

READINGS IN THE
WESTERN HUMANITIES

VOLUME I
REVISED PRINTING

Edited by

JULIE WILDHABER

KATHLEEN ENGELBERG

C. LANSING HAYS

Revised printing includes an extensive
introduction to each reading.

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Headnotes by

ROY T. MATTHEWS
E. DEWITT PLATT



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Preface

This collection of literary and philosophical writings is designed to accompany Roy Matthews and DeWitt Platt's *The Western Humanities*, a textbook that surveys the artistic, cultural, and intellectual heritage of Western civilization from prehistory to the present. Volume I covers ancient Mesopotamia through the Renaissance; Volume II covers the Renaissance through the twentieth century.

Our principal goal in assembling this volume has been to bring the student into contact with as many diverse and representative voices as possible. Compiling an anthology is a quixotic process; the giants of Western thought stand before us, and we, armed with computers and liberal educations, cannot force them into a modest volume without compromises. Thus, we had to make choices.

Our first choice was to include certain voices and not others. The range of Western literature and philosophy is vast, and to keep these books within manageable length we had to exclude many worthwhile writers. Our second choice was

to include particular selections and excerpts. Again, our desire for diversity and broad representation compelled us to reproduce relatively brief samples of many writers' work. We hope these samples will entice students into reading more of each of these writers.

We added headnotes to these readings to provide context for the student in order to gain a clearer picture of the importance of each selection. The headnotes were written by Roy T. Matthews and F. DeWitt Platt, the authors of the corresponding text, *The Western Humanities*, second edition.

We have been aided in selecting these writings by a number of experienced humanities faculties from around the country. We wish to thank them for their generous and thoughtful advice. Special thanks must go to Roy Matthews and DeWitt Platt for their counsel and for their superb work on *The Western Humanities*, which inspired the demand for this anthology.

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Chapter

1

Prehistory and Near Eastern Civilizations

from *Inanna:* *Queen of Heaven and Earth*

From the Great Above to the Great Below

Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth illustrates the problems of understanding Mesopotamian literature. Like other stories from this civilization, it probably was told thousands of times before it was ever transcribed onto a clay tablet. Its survival is more a matter of chance than the result of a deliberate act; and what remains may be only a small fragment of a long and complex tale. Adding to the difficulty in understanding this story is that its purpose, whether as a moral lesson or as pure entertainment, cannot be fully determined. Since Mesopotamian civilizations borrowed tales from one another over long periods of time, stories played a variety of roles across kingdoms and centuries and often found their way into other folktales. Furthermore, Akkadian, the language of Mesopotamian literature, differs so much from English that the precise meaning of words is often impossible to determine; the more subtle aspects of language, such as puns or alliterations, are lost in either the translation or our lack of knowledge of ancient vocabularies.

Within the past thirty years, however, the discovery of more cuneiform-inscribed tablets, the intense study and scholarship brought to deciphering and interpreting the findings, and the willingness of scholars to view artifacts in new ways have all enhanced the understanding of the stories. Also, scholars now know much more about myths and their meaning and appreciate that myths can be interpreted in various ways.

Reading the Selection

This passage from the full text describes the stages Inanna (the goddess of love, also known as Ishtar) goes through to prepare herself for entry into the underworld, what happens to her

once she is there, and her rescue from the "Great Below." The verses that describe her dress and jewelry serve the purpose of reinforcing Inanna's power and wealth, because ordinary humans would not have worn such splendid clothes and precious beads and rings. Other verses dwell on the creative aspects of the divinities, as in the case of Enki, Inanna's father, who is known as the god of the subterranean waters and is associated with wisdom and magic; Enki, deciding to bring Inanna back from the underworld, fashions two creatures to assist in her rescue.

While some of the terms, such as *shugurra* (Inanna's crown), are able to be identified, others are not, such as *me*, a vague term whose meaning shifts according to context. For example, when Inanna gathers the seven *me* into her possession, she seems to be collecting the powers ascribed to deities that allow them to perform certain tasks. *Me* is elsewhere understood to be the powers of gods and goddesses that permit them to carry on the basic activities identified with civilization. In another story, Enki and Inanna gamble for the *me*, and she wins all of them from her father.

Inanna's journey into the lower region is a common theme found in many ancient stories. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus descends into Hades, and in Vergil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas goes into the land of the shades. In both these works, the heroes are given prophecies about the future; however, Inanna's descent appears to be more of an adventure spurred on by the goddess's own curiosity. Her explanation that she wants to attend the funeral rites for her brother-in-law obviously does not convince the Queen of the Underworld who, for whatever reason, decides that Inanna must die.

From the Great Above she opened her ear to the Great Below.

From the Great Above the goddess opened her ear to the Great Below.

From the Great Above Inanna opened her ear to the Great Below.

My Lady abandoned heaven and earth to descend to the underworld.

Inanna abandoned heaven and earth to descend to the underworld.

She abandoned her office of holy priestess to descend to the underworld.

In Uruk she abandoned her temple to descend to the underworld.

In Badtibira she abandoned her temple to descend to the underworld.

In Zabalam she abandoned her temple to descend to the underworld.

In Adab she abandoned her temple to descend to the underworld.

In Nippur she abandoned her temple to descend to the underworld.

In Kish she abandoned her temple to descend to the underworld.

In Akkad she abandoned her temple to descend to the underworld.

She gathered together the seven *me*.

She took them into her hands.

With the *me* in her possession, she prepared herself:

She placed the *shugurra*, the crown of the steppe, on her head.

She arranged the dark locks of hair across her forehead.

She tied the small lapis beads around her neck,

Let the double strand of beads fall to her breast,

And wrapped the royal robe around her body.

She daubed her eyes with ointment called "Let him come, Let him come,"

Bound the breastplate called "Come, man, come!" around her chest,

Slipped the gold ring over her wrist,

And took the lapis measuring rod and line in her hand.

Inanna set out for the underworld.

Ninshubur, her faithful servant, went with her.

Inanna spoke to her, saying:

"Ninshubur, my constant support,

My *sukkal* who gives me wise advice,

My warrior who fights by my side,

I am descending to the *kur*, to the underworld.

If I do not return,

Set up a lament for me by the ruins.

Beat the drum for me in the assembly places.

Circle the houses of the gods.

Tear at your eyes, at your mouth, at your thighs.

Dress yourself in a single garment like a beggar.

Go to Nippur, to the temple of Enlil.

When you enter his holy shrine, cry out:

'O Father Enlil, do not let your daughter

Be put to death in the underworld.

Do not let your bright silver

Be covered with the dust of the underworld.

Do not let your precious lapis

Be broken into stone for the stoneworker.

Do not let your fragrant boxwood

Be cut into wood for the woodworker.

Do not let the holy priestess of heaven

Be put to death in the underworld.'

If Enlil will not help you,
Go to Ur, to the temple of Nanna.
Weep before Father Nanna.
If Nanna will not help you,
Go to Eridu, to the temple of Enki.
Weep before Father Enki.
Father Enki, the God of Wisdom, knows the food
of life,
He knows the water of life;
He knows the secrets.
Surely he will not let me die."

Inanna continued on her way to the underworld.
Then she stopped and said:
"Go now, Ninshubur—
Do not forget the words I have commanded you."

When Inanna arrived at the outer gates of the
underworld,
She knocked loudly.

She cried out in a fierce voice:
"Open the door, gatekeeper!
Open the door, Neti!
I alone would enter!"

Neti, the chief gatekeeper of the *kur*, asked:
"Who are you?"

She answered:
"I am Inanna, Queen of Heaven,
On my way to the East."

Neti said:
"If you are truly Inanna, Queen of Heaven,
On your way to the East,
Why has your heart led you on the road
From which no traveler returns?"

Inanna answered: sister
"Because . . . of my older sister, Ereshkigal,
Her husband, Gugalanna, the Bull of Heaven,
has died.
I have come to witness the funeral rites.
Let the beer of his funeral rites be poured into
the cup.
Let it be done."

Neti spoke:
"Stay here, Inanna, I will speak to my queen.
I will give her your message."

Neti, the chief gatekeeper of the *kur*,
Entered the palace of Ereshkigal, the Queen of the
Underworld, and said:
"My queen, a maid
As tall as heaven,
As wide as the earth,

As strong as the foundations of the city wall,
Waits outside the palace gates.
She has gathered together the seven *me*.
She has taken them into her hands.
With the *me* in her possession, she has
prepared herself:

On her head she wears the *shugurra*, the crown
of the steppe.
Across her forehead her dark locks of hair are
carefully arranged.
Around her neck she wears the small lapis beads.
At her breast she wears the double strand of beads.
Her body is wrapped with the royal robe.
Her eyes are daubed with the ointment called, 'Let
him come, let him come.'
Around her chest she wears the breastplate called
'Come, man, come!'
On her wrist she wears the gold ring.
In her hand she carries the lapis measuring
rod and line."

When Ereshkigal heard this,
She slapped her thigh and bit her lip.
She took the matter into her heart and dwelt on it.
Then she spoke:

"Come, Neti, my chief gatekeeper of the *kur*,
Heed my words:
Bolt the seven gates of the underworld.
Then, one by one, open each gate a crack.
Let Inanna enter.
As she enters, remove her royal garments.
Let the holy priestess of heaven enter
bowed low." . . .

implies death
Naked and bowed low, Inanna entered the throne room.
Ereshkigal rose from her throne.
Inanna started toward the throne.
The Annuna, the judges of the underworld, surrounded her.
They passed judgment against her.

Then Ereshkigal fastened on Inanna the eye of death.
She spoke against her the word of wrath.
She uttered against her the cry of guilt.

She struck her.

Inanna was turned into a corpse,
A piece of rotting meat,
And was hung from a hook on the wall.

When, after three days and three nights, Inanna had not
returned,
Ninshubur set up a lament for her by the ruins.
She beat the drum for her in the assembly places.
She circled the houses of the gods.
She tore at her eyes; she tore at her mouth; she tore at
her thighs.
She dressed herself in a single garment like a beggar.
Alone, she set out for Nippur and the temple of Enlil. . . .

Father Enki said:

"What has happened?
What has my daughter done?
Inanna! Queen of All the Lands! Holy Priestess
of Heaven!
What has happened?
I am troubled. I am grieved."

From under his fingernail Father Enki brought forth dirt.
He fashioned the dirt into a *kurgarra*, a creature neither
male nor female.

From under the fingernail of his other hand he brought
forth dirt.

He fashioned the dirt into a *galatur*, a creature neither
male nor female.

He gave the food of life to the *kurgarra*.

He gave the water of life to the *galatur*.

Enki spoke to the *kurgarra* and *galatur*, saying:

"Go to the underworld,
Enter the door like flies.
Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld,
is moaning
With the cries of a woman about to give birth.
No linen is spread over her body.
Her breasts are uncovered.
Her hair swirls about her head like leeks.
When she cries, 'Oh! Oh! My inside!'
Cry also, 'Oh! Oh! Your inside!'
When she cries, 'Oh! Oh! My outside!'
Cry also, 'Oh! Oh! Your outside!'
The queen will be pleased.
She will offer you a gift.
Ask her only for the corpse that hangs from the
hook on the wall.
One of you will sprinkle the food of life on it.
The other will sprinkle the water of life.
Inanna will arise."

The *kurgarra* and the *galatur* heeded Enki's words.

They set out for the underworld.

Like flies, they slipped through the cracks of the gates.

They entered the throne room of the Queen of the
Underworld.

No linen was spread over her body.

Her breasts were uncovered.

Her hair swirled around her head like leeks.

Ereshkigal was moaning:

"Oh! Oh! My inside!"

They moaned:

"Oh! Oh! Your inside!"

She moaned:

"Ohhhh! Oh! My outside!"

They moaned:

"Ohhhh! Oh! Your outside!"

She groaned:

"Oh! Oh! My belly!"

They groaned:

"Oh! Oh! Your belly!"

She groaned:

"Oh! Ohhhh! My back!!"

They groaned:

"Oh! Ohhhh! Your back!!"

She sighed:

"Ah! Ah! My heart!"

They sighed:

"Ah! Ah! Your heart!"

She sighed:

"Ah! Ahhhh! My liver!"

They sighed:

"Ah! Ahhhh! Your liver!"

Ereshkigal stopped.

She looked at them.

She asked:

"Who are you,
Moaning—groaning—sighing with me?
If you are gods, I will bless you.
If you are mortals, I will give you a gift.
I will give you the water-gift, the river
in its fullness."

The *kurgarra* and *galatur* answered:

"We do not wish it."

Ereshkigal said:

"I will give you the grain-gift, the fields in harvest."

The *kurgarra* and *galatur* said:

"We do not wish it."

Ereshkigal said:

"Speak then! What do you wish?"

They answered:

"We wish only the corpse that hangs from the
hook on the wall."

Ereshkigal said:

"The corpse belongs to Inanna."

They said:

"Whether it belongs to our queen,
Whether it belongs to our king,
That is what we wish."

The corpse was given to them.

The *kurgarra* sprinkled the food of life on the corpse.

The *galatur* sprinkled the water of life on the corpse.

Inanna arose. . . .

from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

The Epic of Gilgamesh is now considered by a majority of scholars to be the oldest known epic in Western literature. This work predates Homer's the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by some 1500 years, appearing about 2200 B.C.

Like other epics, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* went through several variations before reaching its final form. It is based upon an historical figure who quickly passed over into folklore. Gilgamesh reigned as king of the Sumerian city of Uruk around 2700 B.C., and soon after his death, his ordinary experiences were turned into stories of heroic deeds and dangerous journeys. Civilizations that succeeded the Sumerians infused into the epic new episodes and characters, different sets of deities, and issues reflecting the concerns of their own time. Nonetheless, despite its evolution through various civilizations, this epic recalls similar events that appear in other cultures' histories. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the tale of a devastating flood that killed all animals and humans except those who took refuge in a boat resembles stories from other societies, in particular the biblical narrative of Noah, his family, and God.

Another reason why *The Epic of Gilgamesh* evolved from its original form was that it, like all epics, was sung long before it was written, and storytellers adapted the episodes and characters to fit their new audiences. The earliest written form of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* uncovered by archaeologists dates from about 600 B.C., a time when many Middle Eastern societies were disappearing and just before many others would fall under the influence of Greek civilization, later to become provinces of the Roman Empire.

Reading the Selection

This excerpt deals with two themes: one, that mortals cannot insult the gods and goddesses without punishment, and, two, that humans are destined to die. Ishtar, the goddess of love, attempts to seduce Gilgamesh, who spurns her overtures by recalling how she ruined other humans. Furious at Gilgamesh, Ishtar asks her father to send the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the former wildman who had become civilized and had fought Gilgamesh before becoming his close companion, kill the bull. The gods and goddesses decide that Enkidu must die for this transgression. As Enkidu lies dying, he dreams of walking through the "house of dust" where he encounters dead kings and priests and various deities. Homer and many other writers later copy this device of transporting their heroes into the world of the dead to speak with the great men and, sometimes, women of history, as a way to glorify the past and allow the characters to be told of future events by the dead.

Gilgamesh's grief over the death of Enkidu reveals the Sumerian way of death. As king, Gilgamesh orders his artisans to memorialize Enkidu with a statute—one that may very well have existed at some time in Sumerian history. Touched by Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh recognizes his own mortal nature but refuses to accept his final fate, at least not yet. Through a series of adventures, he comes close to possessing immortality only to see it stolen by a serpent—a creature often associated with cults of immortality. Saddened by this turn of events, Gilgamesh returns home to serve others and to die.

Ishtar and Gilgamesh, and the Death of Enkidu

Gilgamesh washed out his long locks and cleaned his weapons; he flung back his hair from his shoulders; he threw off his stained clothes and changed them for new. He put

on his royal robes and made them fast. When Gilgamesh had put on the crown, glorious Ishtar lifted her eyes, seeing the beauty of Gilgamesh. She said, 'Come to me Gilgamesh, and

be my bridegroom; grant me seed of your body, let me be your bride and you shall be my husband. I will harness for you a chariot of lapis lazuli and of gold, with wheels of gold and horns of copper; and you shall have mighty demons of the storm for draft-mules. When you enter our house in the fragrance of cedar-wood, threshold and throne will kiss your feet. Kings, rulers, and princes will bow down before you; they shall bring you tribute from the mountains and the plain. Your ewes shall drop twins and your goats triplets; your pack-ass shall outrun mules; your oxen shall have no rivals, and your chariot horses shall be famous far-off for their swiftness.'

Gilgamesh opened his mouth and answered glorious Ishtar, 'If I take you in marriage, what gifts can I give in return? What ointments and clothing for your body? I would gladly give you bread and all sorts of food fit for a god. I would give you wine to drink fit for a queen. I would pour out barley to stuff your granary; but as for making you my wife—that I will not. How would it go with me? Your lovers have found you like a brazier which smoulders in the cold, a backdoor which keeps out neither squall of wind nor storm, a castle which crushes the garrison, pitch that blackens the bearer, a water-skin that chafes the carrier, a stone which falls from the parapet, a battering-ram turned back from the enemy, a sandal that trips the wearer. Which of your lovers did you ever love for ever? What shepherd of yours has pleased you for all time? Listen to me while I tell the tale of your lovers. There was Tammuz, the lover of your youth, for him you decreed wailing, year after year. You loved the many-coloured roller, but still you struck and broke his wing; now in the grove he sits and cries, "kappi, kappi, my wing, my wing." You have loved the lion tremendous in strength: seven pits you dug for him, and seven. You have loved the stallion magnificent in battle, and for him you decreed whip and spur and a thong, to gallop seven leagues by force and to muddy the water before he drinks; and for his mother Silili lamentations. You have loved the shepherd of the flock; he made meal-cake for you day after day, he killed kids for your sake. You struck and turned him into a wolf; now his own herd-boys chase him away, his own hounds worry his flanks. And did you not love Ishullanu, the gardener of your father's palm-grove? He brought you baskets filled with dates without end; every day he loaded your table. Then you turned your eyes on him and said, "Dearest Ishullanu, come here to me, let us enjoy your manhood, come forward and take me, I am yours." Ishullanu answered, "What are you asking from me? My mother has baked and I have eaten; why should I come to such as you for food that is tainted and rotten? For when was a screen of rushes sufficient protection from frosts?" But when you had heard his answer you struck him. He was changed to a blind mole deep in the earth, one whose desire is always beyond his reach. And if you and I should be lovers, should not I be served in the same fashion as all these others whom you loved once?'

When Ishtar heard this she fell into a bitter rage, she went up to high heaven. Her tears poured down in front of her father Anu, and Antum her mother. She said, 'My father, Gilgamesh has heaped insults on me, he has told over all my abominable behaviour, my foul and hideous acts.' Anu opened his mouth and said, 'Are you a father of gods? Did not you quarrel with Gilgamesh the king, so now he has related your abominable behaviour, your foul and hideous acts.'

Ishtar opened her mouth and said again, 'My father, give me the Bull of Heaven to destroy Gilgamesh. Fill Gilgamesh, I say, with arrogance to his destruction; but if you refuse to give me the Bull of Heaven I will break in the doors of hell and smash the bolts; there will be confusion of people, those above with those from the lower depths. I shall bring up the dead to eat food like the living; and the hosts of dead will outnumber the living.' Anu said to great Ishtar, 'If I do what you desire there will be seven years of drought throughout Uruk when corn will be seedless husks. Have you saved grain enough for the people and grass for the cattle?' Ishtar replied. 'I have saved grain for the people, grass for the cattle; for seven years of seedless husks there is grain and there is grass enough.'

When Anu heard what Ishtar had said he gave her the Bull of Heaven to lead by the halter down to Uruk. When they reached the gates of Uruk the Bull went to the river; with his first snort cracks opened in the earth and a hundred young men fell down to death. With his second snort cracks opened and two hundred fell down to death. With his third snort cracks opened, Enkidu doubled over but instantly recovered, he dodged aside and leapt on the Bull and seized it by the horns. The Bull of Heaven foamed in his face, it brushed him with the thick of its tail. Enkidu cried to Gilgamesh, 'My friend, we boasted that we would leave enduring names behind us. Now thrust in your sword between the nape and the horns.' So Gilgamesh followed the Bull, he seized the thick of its tail, he thrust the sword between the nape and the horns and slew the Bull. When they had killed the Bull of Heaven they cut out its heart and gave it to Shamash, and the brothers rested.

But Ishtar rose up and mounted the great wall of Uruk; she sprang on to the tower and uttered a curse: 'Woe to Gilgamesh, for he has scorned me in killing the Bull of Heaven.' When Enkidu heard these words he tore out the Bull's right thigh and tossed it in her face saying, 'If I could lay my hands on you, it is this I should do to you, and lash the entrails to your side.' Then Ishtar called together her people, the dancing and singing girls, the prostitutes of the temple, the courtesans. Over the thigh of the Bull of Heaven she set up lamentation.

But Gilgamesh called the smiths and the armourers, all of them together. They admired the immensity of the horns. They were plated with lapis lazuli two fingers thick. They were thirty pounds each in weight, and their capacity in oil was six measures, which he gave to his guardian god, Lugulbanda. But he carried the horns into the palace and hung them on the wall. Then they washed their hands in Euphrates, they embraced each other and went away. They drove through the streets of Uruk where the heroes were gathered to see them, and Gilgamesh called to the singing girls, 'Who is most glorious of the heroes, who is most eminent among men?' 'Gilgamesh is the most glorious of the heroes, Gilgamesh is most eminent among men.' And now there was feasting, and celebrations and joy in the palace, till the heroes lay down saying, 'Now we will rest for the night.'

When the daylight came Enkidu got up and cried to Gilgamesh, 'Oh my brother, such a dream I had last night. Anu, Enlil, Ea and heavenly Shamash took counsel together, and Anu said to Enlil, "Because they have killed the Bull

of Heaven, and because they have killed Humbaba who guarded the Cedar Mountain one of the two must die." Then glorious Shamash answered the hero Enlil, "It was by your command they killed the Bull of Heaven, and killed Humbaba, and must Enkidu die although innocent?" Enlil flung round in rage at glorious Shamash, "You dare to say this, you who went about with them every day like one of themselves!"

So Enkidu lay stretched out before Gilgamesh; his tears ran down in streams and he said to Gilgamesh, 'O my brother, so dear as you are to me, brother, yet they will take me from you.' Again he said, 'I must sit down on the threshold of the dead and never again will I see my dear brother with my eyes.'

While Enkidu lay alone in his sickness he cursed the gate as though it was living flesh, 'You there, wood of the gate, dull and insensible, witless, I searched for you over twenty leagues until I saw the towering cedar. There is no wood like you in our land. Seventy-two cubits high and twenty-four wide, the pivot and the ferrule and the jambs are perfect. A master craftsman from Nippur has made you; but O, if I had known the conclusion! If I had known that this was all the good that would come of it, I would have raised the axe and split you into little pieces and set up here a gate of wattle instead. Ah, if only some future king had brought you here, or some god had fashioned you. Let him obliterate my name and write his own, and the curse fall on him instead of on Enkidu.'

With the first brightening of dawn Enkidu raised his head and wept before the Sun God, in the brilliance of the sunlight his tears streamed down. 'Sun God, I beseech you, about that vile Trapper, that Trapper of nothing because of whom I was to catch less than my comrade; let him catch least; make his game scarce, make him feeble, taking the smaller of every share, let his quarry escape from his nets.'

When he had cursed the Trapper to his heart's content he turned on the harlot. He was roused to curse her also. 'As for you, woman, with a great curse I curse you! I will promise you a destiny to all eternity. My curse shall come on you soon and sudden. You shall be without a roof for your commerce, for you shall not keep house with other girls in the tavern, but do your business in places fouled by the vomit of the drunkard. Your hire will be potter's earth, your thievings will be flung into the hovel, you will sit at the cross-roads in the dust of the potter's quarter, you will make your bed on the dunghill at night, and by day take your stand in the wall's shadow. Brambles and thorns will tear your feet, the drunk and the dry will strike your cheek and your mouth will ache. Let you be stripped of your purple dyes, for I too once in the wilderness with my wife had all the treasure I wished.'

When Shamash heard the words of Enkidu he called to him from heaven: 'Enkidu, why are you cursing the woman, the mistress who taught you to eat bread fit for gods and drink wine of kings? She who put upon you a magnificent garment, did she not give you glorious Gilgamesh for your companion, and has not Gilgamesh, your own brother, made you rest on a royal bed and recline on a couch at his left hand? He has made the princes of the earth kiss your feet, and now all the people of Uruk lament and wail over you. When you are dead he will let his hair grow long for your sake, he will wear a lion's pelt and wander through the desert.'

When Enkidu heard glorious Shamash his angry heart grew quiet, he called back the curse and said, 'Woman, I

promise you another destiny. The mouth which cursed you shall bless you! Kings, princes and nobles shall adore you. On your account a man though twelve miles off will clap his hand to his thigh and his hair will twitch. For you he will undo his belt and open his treasure and you shall have your desire; lapis lazuli, gold and carnelian from the heap in the treasury. A ring for your hand and a robe shall be yours. The priest will lead you into the presence of the gods. On your account a wife, a mother of seven, was forsaken.'

As Enkidu slept alone in his sickness, in bitterness of spirit he poured out his heart to his friend. 'It was I who cut down the cedar, I who levelled the forest, I who slew Humbaba and now see what has become of me. Listen, my friend, this is the dream I dreamed last night. The heavens roared, and earth rumbled back an answer; between them stood I before an awful being, the somber-faced man-bird; he had directed on me his purpose. His was a vampire face, his foot was a lion's foot, his hand was an eagle's talon. He fell on me and his claws were in my hair, he held me fast and I smothered; then he transformed me so that my arms became wings covered with feathers. He turned his stare towards me, and he led me away to the palace of Irkalla, the Queen of Darkness, to the house from which none who enters ever returns, down the road from which there is no coming back.

'There is the house whose people sit in darkness; dust is their food and clay their meat. They are clothed like birds with wings for covering, they see no light, they sit in darkness. I entered the house of dust and I saw the kings of the earth, their crowns put away for ever; rulers and princes, all those who once wore kingly crowns and ruled the world in the days of old. They who had stood in the place of the gods like Anu and Enlil, stood now like servants to fetch baked meats in the house of dust, to carry cooked meat and cold water from the water-skin. In the house of dust which I entered were high priests and acolytes, priests of the incantation and of ecstasy; there were servers of the temple, and there was Etana, that King of Kish whom the eagle carried to heaven in the days of old. I saw also Samuqan, god of cattle, and there was Ereshkigal the Queen of the Underworld; and Belit-Sheri squatted in front of her, she who is recorder of the gods and keeps the book of death. She held a tablet from which she read. She raised her head, she saw me and spoke: "Who has brought this one here?" Then I awoke like a man drained of blood who wanders alone in a waste of rushes; like one whom the bailiff has seized and his heart pounds with terror.'

Gilgamesh had peeled off his clothes, he listened to his words and wept quick tears, Gilgamesh listened and his tears flowed. He opened his mouth and spoke to Enkidu: 'Who is there in strong-walled Uruk who has wisdom like this? Strange things have been spoken, why does your heart speak strangely? The dream was marvellous but the terror was great; we must treasure the dream whatever the terror; for the dream has shown that misery comes at last to the healthy man, the end of life is sorrow.' And Gilgamesh lamented, 'Now I will pray to the great gods, for my friend had an ominous dream.'

This day on which Enkidu dreamed came to an end and he lay stricken with sickness. One whole day he lay on his bed and his suffering increased. He said to Gilgamesh, the friend on whose account he had left the wilderness, 'Once I ran for you, for the water of life, and I now have nothing.'

A second day he lay on his bed and Gilgamesh watched over him but the sickness increased. A third day he lay on his bed, he called out to Gilgamesh, rousing him up. Now he was weak and his eyes were blind with weeping. Ten days he lay and his suffering increased, eleven and twelve days he lay on his bed of pain. Then he called to Gilgamesh, 'My friend, the great goddess cursed me and I must die in shame. I shall not die like a man fallen in battle; I feared to fall, but happy is the man who falls in the battle, for I must die in shame.' And Gilgamesh wept over Enkidu. . . .

He touched his heart but it did not beat, nor did he lift his eyes again. When Gilgamesh touched his heart it did not beat. So Gilgamesh laid a veil, as one veils the bride, over his friend. He began to rage like a lion, like a lioness robbed of her whelps. This way and that he paced round the bed, he tore out his hair and strewed it around. He dragged off his splendid robes and flung them down as though they were abominations.

In the first light of dawn Gilgamesh cried out, 'I made you rest on a royal bed, you reclined on a couch at my

left hand, the princes of the earth kissed your feet. I will cause all the people of Uruk to weep over you and raise the dirge of the dead. The joyful people will stoop with sorrow; and when you have gone to the earth I will let my hair grow long for your sake, I will wander through the wilderness in the skin of a lion.' The next day also, in the first light, Gilgamesh lamented; seven days and seven nights he wept for Enkidu, until the worm fastened on him. Only then he gave him up to the earth, for the Anunnaki, the judges, had seized him.

Then Gilgamesh issued a proclamation through the land, he summoned them all, the coppersmiths, the goldsmiths, the stone-workers, and commanded them, 'Make a statue of my friend.' The statue was fashioned with a great weight of lapis lazuli for the breast and of gold for the body. A table of hard-wood was set out, and on it a bowl of carnelian filled with honey, and a bowl of lapis lazuli filled with butter. These he exposed and offered to the Sun; and weeping he went away.

The Story of the Flood

'You know the city Shurruapak, it stands on the banks of Euphrates? That city grew old and the gods that were in it were old. There was Anu, lord of the firmament, their father, and warrior Enlil their counsellor, Ninurta the helper, and Ennugi watcher over canals; and with them also was Ea. In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour. Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in council, "The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel." So the gods agreed to exterminate mankind. Enlil did this, but Ea because of his oath warned me in a dream. He whispered their words to my house of reeds, "Reed-house, reed-house! Wall, O wall, hearken reed-house, wall reflect; O man of Shurruapak, son of Ubara-Tutu; tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life, despise worldly goods and save your soul alive. Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat. These are the measurements of the barque as you shall build her: let her beam equal her length, let her deck be roofed like the vault that covers the abyss; then take up into the boat the seed of all living creatures."

'When I had understood I said to my lord, "Behold, what you have commanded I will honour and perform, but how shall I answer the people, the city, the elders?" Then Ea opened his mouth and said to me, his servant, "Tell them this: I have learnt that Enlil is wrathful against me, I dare no longer walk in his land nor live in his city; I will go down to the Gulf to dwell with Ea my lord. But on you he will rain down abundance, rare fish and shy wild-fowl, a rich

harvest-tide. In the evening the rider of the storm will bring you wheat in torrents."

'In the first light of dawn all my household gathered round me, the children brought pitch and the men whatever was necessary. On the fifth day I laid the keel and the ribs, then I made fast the planking. The ground-space was one acre, each side of the deck measured one hundred and twenty cubits, making a square. I built six decks below, seven in all, I divided them into nine sections with bulkheads between. I drove in wedges where needed, I saw to the punt-poles, and laid in supplies. The carriers brought oil in baskets, I poured pitch into the furnace and asphalt and oil; more oil was consumed in caulking, and more again the master of the board took into his stores. I slaughtered bullocks for the people and every day I killed sheep. I gave the shipwrights wine to drink as though it were river water, raw wine and red wine and oil and white wine. There was feasting then as there is at the time of the New Year's festival; I myself anointed my head. On the seventh day the boat was complete.

'Then was the launching full of difficulty; there was shifting of ballast above and below till two thirds was submerged. I loaded into her all that I had of gold and of living things, my family, my kin, the beast of the field both wild and tame, and all the craftsmen. I sent them on board, for the time that Shamash had ordained was already fulfilled when he said, "In the evening, when the rider of the storm sends down the destroying rain, enter the boat and batten her down." The time was fulfilled, the evening came, the rider of the storm sent down the rain. I looked out at the weather and it was terrible, so I too boarded the boat and battened

her down. All was now complete, the battening and the caulking; so I handed the tiller to Puzur-Amurri the steersman, with the navigation and the care of the whole boat.

'With the first light of dawn a black cloud came from the horizon; it thundered within where Adad, lord of the storm was riding. In front over hill and plain Shullat and Hanish, heralds of the storm, led on. Then the gods of the abyss rose up; Nergal pulled out the dams of the nether waters, Ninurta the war-lord threw down the dykes, and the seven judges of hell, the Annunaki, raised their torches, lighting the land with their livid flame. A stupor of despair went up to heaven when the god of the storm turned daylight to darkness, when he smashed the land like a cup. One whole day the tempest raged, gathering fury as it went, it poured over the people like the tides of battle; a man could not see his brother nor the people be seen from heaven. Even the gods were terrified at the flood, they fled to the highest heaven, the firmament of Anu; they crouched against the walls, cowering like curs. Then Ishtar the sweet-voiced Queen of Heaven cried out like a woman in travail: "Alas the days of old are turned to dust because I commanded evil; why did I command this evil in the council of all the gods? I commanded wars to destroy the people, but are they not my people, for I brought them forth? Now like the spawn of fish they float in the ocean." The great gods of heaven and of hell wept, they covered their mouths.

'For six days and six nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world, tempest and flood raged together like warring hosts. When the seventh day dawned the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stilled; I looked at the face of the world and there was silence, all mankind was turned to clay. The surface of the sea stretched as flat as a roof-top; I opened a hatch and the light fell on my face. Then I bowed low, I sat down and I wept, the tears streamed down my face, for on every side was the waste of water. I looked for land in vain, but fourteen leagues distant there appeared a mountain, and there the boat grounded; on the mountain of Nisir the boat held fast, she held fast and did not budge. One day she held, and a second day on the mountain of Nisir she held fast and did not budge. A third day, and a fourth day she held fast on the mountain and did not budge; a fifth day and a sixth day she held fast on the mountain. When the seventh day dawned I loosed a dove and let her go. She flew away, but finding no resting-place she returned. Then I loosed a swallow, and she flew away but finding no resting-place she returned. I loosed a raven, she saw that the waters had retreated, she

ate, she flew around, she cawed, and she did not come back. Then I threw everything open to the four winds, I made a sacrifice and poured out a libation on the mountain top. Seven and again seven cauldrons I set up on their stands, I heaped up wood and cane and cedar and myrtle. When the gods smelled the sweet savour, they gathered like flies over the sacrifice. Then, at last, Ishtar also came, she lifted her necklace with the jewels of heaven that once Anu had made to please her. "O you gods here present, by the lapis lazuli round my neck I shall remember these days as I remember the jewels of my throat; these last days I shall not forget. Let all the gods gather round the sacrifice, except Enlil. He shall not approach this offering, for without reflection he brought the flood; he consigned my people to destruction."

'When Enlil had come, when he saw the boat, he was wrath and swelled with anger at the gods, the host of heaven, "Has any of these mortals escaped? Not one was to have survived the destruction." Then the god of the wells and canals Ninurta opened his mouth and said to the warrior Enlil, "Who is there of the gods that can devise without Ea? It is Ea alone who knows all things." Then Ea opened his mouth and spoke to warrior Enlil, "Wisest of gods, hero Enlil, how could you so senselessly bring down the flood?

*Lay upon the sinner his sin,
Lay upon the transgressor his transgression,
Punish him a little when he breaks loose,
Do not drive him too hard or he perishes;
Would that a lion had ravaged mankind
Rather than the flood,
Would that a wolf had ravaged mankind
Rather than the flood,
Would that famine had wasted the world
Rather than the flood,
Would that pestilence had wasted mankind
Rather than the flood.*

It was not I that revealed the secret of the gods; the wise man learned it in a dream. Now take your counsel what shall be done with him."

'Then Enlil went up into the boat, he took me by the hand and my wife and made us enter the boat and kneel down on either side, he standing between us. He touched our foreheads to bless us saying, "In time past Utnapishtim was a mortal man; henceforth he and his wife shall live in the distance at the mouth of the rivers." Thus it was that the gods took me and placed me here to live in the distance, at the mouth of the rivers.'

from the Unas Pyramid Texts

Egypt's oldest known poems are the Pyramid Texts, dating from between 2350 and 2175 B.C. Carved on the walls of burial chambers inside the pyramids at Sakkareh, these texts were written in the sacred hieroglyphs of the Old Kingdom (ca. 2700–2185 B.C.) and number about one thousand lines. These inscriptions were actually incantations, or spells, intended to save the king (and only the king) from the underworld and ensure his new life in the sky. These poems, or “utterances,” were to be chanted by priests during burial rites or by the ruler when he revived. Part of the cult of the dead, these writings are magical-literary and not literary in the full sense.

Reading the Selection

The 228 utterances in the King Unas pyramid (ca. 2350 B.C.) are the earliest Pyramid Texts. Typical of the great verbal force of these inscriptions is Utterance 217, dealing with Unas's reception in heaven. In content this utterance blends the solar theology of the sun god Re with myths of the earth god Osiris. This blend reflects the poem's origin in the Old Kingdom, the period when Osiris was growing in influence but Re was still powerful.

In Utterance 217 the ancient solar theology is paramount. The utterance is addressed to Re-Atum (*Re*, the sun at midday; *Atum*, the setting sun) whose sky home is “lightland.” In accordance with solar belief, which held that Re was the father of Egypt's rulers, the speaker prays that the sun god will welcome his earthly son (“Your son comes to you”) into the afterlife. Contrasting images of light and dark reinforce this solar theme throughout the text.

The other deities named in the poem are connected with Osiris, the “green god,” whose cult changed under King Unas from an agrarian faith to become central to the state religion. This cult was based on myths involving chiefly Osiris and his sister-wife, Isis, their brother, Seth, and their son, Horus. The Osirian myths had dualistic themes: the conflict between life and death, good and evil, creation and destruction, and mortality and immortality.

According to these myths, Osiris was dismembered by the envious Seth but was resurrected through Isis's love. Made immortal, Osiris was worshiped as god of the Nile, whose death and rebirth were celebrated annually as symbols of the rise and fall of the life-giving river. True to solar theology, Utterance 217 portrays Osiris as dwelling in the sky; in later times, Osiris was honored as lord of the underworld and each dead king became an Osiris. Isis—like Ishtar in Mesopotamia and Demeter in Greece—represented the original and independent female principle, especially for her gift of wheat. Each living king reigned as Horus—the loving son who avenged his father's death by banishing Seth. Even Seth, despite his villainy, was still a god and thus was venerated.

This utterance employs varied literary devices, such as repetition, which influenced later poets. Most prominent of these devices is parallelism, a common technique in the oral tradition, particularly in Hebrew poetry. Parallelism consists of phrases or sentences of similar construction and meaning placed side by side, balancing each other. The effect is that of a litany—a liturgical prayer made up of a series of petitions. In this poem, a litany effect is achieved in lines such as these:

*May you cross the sky united in the dark,
May you rise in lightland, the place in which you shine!*

Utterance 217

*Sarcophagus Chamber, South Wall
The king joins the sun-god*

Re-Atum, this Unas comes to you,
A spirit indestructible
Who lays claim to the place of the four pillars!
Your son comes to you, this Unas comes to you,
May you cross the sky united in the dark,
May you rise in lightland, the place in which you shine!

Seth, Nephthys, go proclaim to Upper Egypt's gods
And their spirits:

"This Unas comes, a spirit indestructible,
If he wishes you to die, you will die,
If he wishes you to live, you will live!"

Re-Atum, this Unas comes to you,

A spirit indestructible
Who lays claim to the place of the four pillars!
Your son comes to you, this Unas comes to you,
May you cross the sky united in the dark,
May you rise in lightland, the place in which you shine!
Osiris, Isis, go proclaim to Lower Egypt's gods
And their spirits:

"This Unas comes, a spirit indestructible,
Like the morning star above Hapy,
Whom the water-spirits worship;
Whom he wishes to live will live,
Whom he wishes to die will die!"

Re-Atum, this Unas comes to you,
A spirit indestructible

Who lays claim to the place of the four pillars!
Your son comes to you, this Unas comes to you,
May you cross the sky united in the dark,
May you rise in lightland, the place in which you shine!
Thoth, go proclaim to the gods of the west
And their spirits:

"This Unas comes, a spirit indestructible,
Decked above the neck as Anubis,
Lord of the western height,
He will count hearts, he will claim hearts,
Whom he wishes to live will live,
Whom he wishes to die will die!"

Re-Atum, this Unas comes to you,
A spirit indestructible
Who lays claim to the place of the four pillars!
Your son comes to you, this Unas comes to you,
May you cross the sky united in the dark,
May you rise in lightland, the place in which you shine!
Horus, go proclaim to the powers of the east
And their spirits:

"This Unas comes, a spirit indestructible,
Whom he wishes to live will live,
Whom he wishes to die will die!"

Re-Atum, your son comes to you,
Unas comes to you,
Raise him to you, hold him in your arms,
He is your son, of your body, forever!

The Dispute of a Man with His Soul

The Dispute of a Man with His Soul is probably Egypt's most philosophical work. Surviving in one manuscript found in about 1843, this complex text has aroused a great deal of curiosity and has provoked much controversy. Its text combines prose and poetry, a hybrid style of writing that also flourished in medieval Europe (see *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius).

This work dates from the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2050–1800 B.C.), a period characterized by a significant shift in the social system. The old ruling elite of high-ranking royal officials now had to make room for lower officials. Mildly "democratic," this step resulted in revised funeral customs, as nobles claimed the right to immortality enjoyed by rulers (see the Unas Pyramid Texts); those with sufficient wealth to afford monuments began to build private funeral chapels. *The Dispute of a Man with His Soul* provides evidence of these changes, because it was found in a tomb dating from about 1850 B.C., deposited there as reading matter for the deceased in eternity.