.
Shamash set for me the appointed time:
"In the morning, cakes in spates,
In the evening, grains in rains,
Go into your boat and caulk the door!"
That appointed time arrived,
In the morning cakes in spates,
In the evening grains in rains,
I gazed upon the face of the storm,
The weather was dreadful to behold!
I went into the boat and caulked the door.
To the caulker of the boat, to Puzur-Amurri the boatman,
I gave over the edifice, with all it contained.

At the first glimmer of dawn,
A black cloud rose above the horizon.
Inside it Adad[7] was thundering,
While the destroying gods Shullat and Hanish[8] went in front,
Moving as an advance force over hill and plain.
Errakal[9] tore out the mooring posts of the world,
Ninurta[1] came and made the dikes overflow.
The supreme gods held torches aloft,
Setting the land ablaze with their glow.
Adad's awesome power passed over the heavens,
Whatever was light was turned into darkness.
He flooded the land, he smashed it like a clay pot!
For one day the storm wind blew,
Swiftly it blew, the flood came forth,
It passed over the people like a battle,
No one could see the one next to him,

6. The references to Shamash here and below suggest that in some now lost version of this story, Shamash, the god of justice, rather than Ea, the god of wisdom, warned Utanapishtim of the flood and told him how much time he had to build his ship. This substitution of one god for the other might be due to Shamash's role in the epic as protector of Gilgamesh. In the oldest account of the Babylonian story of the flood, Ea sets a timing device, apparently a water clock, to inform Utanapishtim of the time left before the onset of the deluge.
7. God of thunder.
8. Gods of destructive storms.
9. God of death.
1. God of war.

The people could not recognize one another in the downpour.
The gods became frightened of the deluge,
They shrank back, went up to Anu's highest heaven.
The gods cowered like dogs, crouching outside.
Ishtar screamed like a woman in childbirth,
And sweet-voiced Belet-ili[2] wailed aloud:
"Would that day had come to naught,
When I spoke up for evil in the assembly of the gods!
How could I have spoken up for evil in the assembly of the gods,
And spoken up for battle to destroy my people?
It was I myself who brought my people into the world,
Now, like a school of fish, they choke up the sea!"
The supreme gods were weeping with her,
The gods sat where they were, weeping,
Their lips were parched, taking on a crust.
Six days and seven nights
The wind continued, the deluge and windstorm leveled the land.
When the seventh day arrived,
The windstorm and deluge left off their battle,
Which had struggled, like a woman in labor.
The sea grew calm, the tempest stilled, the deluge ceased.

I looked at the weather, stillness reigned,
And the whole human race had turned into clay.
The landscape was flat as a rooftop.
I opened the hatch, sunlight fell upon my face.
Falling to my knees, I sat down weeping,
Tears running down my face.
I looked at the edges of the world, the borders of the sea,
At twelve times sixty double leagues the periphery emerged.
The boat had come to rest on Mount Nimush,[3]
Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not letting it move.
One day, a second day Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not letting it move.
A third day, a fourth day Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not letting it move.
A fifth day, a sixth day Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not letting it move.

When the seventh day arrived,
I brought out a dove and set it free.
The dove went off and returned,
No landing place came to its view, so it turned back.
I brought out a swallow and set it free,
The swallow went off and returned,
No landing place came to its view, so it turned back.

2. A goddess of birth, who in one version of the flood story was said to have collaborated with the god Ea in creating the human race.

3. High peak sometimes identified with Pir Omar Gudrun in Kurdistan. Landing place of the ark in the Gilgamesh epic.

I brought out a raven and set it free,
The raven went off and saw the ebbing of the waters.
It ate, preened, left droppings, did not turn back.
I released all to the four directions,
I brought out an offering and offered it to the four directions.
I set up an incense offering on the summit of the mountain,
I arranged seven and seven cult vessels,
I heaped reeds, cedar, and myrtle in their bowls.
The gods smelled the savor,
The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded round the sacrificer like flies.

As soon as Belet-ili arrived,
She held up the great fly-ornaments that Anu had made
in his ardor:
"O gods, these shall be my lapis necklace, lest I forget,
I shall be mindful of these days and not forget, not ever!
The gods should come to the incense offering,
But Enlil should not come to the incense offering,
For he, irrationally, brought on the flood,
And marked my people for destruction!"
As soon as Enlil arrived,
He saw the boat, Enlil flew into a rage,
He was filled with fury at the gods:
"Who came through alive? No man was to survive destruction!"
Ninurta made ready to speak,
Said to the valiant Enlil:
"Who but Ea could contrive such a thing?
For Ea alone knows every artifice."

Ea made ready to speak,
Said to the valiant Enlil:
"You, O valiant one, are the wisest of the gods,
How could you, irrationally, have brought on the flood?
Punish the wrongdoer for his wrongdoing,
Punish the transgressor for his transgression,
But be lenient, lest he be cut off,
Bear with him, lest he [. . .].
Instead of your bringing on a flood,
Let the lion rise up to diminish the human race!
Instead of your bringing on a flood,
Let the wolf rise up to diminish the human race!
Instead of your bringing on a flood,
Let famine rise up to wreak havoc in the land!
Instead of your bringing on a flood,
Let pestilence rise up to wreak havoc in the land!
It was not I who disclosed the secret of the great gods,
I made Atrahasis have a dream and so he heard the secret
of the gods.
Now then, make some plan for him."
Then Enlil came up into the boat,

Leading me by the hand, he brought me up too.
He brought my wife up and had her kneel beside me.
He touched our brows, stood between us to bless us:
"Hitherto Utanapishtim has been a human being,
Now Utanapishtim and his wife shall become like us gods.
Utanapishtim shall dwell far distant at the source of the rivers."
Thus it was that they took me far distant and had me dwell at the source of the rivers.
Now then, who will convene the gods for your sake,
That you may find the eternal life you seek?
Come, come, try not to sleep for six days and seven nights.

As he sat there on his haunches,
Sleep was swirling over him like a mist.
Utanapishtim said to her, to his wife:

Behold this fellow who seeks eternal life!
Sleep swirls over him like a mist.

[*Utanapishtim's wife, taking pity on Gilgamesh, urges her husband to awaken him and let him go home*].

His wife said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

Do touch him that the man may wake up,
That he may return safe on the way whence he came,
That through the gate he came forth he may return to his land.

Utanapishtim said to her, to his wife:

Since the human race is duplicitous, he'll endeavor to dupe you.
Come, come, bake his daily loaves, put them one after another by his head,
Then mark the wall for each day he has slept.

She baked his daily loaves for him, put them one after another by his head,
Then dated the wall for each day he slept.
The first loaf was dried hard,
The second was leathery, the third soggy,
The crust of the fourth turned white,
The fifth was gray with mold, the sixth was fresh,
The seventh was still on the coals when he touched him, the man woke up.

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

Scarcely had sleep stolen over me,
When straightaway you touched me and roused me.

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Up with you, Gilgamesh, count your daily loaves,
That the days you have slept may be known to you.
The first loaf is dried hard,