Gilgamesh and the Ancient Near East: Adapting Ancient Texts for Modern Musical Stage Works

Michael Guinn

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Bath Spa University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Bath School of Music and Performing Arts, Bath Spa University

May 2025

Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Bath Spa University Ethics Panel on 12.07.2024. Should you have any concerns regarding ethical matters relating to this study, please contact the Research Support Office at Bath Spa University (researchsuppoortoffice@bathsa.ac.uk)

Dataset Statement

No new datasets were created during the study.

Copyright Statement

.

Abstract

This practice-led PhD research explores how modern composers adapt ancient texts to present works based on them to contemporary audiences of musical stage works. The method of research is an examination of the libretti and their ancient sources in order to discuss how composers make changes in the texts in order to reflect their own socio-political times or simply to make the ancient stories feel less remote for their audiences. A brief chapter on adaptation studies sets the parameters of how artists adapt narratives to turn them into their own autonomous works. Translation, "the cognate field to adaptation studies", is the focus of the following chapter in the commentary with an examination of a passage from the Epic of Gilgamesh by several translators over the span of 140 years that shows how the epic has developed over that time as well as varying techniques applied by the translators to render the story to their particular readership. The study focuses on operas and other musical stage works based on texts from the ancient Near East. The composers and compositions included in ancient text adaptation case studies are Philip Glass and his opera *Akhnaten,* Bohuslav Martinů and his oratorio *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* and Per Nørgård and his opera *Gilgamesh.* In addition to the libretti and text source comparisons, the data for the research are also collected from monographs and other scholarly studies on these composers and works in addition to documents and memoirs from the composers themselves where available. I follow all of this with a commentary on my own adaptation of *Gilgamesh* and situate it within the framework of these predecessors for musical adaptation, a commentary that accompanies a submitted work of recordings of the adaptation totalling nearly

three hours. The research herein contributes a potential new niche to musical stage work studies as a focus on adapting ancient texts for modern audiences appears to be a new area of research in musicology.

Contents

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor James Saunders whose indefatigable encouragement and enthusiasm have left an indelible mark on this project. He has been an invaluable guide on this long and rewarding journey.

To my daughter Sara, thank you for your belief in me and for being the greatest gift the universe ever brought to me.

I would like to thank the exceptional cast who took up this project and gave all of their considerable talents to making it work. And I would especially like to thank Jeremy Irons for his generosity in taking the time to lend his superlative, world-class skills to *Gilgamesh*.

1. Introduction

I. Background

As someone working originally on a concept album based on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* which has now grown into a musical stage work, I have a keen interest in how ancient stories and texts have been developed by composers of the past and present for the stage. This interest marries two of my long-term pursuits, music composition and ancient history and languages. My BA is in Classical Languages, and I owe my introduction to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to a passing remark by my ancient Greek language professor Edith Croft when studying Homeric Greek in her classroom at San Francisco State University. I read the epic on her recommendation and felt that it was somehow less sterling than the Homer I was reading— a highly repetitious but engaging adventure tale, not however, on the same order as the mythical Ionian poet's work. Years later I fell under the spell of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke in a volume of his poetry translated by Stephen Mitchell. I began to seek out other works by the translator as many of the works were of a spiritual nature from various cultural traditions, and I was at a time in my life rethinking some of the religious dogmatism that had been such a strong environmental factor in my early years and exploring other perspectives. I was astonished to find that Mitchell (2013) was coming out with a new work—a version, as he called it, in preference to a translation (p. 2)—of the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* I was bemused to think that the translator was turning to adventure stories, but I got my copy of the book, which happened to be just after reading Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*. As I read through Mitchell's version of the epic, the parallels between it and *Siddhartha*

were striking and provocative. The story was much the same as I had read when I was in Professor Croft's class, but now *I* was different, and I looked at it from a completely fresh angle. I realised that I was reading an account of the world's first spiritual journey.

In parallel, my musical compositions have often been inspired by literary experiences. First, I composed a suite of instrumental pieces based on characters from *Siddhartha* with a Buddhist monk, whom I recorded in a temple in Japan, occasionally weaving sutras chanted in Pali throughout the music. This was a work just under 30 minutes, but it gave me the confidence to try a longer piece that might tell a full story. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* seemed ripe for this kind of treatment and was replete with dramatic possibilities.

As I began working with the material, a range of possible courses appeared, each with its own set of issues. For the composer working with ancient sources, unique difficulties arise in terms of how to present ancient tales or texts in such a way that penetrates their remoteness in time and culture so that they can engage modern audiences. A difficult balance must be maintained between adherence to the sources, to such an extent that respect for them is unequivocally present within the work, and to certain modern concessions, the most basic being in the music itself since we know little about how ancient music sounded. In addition, language considerations, textual innovations and psychological explorations of character benefiting from the last century of achievements in that area come to the fore in working with archetypal characters from ancient stories. These kinds of explorations in how to go about working with ancient stories became the central core of my Ph.D. dissertation.

A range of genres or ways of developing the project also presented themselves. My adaptation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* began as a concept album, a 20th century LP phenomenon whose ancestral heritage can be found in 19th century song cycles. According to an artist with much experience with the concept album, Rick Wakeman, in the BBC documentary *When Pop Went Epic: The Crazy World of the Concept Album*, these LP creations "tell a story; others explore a mood or a theme, but they all create their own world and draw you in" (Wakeman & Edwards, 2016, 0:00:57). Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull adds that "either it's a narrative or it's descriptive. It has elements… of individual songs, but it's still talking on the same subject" (0:03:40). Fish, the lead singer for the band Marillon, observes that a concept album is "like putting a movie together for someone's ears" (0:03:57), a description that comes closer than any to approximating my objectives in composing *Gilgamesh*. Therefore, the concept album is an aural experience crafted in a recording studio drawing its narrative or thematic setting onto the listener's imagination. The stage may at some point become a presentation of the concept album's material if there is demand for it, resembling a musical theatre experience (e.g. Roger Waters' *The Wall* or The Who's *Tommy*), but initially the experience is aural rather than visual. This is why the narrator entreats the listener directly at the beginning of *Gilgamesh* to "close your eyes".

Although at the present time *Gilgamesh* is being prepared for the stage, it is difficult to assess whether it will be considered a musical theatre piece, what *Grove Music Online* glosses as "the principal form of Western popular musical theatre in the 20th century, in which sung and danced musical numbers in

popular and pop music styles are combined within a dramatic structure" (Snelson and Lamb, 2001). *Gilgamesh* has its share of memorable songs and some have the typical pop music structure replete with a repeated chorus; however, there are other pieces that drive the narrative forward in a different way— through narration and sound design as well as longer nearly through-composed pieces. The overall narrative objective is to delineate a spiritual journey of the main character, aspects that would seem to belong more to the world of opera since musical theatre typically presents narratives of a more romantic or sentimental nature. Howard Mayer Brown (2001) defines opera as a combination of "music, drama, and spectacle" with music "playing the dominant role in the conception and realization of individual works." In opera, therefore, the music can expand beyond what is necessary for the action on the stage, and in modern operas there is much room for experimentation that delves into sonic textures that are not geared towards popular consumption. Opera also is designed for the virtuosity of singers, whereas musical theatre is centred more on acting. There are pieces in *Gilgamesh* that can be categorised by either the former or the latter. Gilgamesh and Siduri, for example, are roles that will need to be filled by opera singers because of the vast vocal range necessary to succeed in the roles, but the trapper and Inanna could be handled well by singers in the musical theatre world as the vocals are less virtuosic but still emotional and in need of good acting to carry them out. My objective in composing the pieces that constitute *Gilgamesh* is to present a variety of forms, songs in the manner and structure of a musical theatre work and others that are through-composed and more experimental, consistent with opera. *Gilgamesh* is a fusion of genres. As this recording was

principally composed as a concept album but has now developed into a musical stage work, for the sake of avoiding specific musically loaded genre terms, this commentary will consider *Gilgamesh* a musico-dramatic or simply musical stage work.

II. Research Questions

In order to consider how to explore the methods composers use in dealing with ancient texts, the following research questions will be the focus of this commentary.

1. What kinds of decisions have other composers dealing with a dead language from their source material made for their libretto in a musical theatre work?

    a. What methods are there for communicating explicit meaning to audiences if using a language with which they are unfamiliar?

    b. When might a narrator be necessary, and if decided upon, how can this additional text and the person who recites it be integrated within the rest of the libretto?

2. How does a composer make an ancient text feel relevant for a contemporary musical theatre audience in terms of the narrative?

    a. What changes need to be made in the text in order to engage a contemporary audience with an ancient narrative?

b. How can the characters in the narrative be conveyed as sympathetic or understandable to a contemporary audience while also making certain that they have integrity within their own ancient cultural dynamic?

III. Methodology

This is a practice-led Ph.D. My composition *Gilgamesh* has been recorded on my digital audio workstation Cubase with various orchestral and experimental sample libraries, the majority of which come from Spitfire Audio, which specialises in sample libraries for film composers. I have also recorded with pianists, violinists, an oboist, and many singers taking roles in the narrative. These musicians and singers recorded mostly remotely using my backing tracks with partial notation scores, just enough for them to be able to follow along with the backing tracks. The narrator for the project, Jeremy Irons, was recorded on October 30, 2023, in a studio in Oxford. He requested the last bit of music of the piece before the track he was working on to get a sense of the context for his performance. The narration was a late addition to the project, but became an essential component as work progressed. This project has from the beginning been considered a recording project rather than preparation for a live performance, although this is now in the works as well. The project consists of 33 tracks and runs to just under three hours. The libretto will be discussed in my commentary for my work in the final chapter of this paper.

In this commentary, works on adaptation studies have given me a general sense of some of the issues that any adaptor must face. Writings based in Gilgamesh studies and other works by Assyriologists have been instrumental in

helping me with my thought processes in constructing the libretto steeped within a remote culture. I have also been in touch via email with Gilgamesh experts and translators Stephanie Dalley, Benjamin Foster, and Andrew George, all of whom listened to samples and offered constructive critiques of my libretto from a linguistic and historical perspective during its development. Studies of the three composers who have been included in this paper as case studies have also been consulted. I have looked at the libretto of each composer and compared it as far as possible with the texts they were working with, when known, in order to understand their textual choices and narrative decisions. This provision of precedence has been essential sustenance to my own work on *Gilgamesh.*

IV. Objectives and Choices

This discussion concerning how composers use ancient texts to present narratives from ancient times to modern audiences appears to be a unique subject in academia. This is in some ways quite surprising since a number of stage works are in the repertoire of theatres and orchestras around the world that have such texts as their basis. This rich trove includes Richard Strauss's *Elektra*, Holst's *Savitri*, Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, Tippett's *King Priam*, Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus* and Mikis Theodorakis's *Medea*, among many others. The focus of the present study focuses on three works based on ancient texts from the ancient Near East, one on writings of ancient Egypt and two on the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* an ancient tale that developed in Sumer, the ancient region and civilisation in what is now southern Iraq, in the third millennium BCE and is still growing today whenever new archaeological finds optimistically extend the story towards

completion. These have been chosen precisely because of their probable lack of familiarity to an audience walking into a theatre to experience a musical presentation based on them. They are Near Eastern, non-biblical stories featuring characters that play no part in contemporary religious traditions and have not been featured in major films or stage plays attracting mass audiences. The pharaoh Akhnaten and the Mesopotamian king Gilgamesh were both lost to history for thousands of years and discovered through archaeological digs and pure chance in the 19th century. Tel-el Amarna, the modern name for the city of Akhnaten, was discovered by Egyptian peasants in 1887 when they stumbled across some written tablets and sold them on the antiquities market. The pharaoh had suffered the fate of many pharaohs whose successors had attempted to erase the previous pharaoh from history. Through the ruins of his city, he was rejuvenated into cultural and historical consciousness again, foiling his adversarial descendants. Gilgamesh's story was found through tablets excavated by archaeologists from the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania about three decades earlier buried in the sands of Nineveh. Therefore, these are historical figures who were lost to time— there has been no continuous cultural impact in the manner of Solomon or Cleopatra, no depictions in western art over the centuries, and of course no musical settings until recently. For this reason, there is less of a chance that audiences will have any preconceived notions of such characters and their motivations going into the theatre than if they were to see a new opera based on Moses or Achilles. Therefore, composers venturing into this area have their work cut out for them, and it is this work that attracts the attention of this study.

It is hoped then that the following paper will demonstrate how a void in scholarly literature could be filled within the broader scope of methodologies employed by composers and librettists in general and more narrowly with regard to ancient texts in particular. It also intends to contribute something unique to the scholarship on stage works based on ancient texts by the composers included in this study: Philip Glass, Bohuslav Martinů, and Per Nørgård. The works from these composers that will be the focus of this research are Glass's opera *Akhnaten*, Martinů's oratorio *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Nørgård's opera *Gilgamesh*.

One reason for choosing these three works in particular is that, above and beyond their quality, or perhaps because of that quality, all of them have been recorded by major recording labels suggesting that each label assumed there would be enough appeal to justify the cost of the recording, and they have remained in print for decades. There have been operas based on the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, for example, that have never been recorded or only once by a small label but thereafter gone quickly out of print. Croatian composer Rodolf Brucci's 1986 opera *Gilgameš*, for example, appears to have received a 1990 recording on vinyl in his home country, according to a database for music recordings (Discogs, 2024), but it has proved to be an overwhelming challenge to find it. Theodore Ziolkowski (2011) in *Gilgamesh Among Us: Modern Encounters with the Ancient Epic* has to base his summary of the opera on a scenario from the director, describing the work "as a multimedia show with contemporary sets and choreography" (p. 145), but confesses in a footnote, "I have not read or heard this work, which I know only from reports on the Internet and in reference works" (p.

218). In the years since his book was published, this state of affairs has not improved. It can be conceded that quality is not always equal to accessibility—the opera may be a very fine work indeed— but having no access to a work makes a judicious assessment impossible to come by. The subject of this study is how composers adapt their libretti to make the narrative more comprehensible for a modern audience, and it is important to experience the music that underscores the text as it assists in carrying the meaning. Therefore, at least somewhat continuous access to that audience must be present in order to qualify rather than one unfortunately obscure recording.

It will be noted that only relatively contemporary compositions have been given as examples of operatic works based on ancient texts. The composer working with such material nowadays is faced with particular challenges that did not burden composers of past centuries. The reason this is so is that the languages of the classical ancient world have faded out of the formal curricula of western education at various points during the 20th century (Anglin, 2021). Operas based on Greek mythology were common in the early eras of the genre because well-educated members of society during that time were proficient in Greek and Latin and familiar with the myths and stories recounted in works by Ovid, Virgil, and Homer as a matter of course. Ben Jonson's famous praise of Shakespeare in his eulogy of the bard, that he was "the wonder of our stage" despite having "small Latin and less Greek" (Jonson, 1623), was contemporaneous with the infancy of operatic history. The proficiency with classical languages was at the time taken as an expected attribute for an educated individual, as Jonson insinuates, and classical allusions abound in the

writings from the period as well as in depictions in art. This was the case until the last century when classicism became synonymous with elitism and began to be seen as irrelevant to modern needs (Anglin, 2021). Changes in education in the 20th century are responsible in great part for the decline in the study of ancient languages. For example, Latin and ancient Greek were effectively dropped from the curriculum in 1958 by Congress in the US which passed the National Defense Education Act because it was not deemed in the best interests of national defence for students to speak dead languages rather than modern ones and also because there were concerns that students were not keeping pace with the rest of the world in maths and sciences (Roeming 1962).

The consequence of this dwindling exposure to classical languages and knowledge from normative educational development is that composers working with an ancient text today must consider carefully how to present their work to an audience that is no longer as well-versed as it once was in ancient cultures. If this is the case for classical stories, then it is even more challenging to present stories from other ancient cultures that have never been part of a widespread shared cultural consciousness. The ancient Near East sources that are the focus here are also derived ultimately from dead languages that were lost for millennia and deciphered only in the 19th century, never becoming a part of any standard Western education curriculum. Moreover, the figures and elements of these stories have often been seen through a biblical lens rather than on their own terms.

V. Outline

This is a study of adaptations of ancient stories and how the composers have chosen to present them to a modern audience to facilitate understanding and engagement with the narrative. In chapter 2, the first task is to consider the properties of and the problems inherent in operatic adaptations and come to some understanding of current adaptation theory and, as subjective as it may ultimately be, of what makes an adaptation successful.

In chapter 3, translation theory will be presented as a continuing discussion of adaptation matters. Comparisons of translations taken from almost 150 years of Gilgamesh scholarship will provide snapshots of the epic in development from its unearthing in Nineveh to the present day. It will be seen just how difficult it was for early translators in particular to detach their work from their own classical and Judeo-Christian prejudices and impulses.

Chapter 4 will bring out the first of three case studies of composers who have worked with ancient texts in their musical theatre works. Philip Glass's opera *Akhnaten* shows the composer's vision of the eponymous pharaoh seen through a Judeo-Christian lens that insists that the ancient pharaoh was a forerunner of the monotheistic religions of today. His use of ancient Egyptian texts will be explored with a comparison of his libretto to these ancient sources.

In chapter 5, the libretto by Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů for his oratorio *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is compared against the source, an English translation of the epic made in the 1920s. Some of the alterations made for the

libretto had socio-political implications for the composer as he negotiated life during the Cold War in the 1950s.

Per Nørgård's opera *Gilgamesh*, the subject of chapter 6, has a Jungian basis in which Gilgamesh as a character develops into a process of individuation. The progression of the characters of Gilgamesh and Enkidu are expressed metaphorically by means of the composer's infinite series, and the unique staging brings the audience into the mythical world of the story.

My own *Gilgamesh,* which will be the focus in my commentary in chapter 7, coming as it does 50 years after Nørgård's adaptation, is steeped in 21st century concerns for ecological atonement mirrored in the ancient tale as well as years of growing up in a country hostile to Iraq, the modern nation where the ancient tale was born. Therefore, there are perhaps other atonements sought in my adaptation of the story, ones that may be found subconsciously in my work that even I might have difficulty articulating in any other way. There is a point where verbal description ends and music begins, an attempt of my own perhaps to return from the depths of experience rejuvenated like Gilgamesh.

2. "The Lifeblood of Opera"- Adaptation

I. Introduction and Sources

From the origins of the operatic form in the late sixteenth century down to the present point in its long evolution, many composers and librettists have turned to literary works for subjects, adapting them for the stage. Why this should be is not surprising: adapting a popular novel, for example, which is already embedded in the public consciousness, presents less risk to producers when the cost of mounting an opera has always been one of the most exorbitant in all the arts. Adaptation of a familiar text pretested in the public arena rather than an untried original story is for that reason at the heart of the libretto. As Andrew Blake (2010) inevitably concludes, "adaptation is the lifeblood of opera" (p. 187).

And yet there are few scholarly studies pertaining to the adaptation of libretti. Hutcheon and Hutcheon (2017) suggest that "unlike film, opera has occasioned considerably less theorizing of its adaptation process, despite groundbreaking work on individual adaptations by scholars" (p. 1). Adaptation studies are relegated in great part to the transfer that takes place from book to film. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013) and Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2016) are two seminal works on adaptation theory that do discuss operatic adaptations, but these are sparsely interspersed with much discussion of film adaptations. Film and opera both require a large number of performers and producers to interpret respectively a screenplay or a libretto, but adaptation studies have leaned heavily on film rather than opera. One reason

for this is that the librettist must necessarily condense the adapted material rigorously. As Hutcheon makes clear, “It takes much longer to sing than to say a line of text” (2013, p. 38). It stands to reason, then, that an opera-goer will not expect an opera based on, say, a Salman Rushdie novel to contain all or even most of the plot points and characters from the book. A comparison, in fact, is unlikely to be made between a book and an opera based on it because an operatic adaptation is by its nature likely to present an extreme emotional distillation of the text rather than a comprehensive delineation of its plot. Through means of dialogue and editing, a filmed version can cover much more of the territory laid out by the same novel with expectations from its audience heightened in proportion. For this reason, longer novels and book series have been adapted into highly popular television series as well.

For the purposes of the present study then, a brief description of the state of the current research must necessarily lean towards those general works concerning adaptation that give serious consideration to opera as one tessera in the mosaic of adaptation studies. This is not to suggest that fundamental principles in film adaptation cannot also be applied to operatic adaptations when useful. However, these are few and far between as film has its own sui generis concerns and expectations.

II. Definitions, Perspectives, and Motives

It may be useful first to come to terms with definitions and perspectives in adaptation studies more generally. Moreover, and this is of the utmost importance to the adaptor and the audience experiencing the adaptation, coming

to grips with what makes an adaptation a success or a failure will be addressed. The answer must focus on artistic success or failure rather than the commercial consequences of an adaptation which can be highly misleading; after all, money has already been relinquished before the experience of and perhaps disappointment in a cinematic, theatrical, or operatic adaptation. Moreover, as our main subject concerns ancient texts and how they are presented for contemporary musical stage work audiences, and as opera libretti based on or comprised of ancient texts generally emerge from dead languages, we will have occasion to look at translation theory in brief as a "cognate field to adaptation studies" (Sanders, 2016, p. 10) in the next chapter.

In her landmark study that demonstrates methods for analyzing adaptations, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon concludes that "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (2013, p. 9). She explains that "palimpsestuous" works allow us "always to feel its [the original work's] presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation," she continues, "we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works" (p. 5). It would seem from such a description, arguing as it does for the discrete individual creation involved in adaptive work, that fidelity to the original text counts little towards the success or failure of an adaptation. Indeed, at length she clarifies this point, that failure in an adaptation has less to do with lack of fidelity and more to do with "a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous" (p. 21). This is something I have kept in

mind in my own work on *Gilgamesh*, and we will come to this point again in the final chapter of the present study.

In his discussion of the fantastic in the arts, particularly film, Brian Attebery (2013) writes that "ultimately what we ask of adaptation is that it invite audiences to look beyond the text at hand toward other versions, other crystallizations. Every reading of a text is, after all, an interpretation-- a translation" (p. 397). Looking "beyond the text" is a particularly useful way of experiencing adaptations as it does not dogmatically adhere to notions of faithfulness. A shift in adaptation studies away from notions of fidelity as the benchmark of success for an adaptation is highlighted by Brian McFarlane, who notes that "fidelity is obviously very desirable in marriage; but with adaptations, I suspect playing around is more effective" (as cited in Babbage, 2018, p. 204).

With this in mind, the motives behind adapting a text come to the fore. For example, the children's author Priscilla Galloway often turned to the retelling of ancient myths in her work, describing her task as "creative reanimation" in order to appeal to her young and modern readership (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 8). This is the sort of specific motivational act in adaptation that Julie Sanders has in mind when she writes that "adaptation can... continue a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating" (2016, p. 23). These are ways too of "looking beyond the text' and making them resonate with modern audiences.

III. Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* in Japan

Of the many examples in opera that could illustrate this point, Julie Taymor's staged and filmed-for-television version of Stravinsky's opera *Oedipus Rex* is particularly relevant to the subject of this present study: how ancient texts and narratives are transmuted into modern musico-dramatic experiences. The opera was staged at the Sito Kinen Festival in Matsumoto, Japan, in 1993. The most unusual feature of Taymor's production design were the large masks worn atop the main characters as headdresses reminiscent of ancient Greek Cycladic sculpture. However, an aspect of the costumes, particularly those of the soldiers and sentinels, that her Japanese audience would readily understand resembled the ancient *haniwa* figures of Japan. She "consciously used the Japanese locale of performance to influence her costuming and gestural expression" (Smith, 1993). Despite this, the mythical nature and universal quality of the production are evident throughout. Sanders calls adaptation "a form of collaboration across time and sometimes across culture and language" (2016, p. 47). This 1993 production of an ancient Greek text adapted by a Russian composer and French librettist (Jean Cocteau) in the 1920s and sung in a Latin translation with narration in Japanese for a Japanese audience which was directed by an American artist with an international cast exemplifies the immensity of collaboration across cultures, time, language, and space of which adaptations are capable.

It is unclear if Taymor's choice of costume designs depicting the Japanese *haniwa* is anything more than an aesthetic frame of reference for her Japanese audience to latch onto. *Haniwa,* like the ancient Greek *kouroi* or ancient Egyptian *ushabti,* were statuettes used as funerary monuments or in burials in

ancient Japan. Perhaps as the opera unfolds, the aura of death is intensified through the production design. Whatever the case may be, the likely impact on a Japanese audience would be augmented by the atmosphere consisting of a mix of the ancient and modern, considering that the expressive faces of the singers are completely visible under the mask headdresses, a concomitant blend of life and death in movement before their eyes. This is a proximation through staging and design.

IV. "Culturally Loaded" Proximations

There are other kinds of proximations for a composer working with an ancient text that are not only aesthetic. Sanders explains that "there is a case to be made that in some instances the process of adaptation moves away from simple proximation towards something more culturally loaded" (2016, p. 26-27). She gives examples from the film world, in particular two adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in which Sycorax, the Algerian witch who is only present in the original play by means of Prospero's disparaging characterisations, appears as a character fully humanised onscreen (in Derek Jarman's 1979 film *The Tempest* and Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* from 1991). By "looking beyond the text" and acknowledging in Sycorax the importance of a voice and physicality, the adaptors are commenting on her absence in Shakespeare's play (p. 27). Concerning the world of contemporary opera, this study will have occasion to explore more of these "culturally loaded" proximations below in Philip Glass's *Akhnaten* as well as in my own treatment of *Gilgamesh*.

V. The Successful Adaptation

These proximations are pertinent to the motives behind choosing a text to adapt. Linda Hutcheon (2013) writes that "an adaptation is not vampiric: it does not drain the life-blood from its source.… It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise" (p. 176). This motivating principle goes hand in hand with Brian Attebery's (2013) observations of a failed adaptation in cinema: "Adaptations go wrong when they try too hard to be faithful and don't exploit the potential of the new medium, but they go even more badly astray when the adaptors do not love the source" (p. 396). Affection for the source to the extent of attempting to give it new life must surely be at the core of a successful adaptation and is in the best interest of the adaptor. This will be a guiding principle in the forthcoming discussion of my own adaptation of *Gilgamesh* below.

In addition to love for the source, as we have seen, the adaptor's success with an adaptation can assuredly be attributed at least in part to the creativity displayed and the creation thereby of an autonomous work, as Linda Hutcheon (2013) suggests (p. 27). However, it would also be beneficial to consider the reception context for the success of an adaptation. It must be mentioned that if the audience experiences the adaptation before the original, then it will be for them an autonomous work without the shadow of the original. On the other hand, for members of an audience who know the work on which an adaptation is based, there is the potential, as Hutcheon puts it, for the "pleasures of a doubled experience… bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight and surprise of novelty. *As adaptation*, it involves both memory and

change, persistence and variation" (p. 173). It is likely that an adaptation takes on a life of its own when both segments of such an audience are moved or entertained by the experience.

Composers adapting an ancient text for their libretto will most likely be working with a translation, and if they are fortunate enough to be working with a narrative of great interest culturally, they may have the luxury of being able to consult a number of translations. A work like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* certainly qualifies on this count. When multiple translations are consulted, however, one must then deal with the intentions or biases of the translators themselves and the readership they are appealing to. Moreover, in the case of this incomplete epic story that grows with every archaeological find, each translation becomes an artefact frozen in time revealing the state of the narrative along its slow evolution towards completion. In order to illustrate both of these points, it will be useful to compare and contrast several translations of one short section of the epic, and to this we shall now turn.

3. The Growth of an Epic: Gilgamesh Translations Compared

I. Introduction

Jorge Luis Borges (1998) famously said, “Translations are different perspectives of an object in motion” (p. 201), a diversity of views that concedes the impossibility of exact translations when stories migrate from one language to another. As Sanders (2016) writes, “Even the context of one translation of text into another language, where the process is in part expected to retain aspects of plot, narrative and form in ways that adaptation palpably need not, the concept of strict fidelity is unhelpful” (p. 10). Susan Bassnet and André Lefevere (1990), who developed the current scholarly consensus that brings translation studies into the realm of cultural studies, maintain that translators “attempt to make the target text function in the target culture the way the source text functioned in the source culture”, and so “to achieve ‘functional equivalence’ a translator may have to substantially adapt the source text” (p. 8). For Borges, this means that a translation is in its own right an autonomous work: “Every translation is a new version” (p. 201).

Adaptation and translation are substantial concerns in the development of Philip Glass’s *Akhnaten*, which the composer explores in his writings on his own work. Moreover, as a prelude to an analysis of the works by Bohuvlav Martinů and Per Nørgård who are responsible for the most well-known musico-dramatic works featuring the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, it may be enlightening to look at how that same epic has come down to us through a selection of translations that reflect the attitudes and cultural context in which the translation was made. Since Martinů

used R. Campbell Thompson's 1928 translation for his English libretto of his oratorio, it will also be useful to gauge the relative progress at that time in the epic's development and the particular problems posed by the translation itself that Martinů will deal with almost 30 years after its publication. In addition, although it is uncertain which translation or even which language Per Nørgård worked with while researching and formulating his opera, Speiser's 1969 translation below (c) is the closest to the time of his opera's composition (1972). This will be dealt with more substantially in chapter 6.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this commentary, I have been in contact with the last three translators listed in the selected translations below. Stephanie Dalley offered critiques of some of the tracks and whether the music supported the emotional content she envisioned through her own work on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Correspondence with Andrew George elicited a fruitful discussion of some of the translation issues encountered in the section of the epic discussed below, and Benjamin Foster mainly encouraged me in the process of adapting the story for my own musical ends. Reading each of the translations by these scholars as well as Andrew George's extensive essays found in his critical edition of the text from 2003 (discussed below) was an essential experience in this process. As he is the pre-eminent scholar on Gilgamesh studies, George's generous sharing of his own academic journal articles and updates of ongoing archaeological finds and other matters concerning the epic on his website was also a critical reference for me throughout the years of composing this work.

II. Selected Sources for Tablet V, lines 5-15

a. George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (1876), p. 214

b. R. Campbell Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1928), p. 29

c. E.A. Speiser, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1969), p. 82

d. Stephanie Dalley, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1989, rev. 2000), p. 71

e. Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1999), p.41

f. Andrew George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (2003), p. 603

g. Benjamin Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (2019), p. 37

III. General Overview of the Translations

The following comparison of English translations is based on over 140 years of textual development of the incomplete but growing ancient text of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New archaeological finds and a greater understanding of cuneiform gradually continue to pave the way for progress towards the ultimate goal of a complete text. The sources have been selected in order to best demonstrate an understanding of how the translations have changed over time and how the translators themselves have endeavoured to adapt their work to facilitate access to a readership. The selections are ultimately subjectively chosen, but it is hoped that any Assyriologist assessing these seven selections would acknowledge that some of the most important milestones in the development of the text are well marked by these translations in a clear linear fashion.

Tablet V lines 5-15 have been chosen in order to show how this text has grown over time. The latest translation of the seven compared here, that of Benjamin Foster, benefits from one of the most momentous discoveries in Gilgamesh studies since their inception in the 19th century under the work of George Smith—the discovery of a tablet in 2011 in northern Iraq that filled in many large gaps of the story concerning the expedition to the sacred cedar forest and the battle with its guardian Humbaba. This makes this particular ancient story unique. A composer adapting a Greek myth today is essentially adapting the same text that a composer and librettist might have used a century ago or more. This is not the case with the *Epic of Gilgamesh* because it is a work that is in a gradual state of completion with progress made from one generation to the next. A composer adapting this text for a musical stage work today is essentially adapting a different text from the one coming out of the translation that Martinů used from 1928.

In the modern world, the story of the king of Uruk and his quest for immortality found its first home in English. This was the translation by George Smith entitled "The Chaldean Account of Genesis," a title which demonstrates the nineteenth-century translator's keen objective to tie in his work with the biblical tradition, an objective emerging undoubtedly from the public enthusiasm that greeted Smith's own lectures in 1872 after he had deciphered the famed Flood Tablet with its many parallels to the ark narrative in the Book of Genesis. For example, he refers to Gilgamesh's city of Uruk in the biblical form Erech. He also employs deliberate archaisms and occasional anachronisms, which will be demonstrated in the comparisons below, that stake a readership's interest on

biblical analogy. Cuneiform studies were in their inchoate state at this time with uncertain transliterations, and so the modern reader is taken aback to find in Smith's translation the name Izdubar rather than Gilgamesh and Heabani for Enkidu, Gilgamesh's boon companion.

By the time of Thompson's translation over 50 years later, cuneiform knowledge had settled into a more confident state of decipherment so that the names of the protagonists were well fixed. In addition, by 1928 the idea that the epic proved the authenticity of the Bible or that its relevance was dependent upon it was less in vogue among scholars, so that when Thompson does equate Utanapishtim with Noah in one instance in his preface to the story (p.6), it appears more as a useful analogy that bestows familiarity rather than any other ulterior motive such as proof of relevance through biblical association. Thompson's translation is in hexameters, presumably to make the Mesopotamian narrative fit into the mould of the later Homeric epics more familiar to his readers. With a hint of confessional doubt, he states in his preface to his volume, "Whether there is justification for taking the risk of turning it into ponderous English hexameter metre is an open question" (p. 6).

By the time of Speiser's translation in 1969, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is presented on its own textual and cultural terms by translators without recourse to other later religious and cultural traditions. For this reason, issues concerning his translation and those that follow will be dealt with more suitably as they come up in the comparisons below. In the passage that follows, Gilgamesh and Enkidu have travelled from the city of Uruk to the Cedar Forest of Lebanon far to the west under the stewardship of Humbaba, a journey of many days on foot.

Now they are standing at last in front of the forest looking at the path that will take them in.

IV. The Lines Compared

A. Tablet V, line 5:

a. on a straight road and a good path. (Smith, 1876)

b. Stalk'd, was a path, (and) straight were his tracks, and good was the passage. (Thompson, 1928)

c. Straight were the tracks and good was the going (Speiser, 1969)

d. The paths were well trodden and the road was excellent. (Dalley, 1989)

e. The path was straight and the way well trodden. (George, 1999)

f. the paths were in order and the way was well trodden (George, 2003)

g. Straight were the ways and easy the going. (Foster, 2019)

Of the seven translations of line 5 given here, Thompson's rendering is the clear outlier. In terms of punctuation alone, his is the only one that requires an apostrophe, parentheses, and commas, whereas the other translations are entirely or mostly free of all punctuation. The word "Stalk'd" that begins his passage is carried over from line 4, which reads "(and there) where Humbaba stalk'd" so that the first word of line 5 is actually the last of the clause begun in line 4. Because of the translator's choice of hexameters, this sort of confluence of lines occurs throughout his work, making it difficult to coordinate his line numbers with those of the tablets themselves in an isomorphic relationship. In his translation, copious apostrophes are utilized in order to fit the syllabic

constraints of the meter, examples of which can be seen here in line 5 and the next two lines as well.

B. Tablet V, line 6:

a. He saw the land of the pine trees, the seat of the gods, the sanctuary of the angels, (1876)

b. (Eke) they beheld the Mount of Cedar, the home of th' Immortals, (1928)

c. They beheld the cedar mountains, abode of the gods, throne-seat of Irnini. (1969)

d. They beheld the Pine Mountain, dwelling-place of gods, shrine of Irnini (1989)

e. They saw the Mountain of Cedar, seat of gods and goddesses' throne. (1999)

f. They were gazing at the Cedar Mountain, the dwelling of the gods, the throne-dais of the goddesses, (2003)

g. They beheld the cedar mountain, dwelling of the gods, sacred to the goddess Irnina (2019)

A deliberate archaism occurs in the conjunction "Eke" as elsewhere in Thompson's 1928 translation. Like George Smith (a) before him and Speiser (c) after him, he uses "thou" in all its linguistic forms for direct address in the narrative. Among our selections here, only from Dalley's translation in 1989 on will such archaisms be renounced in favour of more colloquial expressions and forms of address. Although both pine and cedar are from the coniferous family of trees, they are not synonymous. Only Smith in 1876 and Dalley over a century later translate the Akkadian word *erenueren* as pine, whereas all others here translate the word as cedar. The end of the line is slightly more controversial in its rendering, however. George Smith (a), ever eager to project a biblical outlook

for his readers, renders the forest as “the sanctuary of angels” here, but ancient Mesopotamians had no such heavenly figures dwelling in their divine world. Biblical angels can be defined as winged messengers from God (*angelos* is in fact an ancient Greek word meaning “messenger”), but in Mesopotamia the gods, some of whom are depicted as winged in ancient glyptic and sculptural art, are their own messengers, as can be seen in Tablet XI of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* when Enki himself, the god of freshwater, wisdom, and magic, very supportive of mankind, visits Utanapishtim to save him and his family from the coming wrath of the other gods (Foster, 2019, p. 88). Foster (g) glosses the goddess Irnina as “another name or a local form of the goddess Ishtar” (p. 242). This follows the same reading held by Dalley (d) and Speiser (c) from 30 and 50 years earlier respectively. Andrew George (e, f) states that there is a “clear parallelism” in the line between two of the nouns in the original Akkadian (*musab ili* and *parak ir-ni-ni)*, and therefore he writes, “I assume that the *ir-ni-ni* stands not for the well-known aspect of Istar (Irnina) but for goddesses in general; in other words it is a variant on the common noun *istari*, which often appears paired with *ili* in a formally masculine plural guise” (2003, p. 822). Despite this reasoning before him, Foster continues the trend of conjecturing that *ir-ni-ni* is another name for Ishtar. This demonstrates the difficulty of consensus that is a particular feature of translating ancient texts from long-dead languages.

c. Tablet V, line 7:

a. in front? of the seed the pine tree carried its fruit, (1876)

b. Shrine [of Irnini], the Cedar uplifting its pride ‘gainst the mountain, (1928)

c. From the face of the mountains, the cedars raise aloft their luxuriance (1969)

d. The pines held up their luxuriance even on the face of the mountain. (1989)

e. [On the] face of the mountain the cedar proffered its abundance (1999)

f. [on the] very face of the mountain the cedar was proffering its abundance, (2003)

g. On the slopes of that mountain, the cedar bore its abundance, (2019)

Because of the hexameters in the 1928 translation, Irnini makes her or their appearance a line later for Thompson, albeit between brackets, which he uses to show "restorations, either probable from the context or certain from parallels" (p. 6). The personification of "the Cedar uplifting its pride 'gainst the mountain" is stressed by the word "pride" here, its presence emphasizing perhaps the epic, Homeric nature Thompson's hexameters aim for as personification (e.g. "dawn's rosy fingers" or "death bearing Sarpedon to his faraway home" [The Iliad 16.681-683]) plays a prominent role in epic Greek literature. All of our translators here participate in this personification, mainly in the verb choices that convey movement by design, but all come off as attenuated by comparison when Thompson's "pride" also conveys inner feeling.

It would be well here to compare two different translations of the same text by the same translator since this is about targeting two different kinds of audience. Andrew George (e, f), the preeminent scholar in the field of Gilgamesh studies today, published in 1999 a translation of the text meant for a wide readership including students in the classroom and curious lay readers with an interest in history, mythology and ancient literature. Therefore, George aims to create a more accessible version without too much scholarly intervention. His

translation four years later is a critical edition of the text intended for Assyriologists as much as keenly dedicated laypersons. It consists not only of the translation but also transliterations from the original Akkadian, an important exegesis of the text, and photographs or drawings of every tablet or fragment known to exist at the time of publication. The differences in targeted audiences here account for the differences in the translations. For example, here in line 7 as well as in line 6 above, the verbs are given an imperfect reading in the 2003 translation. In a personal message to the author, George writes,

> In the critical edition I have been more rigorous in using the English imperfect where Akkadian uses the present/ durative in narratives of past actions (L.6 i*mmaru*, "gazing"). The tense describes incomplete, non-punctual action that is often the background circumstance for some specific action (punctual, Akkadian preterite). The verb in L. 7 (*nashi*, "proffering") is a stative: it describes a state and is timeless, so can be translated "is/was/will be bearing/proffering" (2019).

It can be inferred from the translator's comments here that in the 2003 critical edition he is attempting to get the English as closely aligned to the Akkadian syntax as possible without the inhibitions required for producing a translation for a mass audience. This means that the translation becomes a window through which we may have a more authentic view of the original, even in its grammatical elements and syntax, all the while remaining readable, though with some sacrifice of smoothness to achieve this authenticity of vision. This helps to explain the differences in his translations here.

D. Tablet V, line 8:

a. good was its shadow, full of pleasure, (1876)

b. Fair was its shade, (all) full of delight, with bushes (there) spreading, (1928)

c. Good is their shade, full of delight (1969)

d. Their shade was good, filling one with happiness. (1989)

e. its shade was sweet and full of delight. (1999)

f. sweet was its shade, full of delight (2003)

g. Agreeable was its shade, full of pleasures. (2019)

Once more it should be noted that because of the hexameters laid out by Thompson causing each line to act as a Procrustean bed, his translation here has information not contained in the others. The "bushes (there) spreading" should rightly be part of the following line with the corollary that this line too will be off the mark.

E. Tablet V, line 9:

a. an excellent tree, the choice of the forest, (1876)

b. Spread, too, the. . . .the Cedar the incense. . . . (1928)

c. There is cover in their brushwood, cover in their [. . .]. (1969)

d. Undergrowth burgeoned, entangling the forest. (1989)

e. [Thick] tangled was the thorn, the forest a shrouding canopy, (1999)

f. [All] tangled was the thorny undergrowth, the forest was a thick canopy, (2003)

g. The undergrowth was tangled, the forest dense, (2019)

In line 9, the differences are subtle, but each translator has a different answer for what precisely is tangled. Smith, Thompson, and Speiser (a-c) find nothing. However, Dalley (d) describes the entire forest as having been entangled by the undergrowth. George (e) writes that the thorn was tangled. Four years later (f) he describes the thorny undergrowth as tangled. And finally in Foster (g), just the undergrowth was tangled without a hint of thorns. George (e, f) is the only one to refer to the forest as a canopy, although Foster describes it as "dense". We are a long way from 1876 when George Smith called this "an excellent tree." Translations are indeed different perspectives of an object, as Borges said, but here it can be seen even when the object is not in motion.

F. Tablet V, lines 10-15—A Momentous Discovery

a. . . . . the pine heaped . . . . (1876)

b. (After a few mutilated lines the Column breaks: the upper part of Column II contains about twenty lines badly mutilated; then the lower part is more complete, beginning with visions granted to the hero). (1928)

c. (The remainder of the column is missing or mutilated, and the same applies to column ii and most of column iii. An Akkadian fragment from Boğazköy published by E.F. Weidner *KUB,*iv, [1922], 12, and Pl. 48-- helps to fill in some gaps while duplicating other parts.) (1969)

d. (*8 fragmentary lines, then gap*) (*They entered the forest and found Humbaba*) (1989)

e. * * * After a lacuna intervenes, the text continues, though it is not completely recovered (1999)

f. [. . .] cedar, *bullukku* tree. . .[. . .] (2003)

g. Cedars and balsam [grew] so close together, there was no way in among them. (2019)

The entirety of Gilgamesh studies-- the frustration in and methods for handling gaps, the wrong turns, the corrections, the momentous discoveries-- can be demonstrated in microcosm in an analysis of line 10 above in isolation. Smith's use of ellipses in 1876 indicating illegible or damaged text on the physical tablets themselves inaugurates the long tradition of frustration for translators of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, who, fortunately, have been applying ellipses less and less liberally as new archaeological finds have served to fill out the text over the many decades since. Brackets with ellipses are often the preferred method from modern translators, as can be seen above in George's 2003 translation.

It should be noted that at the end of Thompson's parenthetical explanatory note (b), the next scene to be translated involves "visions granted to the hero," in other words, Gilgamesh's dreams concerning the outcome of the expedition. Speiser (c) 40 years later follows this same sequence as well. However, Dalley (d) indicates an entirely different scene ahead in which the protagonists enter the forest. Andrew George writes,

> For many decades the order of the various fragments of the Cedar Forest episode (Tablets IV-V) was far from clear. Order was first imposed by Benno Landsberger in 1968 ("Zum Vierten und Siebten tafel des Gilgamesch-Epos," Revue d'Assyriologie 62: 97-135), long after Thompson and Speiser. Landsberger placed all the dreams in Tablet IV, before the heroes reach the forest. He was right (George, 2019).

Professor George's statement here indicates in the microcosm of this section the overall progress in Gilgamesh studies over the decades made by scholars. There has been much trial and error in the guesswork that comes naturally with a fragmented text in a long-dead language from a remote ancient society. There have also been momentous discoveries that have encouraged and lifted the spirits of Assyriologists everywhere. One such moment came in 2011. In line 10 above, Andrew George in his critical edition of 2003 provided for his readers what he found legible on the tablet: a bracketed ellipsis to show that the first part of the line is missing, the beginning of the word for 'cedar', the entirety of the word 'bulukku' (another type of tree), a couple of marks from another indistinguishable word, and finally a missing end. However, Benjamin Foster's translation of this line in 2019 is more or less complete. This is because between these two translations in 2011 in northern Iraq, a tablet was found on the antiquities market, Tablet V of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It was then translated and published by Farouk al-Rawi and Andrew George (Al-Rawi and George, 2014). The results demonstrate that 135 years after George Smith's initial publication of the story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is still a work in progress, a work whose long-buried history still harbors the element of surprise for us when fragments are brought up into the light, and the old familiar story is free to take unexpected turns with such momentous new additions. The following lines 11-15 from Foster's translation, a colorful description of the vibrant cedar forest, along with many other lines of Tablet V, were completely unknown to all previous translators and indeed the world before that moment in 2011:

The cedars sent out shoots for a league

The cypresses [branches] for two-thirds of a league,

The cedar was dappled sixty cubits high with exudation,

The resin [oozed] out, dribbling down like raindrops,

It flowed out so that ditches had to carry it away

V. Conclusion

Other parts of this tablet describe cicadas, monkeys and other creatures playing as musicians attached to Humbaba's court in the sacred forest—another detail completely unknown to previous translators. A composer living today has more scenes such as these to choose from when adapting the story for a modern stage work, and indeed my own adaptation of the story has benefited from these archaeological finds. One wonders that if Bohuslav Martinů were working on his oratorio today, would such colorful details as an orchestra of cicadas, birds and monkeys entice him to provide a setting of Tablet V, and if so, what colours and textures would have been adapted in his musical language to evoke the world contained in this one tablet. However, in 1954, when Martinů was working on his oratorio, Tablet V was in what must have seemed then a hopelessly fragmented mess. This probably explains why Martinů avoided it altogether. In chapter 5 of this commentary, Martinů's own adaptation of the R. Campbell Thompson translation of 1928 will be examined. An adaptation of this translation was not an ideal beginning for works based on the epic story, but the composer nevertheless managed to produce a stirring oratorio with some intriguing textual decisions.

Per Nørgård's opera "Gilgamesh" premiered in 1973, less than two decades after Martinů's oratorio, but Tablet V was still a long way from being settled. In the chapter 6 commentary on his opera, it will be demonstrated that the composer breezes through the main event of the tablet—the battle with and beheading of Huwawa (Humbaba)—perhaps in part because of the tablet's still-fractured state.

The present section on matters concerning translation has focused on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* since two of the three upcoming case studies on the following pages are based on this narrative. However, the principles of adaptation and translation dealt with in the last two chapters both can be applied to any ancient text. In chapter 4, Philip Glass's methodology regarding ancient texts will be the focus as he too had to deal with the fragmentary conditions of texts from the ancient world.

4. Philip Glass's *Akhnaten:* Fragments of Opera

I. Going to the Source

Three prominent musico-dramatic works using narrators in the past century are based on texts focusing on three different ancient Near Eastern kings: Arthur Honegger's opera *Le Roi David* [1921 (chamber version)/1923 (orchestral version)], Bohuslav Martinů's oratorio *The Epic of Gilgamesh* [1954] and Philip Glass's opera *Akhnaten* [1984], works that span across sixty years of 20th century music and, beginning with *David*, occurred at roughly thirty-year intervals. The texts in all three cases were treated in strikingly different ways. Honegger's work on *Le Roi David* ultimately derives from the Old Testament books that tell David's story, but in a more immediate sense, the libretto is the work of Rene Morax, who wrote a play based on these and commissioned Honegger for the score on the advice of Stravinsky (Halbreich 1999, p. 73). Therefore, Honegger mainly worked with a modern text in his native French language in his composition rather than a direct translation of the ancient Hebrew source. Bohuslav Martinů's *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, like *Le Roi David*, premiered in Switzerland but was originally composed in English after the translation by R. Campbell Thompson of 1928, which was produced, unlike the original Akkadian, in hexametres, a fact that will be discussed in greater depth in the chapter devoted to his work. There have been dozens of archaeological fragments discovered since Martinů's oratorio was first performed, so textually his work is well out of date in terms of archaeology, although it remains aesthetically a very powerful musical experience.

It is arguable that trends in depicting ancient stories on stage led composers to seek greater historical fidelity as the century wore on; however, those in favor of such a judgment might point to Philip Glass's 1984 opera *Akhnaten* for support. By the 1980s traveling across the globe was a far easier thing to do than it had been a few decades earlier. Honegger never visited Israel, nor did Martinu find his inspiration among the ruins and museums of Iraq. However, Philip Glass was able to travel with his collaborators to the very place where his subject founded the city dedicated to his god. An epiphany in the Cairo Museum gave Glass the inspiration on how to approach his opera, which will be discussed below. Moreover, his opera would be composed mainly from the ancient Egyptian texts themselves, some of which would be translated by an onstage narrator doubling as an Egyptian scribe either before or after each piece. Therefore, unlike the narrators of Honegger and Martinů, the narrator in *Akhnaten* uses a different language from the sung texts. In addition, Glass hired a Near Eastern scholar and linguist as a co-librettist for his opera, so important was it for him to ensure faithfulness to the history of the time, correct pronunciation of the languages involved, and to ensure that expertise would be to hand at all times during the compositional development of the opera. All of this marks a very different approach than most previous composers had taken when dealing with ancient textual sources. For this reason, Glass's opera is a fascinating source for exploring how composers can use ancient texts to make the ancient world come alive onstage for a modern audience. After providing a general background on Akhnaten and ancient Egypt, this chapter will focus on two pieces in Glass's opera: "The Funeral Scene" of Act I Scene II and "The Hymn

to the Sun" of Act II Scene IV. These two pieces are instructive for the specific compositional and textual decisions that were inspired by Glass's reading of the ancient texts behind them.

II. Criticism and Sources

In a study of how a composer of a stage work treats ancient texts, there can be no source more beneficial and valuable than that of the composer himself. There are no less than three books by Philip Glass covering details of his life and work, and all three were published after 1984, the year of the *Akhnaten* premiere: *Opera on the Beach* (1988), *Music by Philip Glass* (1995), and *Words without Music* (2015). There is much repeated material across the three works with whole passages lifted verbatim from earlier writings at times. *Opera on the Beach* is the most valuable source for the subject at hand because not only is it closer to the time of the opera itself, thereby exercising the composer's memory less, but also its purpose is constrained to expositions of the operas alone with little recourse to the rest of Glass's voluminous compositional output. *Opera on the Beach* discusses his operas *Einstein on the Beach, Satyagraha,* and *Akhnaten*—all three served with a lengthy and detailed treatment by the composer. At the end of his section on *Akhnaten* in *Opera on the Beach*, Glass provides the libretto, in which the textual sources are provided parenthetically before each piece. [1]*Music by Philip Glass* and *Words without Music* both treat *Akhnaten* as well, but they merely reinforce his earlier writing without adding new details, a fact that suggests that the composer's theoretical views concerning

[1] For convenience, I have included an online source for his libretto to *Akhnaten* for immediate accessibility in the bibliography (Glass et al, 1984).

the contents of the opera and the memories of his working methods to achieve the fruition of his vision were definitive early on and in little need of amendment.

The most carefully considered and weighty analysis of the whole of the opera is undoubtedly the monograph by John Richardson (1999) entitled *Singing Archaeology: Philip Glass's Akhnaten*. It would appear from the title that this would be an ideal source for the purpose of the present study, and indeed Richardson introduces into his analysis a great deal of research in Egyptology. However, when it comes to considering the texts and how the composer uses them, Richardson is not particularly thorough. One of the sub-chapter headings in his introduction is entitled tantalizingly "The Search for Sources," but the sources in question turn out mainly to be two twentieth-century works that inspired Glass's aesthetic and motivation to work on the opera. Undoubtedly these works are relevant and fascinating in how they explain Glass's conception of the opera and how his ideas developed, but it only touches upon the subject of Glass's ancient sources in passing. Richardson's main goal in his work is to establish the various elements of Glass's aesthetic from the viewpoint of a musicologist, and he states early on that his work "is not a documentary on how the composer went about putting *Akhnaten* together;" it is, however, "a personal and subjectively colored vision of Glass's music as I myself have experienced it" (p. xii). Because one of the texts that inspired Glass is controversial Russian psychologist Immanuel Velikovsky's (1960) *Oedipus and Akhnaton: Myth and History*, a work which argues that Akhnaten and Oedipus are in fact one and the same person, and was Glass's initial inspiration for writing the opera, Richardson spends much of his text working through the sexual dynamics of Akhnaten and

his family as depicted in the opera throughout his book, finding a multitude of elements in the music and onstage choreography symbolic of Oedipalism. Richardson interprets archaeology in a post-modern manner "as exemplified by Foucault's influential 'Archaeology of Knowledge'" (p. xi). Therefore, Richardson's monograph is useful for understanding the opera in this way, but it does not assist much in the program developed by this paper—the composer's relationship with ancient texts and the compositional decisions made from that relationship. In fact, Richardson does not check Glass's sources for each of the pieces of the opera in order to analyze textual changes or compositional features that came from them, but this is not the core interest of his work. Therefore, Richardson's monograph is not very helpful for an understanding of the textual matters of concern here despite its initially promising title.

A more promising source comes to light in the form of an Egyptologist named Paul John Frandsen (1993). His essay on *Akhnaten* is included with 27 others by various scholars on Philip Glass's work in the volume *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism*. He discusses the opera scene by scene in his essay and does give some account of Glass's work with the Egyptological sources in the compositional development behind a few scenes. However, there are two reasons why this source is lacking when it comes to providing a sufficient analysis of Glass's work with the texts. First, each scene in his essay is quite brief. For "The Funeral" of Act I Scene II, he does not mention Glass's source at all but rather quotes Glass at length concerning his view of how the Egyptian world gets established in this scene (p. 216). He then moves on to imply that Glass is guilty of the "'orientalism that Western artists and scholars have often

employed in their treatment of the Orient" (p. 216-217), apparently because the composer uses percussion. He then abruptly ends the discussion of the funeral scene with a very brief synopsis of the musical raw material. The whole of his discussion of this scene takes up a single page only. For Act II Scene IV, Frandsen gives an account of Akhnaten's "Sun Hymn" in solid Egyptological terms—where it was found, its view of kingship as intermediary between humankind and gods, and so on, before moving on to an analysis of the key and harmonic progressions in the music. Concerning Glass's usage of the text itself, Frandsen merely notes that Glass's adaptation of the poem is "rendered in a textually corrupt version" (p. 225) without offering further comment. At the conclusion of his essay, he states that the opera "has largely been gathered from nonprimary sources," a confusing statement to make indeed when he further declares that Glass "uses original texts and has them sung in their original language" in his criticism that "there is no meaningful construction of a reality" in the opera (p. 233). Since Frandsen has not engaged in an in-depth analysis of Glass and his co-librettists' use of the texts in question, such a subjective summary of this issue is disappointing, and one feels in the absence of persuasive evidence, unmerited. Second, much of Frandsen's discussion of *Akhnaten* is framed as a technical discussion of its musical properties. The quality of this prompted one of the editors to write a preface to Frandsen's essay—a prompting that did not take place for any other essay in the volume—to warn the reader that "Mr. Frandsen's musical analytical methods are not particularly sophisticated" and that Frandsen had admitted to lacking exposure to Minimalism before embarking on the essay. Although the editor moves on to laud the "fresh perspective" that can be gained

by a "nondoctrinaire approach" (Swed 1993, p. 209), one is left wondering what sort of essay might have been possible had Frandsen concentrated only on relating aspects of the opera to current Egyptological research, providing thereby a unique ray of light for illuminating the composer's work on the opera. Such an essay with his expertise in this area would undoubtedly have offered a "fresh perspective". The question of how the composer utilized, adapted, or modified the ancient texts would have been an excellent starting point. The overall impression of Frandsen's work, then, is of a lost opportunity, and one cannot help but find an analogy here in his own essay for what Frandsen writes in his conclusion regarding *Akhnaten,* "I do not think that Glass and his collaborators had a clear picture in their minds of what they were aiming for when they tackled this subject" (1993 p. 233).

It should be noted that there are a number of other scholarly works on Philip Glass and Minimalism which feature much discussion of the composer's contributions to modern music. Since these works have a broad perspective, any mention of *Akhnaten* is a necessarily brief stop on the way towards making a broader point about Glass's development as a composer or about Minimalism in general. To provide but one example among many that could be detailed here, Glass's main biographer Robert Maycock (2002) in *Glass: A Portrait* discusses *Akhnaten* merely in the context of the trilogy in a linear treatment of Glass's life and work, offering little insight into the opera itself (p. 133-134).

III. Background: the Historical Akhnaten and His Religious Revolution

In 1984, Philip Glass's trilogy of operas based on revolutionary thinkers and their ideas, the so-called “portrait trilogy”, culminated in a production of an opera based on an ancient Egyptian pharaoh. If Einstein revolutionized science and Gandhi revolutionized politics in the 20th century, then certainly Akhnaten was an astute choice as someone who revolutionized religion, albeit in the ancient world. That this revolution came about in a society that did not change its religious, artistic and political structures for thousands of years makes this pharaoh's life and ideas particularly extraordinary.

Ancient Egyptian society rested on the three pillars of its religion, its military, and its pharaoh. The pharaoh was a god on earth. He was expected to lead the military on engagements abroad that would augment Egypt's wealth, to keep the temples and their priests supplied with land and wealth in order to ensure cosmic maintenance and earthly order, and to make political decisions concerning every matter of national importance (Clayton, 1994, p.6). This was how every pharaoh approached his (and occasionally her) duties since the Old Kingdom began, roughly 1400 years before the reign of Amenhotep IV. In the fifth year of that reign, however, Amenhotep IV ("Amenhotep" literally means the god "Amon is pleased") changed his name to Akhnaten ("Useful for Aten"), declared Aten, a heretofore minor god of the Egyptian pantheon, the only god to be worshiped, and moved the capital from Thebes to a new city he would name Akhetaten (modern Tel-el-Amarna) about 200 miles north. At one stroke every pillar of Egyptian society was cut down. The pharaoh could no longer be a god on earth if Aten was the only god; in Akhnaten's case, he became the only visionary

prophet of the one true god. The temples of Amon and all other gods had in this unprecedented monotheistic doctrine no function whatsoever, and the priestly class lost their power and funding. As Akhnaten's concentration in his newly founded city was focused mainly on the worship of Aten, political matters were gradually ignored, and the military was not provided with leadership or the means to go on expeditions abroad that annually filled the coffers of the national treasury. It was a revolution in almost every sense (Clayton, 1994, p. 123).

This constitutes the Akhnaten that Philip Glass presents in his opera, the progenitor of religious ideas that evolved into the major monotheistic religions of today. In fairness to his historical subject, it should be noted that the above summary of Akhnaten's life and reign is somewhat simplistic. One prominent Egyptologist even questions whether we can call Akhnaten the historical figure religious at all (Redford 2013, p. 26), but arguing for or against this hypothesis is beyond the scope of the subject at hand. In formulating his conception of Akhnaten for his opera, Glass takes his cue from Freud's (1940) *Moses and Monotheism*, wherein Freud famously theorizes that "if Moses was an Egyptian and if he transmitted to the Jews his own religion, then it was that of Ikhnaton, the Aton religion" (p. 41), thus spreading the seeds of the Western Judeo-Christian heritage from Akhnaten himself. It is this theory that sways the composer in part to follow a more dramatic storyline and to present the link to a contemporary audience as highly significant to their culture rather than merely a tale from ancient history. This is a particularly strong example of the type of proximation that Julie Sanders (2016) calls “culturally loaded” (p. 26-27) that was mentioned in the previous chapter—the conscious build-up of correlations

and the blurring of distinctions between the adaptation's subject and the observing audience in an effort to stress commonality and continuity of values.

IV. Assigning Vocal Parts

Scholarly debate may never settle the matter of Akhnaten's religious revolution with precision, but Glass is surely right to consider the pharaoh as distinct from any that came before him. In his preparation for composing the opera, Glass turned over ways to demonstrate this distinctiveness effectively so that it would leave an impact on the audience. The solution came to him in having a countertenor sing the part of the pharaoh. "The effect of hearing a high, beautiful voice coming from the lips of a full-grown man can at first be very startling. In one stroke, Akhnaten would be separated from everyone around him" (Glass 1988, p. 156). This choice accomplishes several things at once. The countertenor, suggesting historical precedent in the Baroque period of musical history when castrati singers like Farinelli were enrapturing audiences with their falsetto voices, allows Glass also to insinuate the androgynous appearance of the pharaoh, so peculiar an element of Amarna art, into his voice. Musical history and art history from different periods lend themselves here to an evocation of the past—the former embellished by the rhythmic insistence of Glass's Minimalism, a rhythm that has much in character with that of the Baroque style, and the latter added to the former in the voice quality of his protagonist.

To complement this decision, Glass then made Nefertiti a mezzo-soprano. He explains, "normally the younger woman, in this case Akhnaten's wife,

Nefertiti, would sing the higher part" rather than Akhnaten's mother who takes the soprano part, "but for musical reasons, I wanted the voice in the Act II duet between Akhnaten and Nefertiti to be as close as possible to the same range, to create a more intimate effect in their vocal intermingling" (1988, p. 156). This implies that Glass had the construction of the opera already in mind and had some idea of the musical requirements even before assigning vocal parts. The attention to the latter is striking and apparent as one listens to the opera. The "vocal intermingling" that Glass speaks of in the duet draws the listener into the couple's intimacy in a very powerful way, and it is difficult to imagine that level of interaction if the parts had been assigned more traditionally without attention to the characterisation.

V. The texts: "The Funeral" and "The Hymn to the Sun"

Linking voice parts to characterisation is an integral aspect of preparation for a composer of any stage work, but for a composer using ancient narratives, special consideration must be taken towards choosing the texts that will be used, especially if the composer is not tied to a single text like Martinů had been in his *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Glass enlisted archaeologist Shalom Goldman as a co-librettist to assist in finding and translating the texts Glass sought for different aspects of the story. "We would want a specific kind of text," writes Glass, "then go looking for it. If the scenic idea came first, then the appropriate text had to be discovered." Glass gives an example of this by citing Akhnaten's coronation scene. "We knew... that there must have been a coronation, and we needed a text to be sung at our re-creation of it. What we decided to use was the list of the names and titles Akhnaten assumed on becoming pharaoh" (1988, p. 151). It seems

throughout the process of composition and planning, the texts were generally used to support the scenic ideas rather than the other way around, although the "Hymn to the Sun", Akhnaten's own poem, is a salient exception which will be discussed at length in due course. Like the hymn, most of the texts collected by Glass and his collaborators stem from the Amarna period, but one striking exception is the text used for the funeral scene in Act I—"The Funeral of Amenhotep III", Akhnaten's father.

The music for this scene begins with two drummers leading the funeral procession. These tom-toms are joined by a two-note ostinato in the strings, then rapid flourishes in woodwinds and finally a strident tritone pulse in the brass. It is all rather raucous and quite different from anything else in the opera—the old world, the militarism, the virile staccato vocals from the priests sung in ancient Egyptian. The material for this scene is from a collection of chants, spells and prescriptions called today *The Egyptian Book of the Dead,* the oldest material of which comes from about two centuries before the birth of Akhnaten. In consulting this work, Glass

> learned that when the pharaoh dies and begins his journey to the heavenly kingdom of Ra, he is urged to employ various strategies to ensure that the god will *notice* [Glass's emphasis] what is happening... but what should happen, the texts seem to ask, if for some reason the gods do not notice the pharaoh's passing and are not prepared to assist him in finding his way to them and to welcome him. With that in mind, I strove to make my funeral music capable of drawing attention to itself in every way possible. If any

> gods in the heavenly land of Ra were dozing, I was determined that my music would wake them up (1988, p. 154)

Glass found his working method for this scene in the text although none of this would be clear to a lay audience unversed in Egyptian history or literature. The libretto and stage directions do not call for any gods to appear. Nonetheless, Glass found an approach through his textual research that makes historical sense while also being aesthetically compelling. Glass scholar John Richardson (1999) writes of the above passage, "I have already discussed some parallels pursued by Glass between contemporary and ancient musics, of which the above has to be one of the most shaky in historical terms" (p. 113). Unfortunately, Richardson provides no more comment than this, and in fact, he seems more interested in describing the music in terms of late 20th-century popular music due to its percussive, rhythmic features. What Richardson seems to miss here is that Glass is not attempting to imitate Egyptian musical practice. The composer is establishing this scene from a literary, religious and cultural context found in the funerary writings. He does not say that he is attempting to follow Egyptian funerary music styles based on wall paintings or other texts. In fact, we have no scores from the time period concerning funerals or, for that matter, anything else in ancient Egyptian society—only chants (Anderson 1993, p.100). There is certainly nothing historically inaccurate in the thematic approach that Glass takes. Self-identification and location are important factors for ensuring that the gods do not neglect their duties towards the corpse, and there is even a hint of *quid pro quo* as well, as can be seen here in a prayer from *The Book of the Dead*:

> I have fought for thee, I have put to flight the enemy for thy name's sake. I am Tetteti, the son of Tetteti. I was conceived in Tattu, I was born in Tattu. I am with those who weep and with the women who bewail (Budge 1895)

Although it cannot be said with certitude, it is not unlikely that such a sentiment might be accompanied by a percussive accompaniment in order to get the attention of the gods. The point is that Glass was able to find through such a text a way of presenting something culturally significant and musically prescriptive that establishes the compelling nature of an ancient ritual for a modern audience, regardless of their lack of knowledge concerning the basis of such.

Glass also had to decide how such a scene would be intelligible to a modern audience if the text were to be sung in a dead language as it is in the funeral scene. In fact, all of the texts, with one important exception that we will come to, are sung in ancient languages—mainly ancient Egyptian but also Akkadian and Hebrew. Before the hammering tom-toms of the funeral procession begin, a narrator, who, it is important to recall, also doubles as an Egyptian scribe, reads from a papyrus scroll in the audience's language an announcement of the king's death; therefore, the audience can follow thematically the scene that is to come. In this instance the narration comes without musical support behind it, thus making the entrance of the tom-toms all the more striking. Glass explains his use of language in the opera:

> I gave myself the benefit of a narrator, thereby allowing the story to be more easily understood by the audience. I used the original ancient languages for two reasons: first, because I liked the way the words could be sung, and second, because I wanted the overall experience of the opera to come through movement, music, and image (2015, p. 317)

The composer's second reason must be justified by the effect of a live encounter with the work, but the first can be gleaned from recordings. Glass makes full use of the sound of ancient Egyptian in this funeral scene in lines like these:

> Ankh ankh, en mitak
> Yewk er heh en heh
> Aha en heh

The words here are perfectly suited to the sort of brilliantly dynamic staccato rendering that they are given by the composer. All the aspirated h's in the second and third lines have a compelling yet unforced quality, and it is doubtful that a translation into English would have anything but a choppy effect that would seem unnaturally articulated. There is also the added effect for the audience in not knowing precisely what is being sung, but rather in feeling the words. Emotions with unintelligible words can come across as all the more raw and visceral in impact, and that is precisely what Glass achieves here.

The only text that is sung in the audience's own language is at the end of Act II, the *Hymn to the Sun*, the only text as well that comes, presumably, from

the historical Akhnaten's own words. Glass himself juxtaposes the music for this piece with the earlier funeral scene:

> The blaring brass and pounding drums introduce the world into which Akhnaten was born. By contrast, the *Hymn to the Sun*...portrays, both musically and emotionally, the opposite end of the spectrum. Here Akhnaten, alone in the desert, sings a hymn to his god in words startlingly similar to the psalms of the Old Testament (1988, p. 153)

Glass and his collaborators have in fact taken their translation of the text from an anthology in English of ancient primary sources related to the Old Testament called *Documents from Old Testament Times* rather than an Egyptological source. This alone indicates something of Glass's desire from the outset to show links from the pharaoh's concept of divinity to the Judaic monotheistic tradition. In the translation by R.J. Williams (1960) (the *Akhnaten* libretto erroneously credits the editor of the volume for the translation), "Hymn to the Sun" runs 109 lines. Glass's libretto greatly truncates the poem, covering only lines 1-6, 31-36, 52-56, 78-81, 94-96, and ending with line 108. The lines that are chosen by Glass are at times altered to fit the meter best suited to the melody and to limit certain archaic phrases that do not sing well. For example, here are lines 1-6 of the original English translation by Williams:

> Thou dost appear beautiful on the horizon of heaven
> O living Aten, thou who wast the first to live
> When thou hast risen on the eastern horizon,
> Thou hast filled every land with thy beauty.

Thou art fair, great, dazzling, high above every land ;

Thy rays encompass the lands to the very limit of all thou hast made (p. 145)

And here are the first six lines of Glass's treatment of the text with changes in bold:

Thou dost appear beautiful on the horizon of heaven

O living Aten, **he** who **was** the first to live

When thou hast risen on the eastern horizon,

Thou hast filled every land with thy **purity**

Thou art fair, great, dazzling, high above every land ;

Thy rays encompass the **land** to the very **end** of all thou hast made (1984)

Glass does not indicate precisely why he made these particular changes in the text, but some of them, minor though they may first appear, have a strategic significance. In the second line, he changes "thou" to "he", having Akhnaten refer to the Aten suddenly in the third person using a gendered pronoun when elsewhere he uses the second person exclusively. This subtle shift in pronouns may have been used to bring the audience into the address, a direct explanation of who the object of Akhnaten's devotion is and a way of making Akhnaten stand briefly outside of the frame of the hymn. It could also be a soliloquy in which Akhnaten simply basks in wonderment at the glory of the Aten. In either case, the change to "he" is a strikingly incongruous pronoun shift when set against the rest of the lines in which the Aten is always addressed directly. Changing "wast" to "was" in that same line avoids the harsh linking sound that occurs when the final -t in "wast" almost swallows the article "the" after it when sung, so this

change allows a much smoother transition. Other changes in these lines stem from metric necessity with an increase or decrease in syllabic number.

As Glass and his collaborators include only about twenty-five percent of the original text, what is especially telling is what they choose to omit or stress. To understand the possible reasons for these choices, the agenda Glass establishes for his opera of ideas is of paramount importance. "It is currently argued that Akhnaten's monotheism was preserved by the Hebrews of his time and became the basis of the Judeo-Christian tradition of the West." To his credit, Glass does acknowledge in the next sentence that "this is an extremely complicated... issue" (Glass 1995, p. 138). It is clear, however, that Glass wants to make this connection between his protagonist and the tradition that a Western audience would recognize as its own. Nonetheless, it appears to be artistic disingenuousness to present the argument in his writing as though it were scholarly consensus when the translator of the very text that Glass uses for his libretto writes in his preface to the translation,

> The hymn's claim for the exclusiveness of Aten is only apparent. We would do well to reserve the term monotheism for Hebrew religion and employ for the religion of Akhenaten a less restrictive term such as monolatry, the worship of one god to the exclusion of others, even though their existence be not denied (Williams 1960, p. 144)

In fact, there is very little evidence to suggest that Judaism was dependent in its formation on Akhnaten's ideas. Glass appears to be hearkening back to Freud (1941) and his theories in *Moses and Monotheism* here. This perhaps

explains why the composer includes the first six lines of the Hymn in his libretto but does not continue with line 7, which reads, "Being Re, thou dost reach to their limit..." (p. 145). Akhnaten equates the Aten with the sun god Re, just as he equated the Aten with two other gods in his prose introduction to the hymn, which is not translated by Williams, but is included in Egyptologist Miriam Lichtheim's (2006 [first edition 1976])) well-known anthology of Egyptian writings published nearly a decade before the premiere of the opera (p. 96). What is clear is that Akhnaten's brand of "monolatry" does not eschew a certain multiplicity, but it is this that Glass is uncomfortable conveying to his audience because it introduces ambiguity when his opera's agenda requires clarity.

With so little of Akhnaten's original poem set to music in this scene, it could well be argued that all of what the composer chooses to include is what the composer chooses to emphasize to his audience. First, we begin with the choice of translation itself. Williams' translation is full of archaic pronouns that suit a majestic, biblical presentation- "thou" and "thy" are used exclusively in Akhnaten's address to the Aten, and verbs such as "dost" and "givest" are sprinkled throughout the text. The language is clearly meant to convey an epic, archaic relationship with the reader's understanding of biblical texts translated into familiar forms as in the King James Bible. With Glass's agenda of continuity between Akhnaten's words and the Judeo-Christian tradition, this choice of English text makes the position resoundingly clear. Nonetheless, it must be asked if Akhnaten's original text circa 1350 BCE was meant to sound archaic to his contemporary audience in Egypt and whether the composer has not compromised another of his obvious ambitions of historical and linguistic fidelity,

which is applied throughout the remainder of the opera, by choosing a translation that deliberately contravenes this. For an English-speaking audience, Glass's "Hymn" is already a modern concession by virtue of its being in English. However, it is interesting to note that Miriam Lichtheim's translation of the same hymn uses "you" as the form of address throughout, and the poem in her hands is far more colloquial in its details. As her translation is that of an Egyptologist and certainly would have been known to Glass and his collaborators (one of whom, it will be remembered, was Shalom Goldman, a scholar of Near Eastern languages) at the time of the opera's conception, the choice to use the archaised text is all the more striking.

As the aria comes to a close, Akhnaten leaves the stage "followed by an offstage chorus singing Psalm 104, in the original Hebrew. This Hebrew text has striking similarities to 'The Hymn to the Sun'" (Glass 2015, p. 317-318). This is the basis for much of the content that gets stressed in the Hymn. It is well to remember that the narrator is also an Egyptian scribe and therefore cannot contribute to the exposition of a scene involving Hebrew scripture. Clearly, concerning the connection between Akhnaten's ideas and the later Judaism, Glass is interested in choosing the parts of the text in the Egyptian hymn that match details and even certain words from Psalm 104 since language alone must be relied upon in this instance to make his point. Although the latter is sung in Hebrew, "in the productions we used projections of the English or German translations on the walls of the stage, which I had also done for the Sanskrit text sung in *Satyagraha*" (p. 318). In this way, the audience has been primed to make these associations as they read the psalm on the wall immediately after hearing

the aria sung in their own language. Since the translated text of the projected psalm is that of the King James version in the English iteration of the opera (Glass 1984), another reason for choosing the archaised translation by Williams becomes self-evident. Here is an example of the text of the libretto taken from Akhnaten's hymn:

> How manifold is that which thou hast made
>
> Thou sole God
>
> Thou didst create the earth
>
> According to thy will
>
> Being alone, everything on earth
>
> Which walks and flies on high

And here in full is the part of the projected Psalm 104 that Glass has set to music:

> Oh Lord, how manifold are Thy works
>
> In wisdom hast Thou made them all
>
> The earth is full of Thy riches
>
> Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment
>
> Who stretchest out the Heavens like a curtain
>
> Thou makest darkness and it is night
>
> Wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth (1984)

It is worth noting here that Glass repeats the first three lines of his setting of Psalm 104 so that the audience reads these lines twice. The similarities are indeed striking. Frandsen (1993) writes, "Here, Akhnaten is shown to us as our ancestor and contemporary in that his religious program, exemplified in his

hymn, is seen as the true predecessor to our own Christianity" (p. 225). The association to Christianity that Frandsen is considering here is clearly implied by Glass's choice for the last stanza of his setting of the hymn:

> There is no other that knows thee
> Save thy son, Akhnaten
> For thou hast made him skilled In thy plans and thy might
> Thou dost raise him up for thy son
> Who comes forth from thyself (1984)

However, Frandsen (1993) continues,

> The connection between the ancient Egyptian doctrine of Akhnaten and our faith is, of course far from immediate. Glass and his co-librettists have adopted the older belief, according to which the author of the 104th *Psalm of David* allegedly was inspired by the *Sun Hymn* of Akhnaten (p. 225).

This older belief was indeed already out of date by the time of Glass's opera since, according to Miriam Lichtheim (2006 [first edition 1976]) in a footnote to her translation of the "Hymn to Aten" almost a decade earlier, the resemblances between the hymn and the psalm are "more likely to be the result of the generic similarity between Egyptian hymns and biblical psalms. A specific literary interdependence is not probable" (p. 100 n.3). It is likely that Glass was aware of this point of view when composing his opera, but the dramatic possibilities of connecting these religious ideas through time as the consummation of his trilogy of operas based on world-changing ideas were undoubtedly too irresistibly poetic to lay aside in favour of a prosaic scholarly consensus.

VI. Extra-textual Sources of Inspiration

Because Philip Glass and his collaborators visited Egyptian sites and museums, inspiration was not solely generated through texts. Artefacts played a role as well. At Tel-el-Amarna, the modern name for the site of Akhetaten, Glass found a stela, an upright stone marker, with "the hands of the sun (the Aten) reaching down from the heavens to touch his son, Akhnaten (see Figure 1). The ceremonial fanfare that concludes the City/Dance scene in Act II of the opera derives directly from that moment, when I first stood in front of this monument" (Glass 1988, p. 152). Here a compositional feature came as a direct inspiration from a pictorial representation of the pharaoh and the Aten.

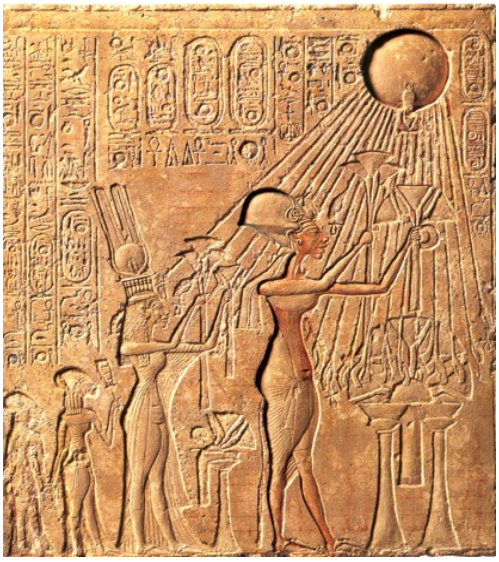

Figure 1. Stela from Tel-el-Amarna of Akhnaten and family now in the Egyptian Museum. (Godfrey, 2015)

It is rather difficult to insist that the representation should engender in the mind of the viewer a brass fanfare, but there is clearly something of the awe of the divine represented here that provoked Glass to form a musical outlet for it. It is a more visceral, direct route to engaging with the ancient worldview than a

text in general, and Glass's compositional decision stemming from it is an important reflection of this.

More importantly, however, is a sudden realisation Glass experienced while looking at the objects in the Amarna Room at the Cairo Museum that would become the guiding principle of the opera's structure. Many of the objects in the room are fragmented as time measured in millennia is brutal on survivors. This lack of wholeness became, in Glass's phrase, a "metaphor for the opera":

> It seemed to me, at that moment, that we needed no more story than was already there, that the missing pieces far from needing to be filled in or explained, actually added to the mystery and beauty of our subject. A theatrical approach, to be sure, but theater was what we were making (1988, p. 150)

This may be at the heart of Frandsen's (1993) passing of judgment on *Akhnaten—that* "there is no meaningful construction of a reality" in the opera (p. 233). Were the Cairo artefacts to be filled in by modern goldsmiths, stonemasons, carpenters, etc., rather than left in their present condition, it stands to reason that they would be artificially constructed and of far less value. Glass's opera does have an episodic quality to it, but so does our knowledge of Akhnaten and his world, still and always shrouded in a great deal of mystery. A less episodic version of the pharaoh's story would make it more fluid, to be sure, but that would necessitate a great deal of fiction as a crutch to get from one known element to the next. It is better to leave the artefact as it is, precious for its vulnerability, beautiful for its fractured reality. This, it seems to me, is clearly the

impression with which Glass wishes to leave us in his opera. And this is precisely what his opera achieves.

VII. Conclusion

Philip Glass's use of ancient texts in his opera *Akhnaten* opens up a fascinating window onto the compositional methodologies of one of the world's most well-known composers. We have examined two pieces in particular because they are fine examples of two different ways of dealing with ancient texts. "The Funeral Scene" is an example of how Glass went to a primary source, with the help of his collaborators, in order to solve a compositional and narrative problem, and this text informed his decisions at every turn in the process. "The Hymn to the Sun", on the other hand, meant dealing with a translation of an ancient text. The focus on which translation to choose and how to adapt it to the overall linguistic and thematic needs of the work is exemplified in Glass's approach to his subject and his working methods. Although scholarly consensus is not always with him concerning the place of the pharaoh's impact on theological and historical matters, it is difficult to argue with such compelling artistic results when faced with the music and drama of the opera.

5. Bohuslav Martinu and The Epic of Gilgamesh: A Very Personal Conception

I. "The Problems of Friendship, Love, and Death"

The standard version of the Epic of Gilgamesh consists of eleven tablets with an extraneous tablet at the end, Tablet XII, which was traditionally added to the tale beginning around 1200 BCE, presumably because it supplemented thematically the original story contained in the first eleven tablets. It is in fact a line-by-line translation of part of an earlier Sumerian Gilgamesh story (ca. 2100 BCE). Most scholars today agree that it does not belong to the story told in the first eleven tablets "but was attached to it because it was plainly related material" (George, 1999, p. xxviii). To assemble texts according to thematic concerns was the prerogative of Babylonian scholars (George, 1999, p. xxviii). Evidence suggests that this same concern was also paramount to Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů's decision to adapt Tablet XII for the ending of his oratorio *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

The modern world was first attracted to the story of Gilgamesh when the Flood Tablet was deciphered by George Smith at the British Museum between 1873 and 1876. For Martinů too, it appears that it was this episode that first caught the composer's attention in the late 1940s during a long exile from his homeland when he first learned of the story from friends and agreed that it was the right story for the "cantata" he wanted to compose (Březina, 2017, p. 6). "It was these verses which induced Martinů to study the whole Gilgamesh text," writes his friend and biographer Miloš Šafránek (1962), "but, as it turned out, he did not then set 'The Flood' to music" (p. 305). The composer had planned at the

outset to choose a single part of the epic rather than the whole (Březina, 2017, p. 7). In the end, Martinů sets material from Tablets I, II, VII, VIII, X, and XII (the translation of the Sumerian episodes) mainly for his oratorio but adds a few lines from Tablets III, IV and IX in order to mine key thematic statements from these tablets rather than narrative sequences. He leaves Tablets V, VI and XI (the Flood Tablet) completely out of his treatment of the story. What may have turned Martinů against the idea of setting the scene of the Flood is that the tale of the great deluge is told by a different character as Gilgamesh listens passively. While important as a lesson for Gilgamesh in the original epic, Martinů, judging by his choices for narrative settings, is mainly interested in the themes born out of the relationship between Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu as well as the death of the latter and the effect of this on Gilgamesh. As Martinů explained in his programme notes for the premiere:

> I have come to realize...that in spite of the immense progress we have made in technical science and industry, the feelings and the problems which move people most deeply have not changed and that they exist in the literatures of the oldest peoples of which we have knowledge just as they exist in ours. They are the problems of friendship, love and death. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* the desire is expressed with almost painful urgency for an answer to these questions to which to this day we have failed to find a reply (Šafránek, 1962, p. 308)

Although Šafránek (1962) calls the Flood Story "undoubtedly the finest episode in the whole epic", Martinů explains that his "conception of the text... is a very personal one" (p. 305). The themes of friendship, love, and death suit this

conception of the text in a more satisfying way than a tale told by a supporting character, regardless of how pertinent to the epic and Gilgamesh's character development in comprehending the gods and the universe such a tale is and how much it conveys of the Mesopotamian cosmological world view. This emphasis on these features of the text could be related to Martinů's personal experience in the recent past with the Nazi takeover of his country followed by the Soviet-backed Czechoslovak coup d'état of 1948, and the composer's self-imposed exile which took him to the United States only to be caught up in the rampant paranoia of 1950s McCarthyism there. Many of the composer's friends and colleagues had died or suffered artistic suppression in his homeland during this period (Martinů's own music was blacklisted by the Communist regime [Svatos, 2024]), and the themes from the *Gilgamesh* epic clearly resonated deeply with Martinů due to recent experience.

Beyond the thematic context, Martinů's choices of what to include or omit seem to be in service to a pre-formed musical construct. The composer's general approach to a libretto is made clear when he states, "The text must be accommodated to the music. It is therein that the poetry resides" (Popelka, 2012, p. 191). In fact, in a letter to Milos Šafránek (1962), the composer insists that his choices for the *Epic of Gilgamesh* oratorio do not constitute the formation of a standard libretto, perhaps due to the fragmentary nature of the text he was working with. He writes that his choices had come down to "almost theatrical scenes, which provided the necessary contrast, but not, of course, a libretto." And then he adds a succinct but telling statement that may indicate the core concept determining his choices: "I have taken what I needed for the music" (p. 308). This

demonstrates that his aims were directed towards a method for adapting the text to music that had already been composed. In this way, Martinů signals that the text is in some way secondary to the music and that he is not as concerned with the coherence of the story or the Mesopotamian world view depicted in it than as a means to a musically expressive end. In an earlier work, the ballet *Istar*, also based on an ancient Mesopotamian myth, Martinů's working methods were already defined in similar terms when he writes, "I have…adapted the libretto in order to achieve the proper proportions of form and certain opportunities for gradation in the musical expression" (Šafránek, 1962, p. 74).

As noted in chapter 3, Martinů's libretto for the oratorio is taken from the 1928 translation in hexameters by R. Campbell-Thompson. Martinů began composing the work in Nice, France, in October 1954 and completed it four months later, "the English edition in R. Campbell Thompson's translation having had its place in his 'select' library for many years" (Šafránek, 1962, p. 304). His familiarity with this particular translation may go some way towards explaining why Martinů did not use or even appear to know of Alexander Heidel's English translation from 1946, in circulation for almost a decade by the time Martinů's composition began to take form. Since the hexameters of Thompson's translation caused the composer difficulty in his work on the libretto, it is curious that the more recent translation did not come to his attention. Martinů admitted that the Campbell Thompson English translation was "rather distorted and choppy," and he feared that "given that I only use fragments, people wouldn't understand it much" (Březina, 2017, p. 8). Near the end of his work on the composition of the oratorio, he was given a copy of a recent Czech translation of the epic by Lubor

Matouš, which was "metrically much closer to the original and more effective than the hexameters of R. Campbell Thompson." Martinů, "to his express regret, as the work was already practically finished" was unable to use the text for his libretto except for purposes of comparison (Šafránek, 1962, p. 305). His determination upon an English language text of the epic was a concern for universality. He explained in a letter to his family, "I must base it on an English text, you know, nowhere would they sing my piece in Czech. Maybe later on I will be able to adapt it to a Czech text, so it could be played in our country" (Březina, 2017, p. 7-8). In fact, the translation by Matouš was the first time that the epic had appeared in Czech (Ziolkowski, 2011, p. 75), so Martinů had little choice but to use the English libretto when he began composing the oratorio several years earlier.

II. Libretto Overview

Martinů's oratorio is divided into three roughly equal parts in terms of performance duration. However, in terms of coverage of the text on the tablets, the three parts could hardly be more unequal. Part 1, entitled "Gilgamesh", only features the titular character at the beginning and end. It depicts mainly the creation of Enkidu and his transformation into the human world, ending with his battle in the city with Gilgamesh, which is left unresolved by the composer. Tablets I and II are adapted in Part I of the oratorio, the first tablet rather extensively since it was in Martinů's time (and still is today) one of the best-preserved of all of the tablets that constitute the standard version of the epic. In fact, only six lines from Tablet II are inserted into the libretto, although the final line of Part 1 from this tablet, which dramatizes the violent heat of battle

between the two heroes, is repeated by the choir in extended, rhythmically heavy fortissimo passages:

> They grappled and roared like a beast!
> O! The door trembl'd! The Wall crumbl'd!
> O! They grappled and struggl'd and snorted and strangl'd,
> they grappled and snorted, the door and wall crumbl'd!
> They grappled and roared like a beast! O! The wall crumbl'd!

This ends Part I of the oratorio. Part II, entitled "The Death of Enkidu", takes up Tablets VII, VIII, and X as Martinů's subtitle on the score makes clear. However, Martinů also draws thematic passages from Tablets III, and IX along with a brief narrative description from Tablet IV here to complement the narrative exploitation of the three main tablets. Part II begins with the choir intoning the opening passage of Tablet III concerning the inexorable mortality of man compared with the immortality of the gods. Then Enkidu's depiction of the 'Dwelling of Darkness' or the underworld, which Enkidu has dreamt about, his death, and Gilgamesh's subsequent mourning and expedition to Utanapishti, the immortal man, all follow. Part III of the oratorio, entitled "Invocation", is made up only of the main section of Tablet XII with a brief exception at the beginning, an observation taken from Tablet X describing Gilgamesh's haggard appearance as sorrow for the death of his friend has overwhelmed him. The rest of Part 3 is taken up by Gilgamesh's invocation of Enkidu in the underworld in order to find out what the afterlife is like, crying out through the voice of the narrator, "Enkidu, I pray thee, to rise from the earth."

In addition to the orchestra, the work is scored for four soloists—soprano, tenor, baritone, and bass—as well as a narrator and choir. Sung narration is delivered by the choir in all three parts, the bass soloist in Part 1 and the soprano soloist in part 3. Each character in the story is given to one of the soloists with one interesting exception of doubling. The soprano sings the part of Shamhat, the temple harlot who seduces Enkidu, for one passage, and Siduri, the wise tavern keeper, in another, although neither female character's name is ever given in the libretto. The tenor sings the part of the hunter and Enkidu in Part 2. The baritone is assigned to Gilgamesh only. The bass takes the part of the hunter's father and Enkidu in Part 3. The difference between Enkidu as sung by the tenor and then by the bass is that Enkidu is alive in the part of the story sung by the former but an apparition in the underworld when sung by the latter. The effect of this contrast is striking. Martinů has suggested musically the physical depth of the spirit of Enkidu now wandering aimlessly in the underworld by matching it with the sonorous depth of the bass. The material aspect of living flesh is contrasted with the incorporeality of Enkidu's new condition by assigning each to a different singer. As none of the other characters are assigned to multiple singers, this would seem to be Martinů's express purpose in his treatment of Enkidu's characterization, and it is a thematically provocative and musically thoughtful one.

One interesting note must be added here concerning Martinů's use of the narrator. Much of the narration comes from the ancient text itself, but at times Martinů also uses Campbell-Thompson's explanatory notes on the text. The first sentence spoken by the narrator, for example, in Part III is "Gilgamish, having

failed to learn the secret of eternal life, is now calling up his dead friend." This line does not come from the poem itself but from Campbell-Thompson's parenthetical summation in a footnote at the end of the text. Then, the composer proceeds from there with textual material spoken by the narrator at the midpoint of Tablet XII.

III. The Story and the Text

The first word heard in the oratorio is a full-throated exclamation of the name "Gilgamesh!" The bass solo then sings the first three lines of R. Campbell-Thompson's translation of Tablet I of the epic save for the words in bold struck through that Martinů cuts:

> He who (the heart of) all matters hath proven let him [teach] the nation,
>
> [He who all] knowledge possesseth, ~~**therein**~~ shall ~~**he**~~ [school] all the people
>
> [He shall his wisdom impart (?)] and (so) shall they [share it] together
>
> (1928, p. 9)

The first thing to note is that Martinů here and elsewhere will take even Campbell-Thompson's uncertain passages signified by parentheses, brackets, and question marks, and use them unflinchingly in his libretto. Martinů's contribution to this opening is to simplify the syntax by omitting two words in the second line, which serves to provide a more cohesive link to the first half of the sentence by making "shall school" the main verb. These opening lines serve to establish a relationship between Gilgamesh and his subjects in which the king shares wisdom learned over the course of the story with his people. It is in fact

the state of things at the close of the story—the epic begins at the end. Martinů then picks up the translation of the story some 20 lines later that reads, "Gilgamesh leaveth no son to his father, leaveth no maid to her mother." Here is described a very different relationship between Gilgamesh and his people in which the former is seen as abusive and exploitative. By following the opening lines with these lines, Martinů is juxtaposing the two extremes of Gilgamesh's personality and the effect of each on the people he rules over. In order to convey this juxtaposition, Martinů discards the framing device in the translation of the opening which describes the walls of the city. Since the composer does not score Tablet XI, which consists of the latter half of this framing device concerning the walls, there is no need to present its match here. In effect, Martinů has already set up the focus of his intentions in the story he wants to tell with his choices of textual presentation in this opening; he is interested in the human relationships in the epic rather than the artefacts and other features of the culture.

Martinů rearranges Campbell-Thompson's lines here concerning Gilgamesh's initial abusive stewardship of his subjects. Here are the original lines in the translation:

> Gilgamish leaveth no son to [his] father, [his] arrogance swelling
>
> (Each) day and [night]; [aye, he] is the shepherd of Erech, the high-[wall'd]
>
> He is [our?] shepherd. . . . [masterful, dominant, subtle]. . .
>
> [Gilgamish] leaveth no [maid to her mother, nor] daughter to [hero],
>
> [(Nay), nor a spouse to a husband]" (1928, p. 10)

And here is Martinů's treatment of these lines:

> Gilgamesh leaveth no son to his father,
> leaveth no maid to her mother,
> nor a spouse to a husband!
> He is our shepherd, masterful, dominant! (2017, p. 42)

This is Martinů's typical approach in adapting this translation for his work. He aligns similar syntactical groupings for rhetorical effect rather than allowing them to be interrupted by extraneous ideas. Therefore, the rearrangement of lines undertaken by the composer is necessary for thematic clarity. The brew of ideas and images is boiled down to the essence here: the familial structures of this society are threatened by an abusive, overarching king. Where the family goes, so goes civilisation. The irony of the final line of the passage in question is highlighted by its place immediately following. Is this what a shepherd of his people does? Note that unlike the translator, Martinů ends the line with "dominant" rather than "subtle". The latter word is not as musical as the former in English, and "dominant" contains the same dactylic structure as "masterful", the preceding word, making the connection more forceful when sung. In fact, Martinů's passage here, because of the clear alignment of his ideas, is a much more musical one than the translation he is working from, which stands to reason.

Martinů clearly is at pains throughout his adaptation of the Gilgamesh translation to reduce to a minimum the number of times the names of gods come up in the text. This perhaps comes from the perspective that modern audiences

might not recognise the significance of these ancient names and what functions the gods might have or even that a name represents one of the gods. Note Campbell-Thompson's translation of Tablet XII in which Gilgamesh calls into the underworld for Enkidu to come out to him:

> Cried (?) [he] (for) Enkidu out of the earth to ascend: "[Not] (the Plague-god), Namtar, hath [seized] him, nor fever, (but only) the earth: nor the Croucher, Nergal, the ruthless, hath seized him, (but only) the earth: neither fell he there where was [battle] of mortals; 'twas only the earth [which hath seized [him.]"
>
> (So) . . . .for his servitor Enkidu sorrow'd the offspring of Ninsun,
> (Aye), as he went all alone unto [Ekur}, the temple of Enlil (1928, p. 58)

Four Mesopotamian gods are named in this section, including additional epithets that served to identify their attributes (i.e. the ruthless, the Croucher). It is significant to add that although these lines are given to the narrator, it may also be the difficulty of scoring a vocal line with these names that is at issue because Martinů will repeat some of these lines through the soprano and choir between the narrated sections here. However, the main concern seems to be finding a way to simplify the text so that a modern audience will understand the action without the distractions of ancient names that would generally be unknown to them and which have no strong bearing on the story the composer is telling. Therefore, the composer shows himself willing to sacrifice some of the richness of the original ancient text in order to facilitate a clearer understanding

for the oratorio's audience. Here now is Martinů's reworking of these lines in Part III "Invocation" in the voice of the narrator:

> Cried he for Enkidu out of the earth to ascend. Cried he, "Not the plague hath seized him, nor fever, but only the earth! Nor the god hath seized him, but only the earth! Neither fell he there where was battle of mortals, 'twas only the earth which hath seized him-- Enkidu, I pray thee, to rise from the earth!" (2017, p. 54)

The first three gods from the translation go unmentioned in Martinů's libretto. Namtar is reduced impersonally to "the plague". "The Croucher, Nergal, the ruthless" is changed simply to "the god". Moreover, the line mentioning Ninsun is eliminated altogether. The last line imploring Enkidu to ascend out of the depths of the earth has been brought forward 20 lines in Campbell-Thompson's translation by Martinů. After the choir repeats the line and joins the soprano for some repetition of the above text, the narration resumes:

> Gilgamesh, he went all alone unto the temple of God Enlil! (2017, p. 56)

Because the line concerning the invocation of Enkidu has been brought forward, Martinů is careful to replace the pronoun in Campbell-Thompson's translation with the agent of the present action, Gilgamesh, so that it will not be confused with Enkidu in the preceding line of narration. The name of the temple, Ekur, is omitted. At last, the name of Enlil is mentioned, but Martinů, again striving for clarity and understanding, has added the word "God" before the name so that there can be no mistaking the identity of the temple's owner. He is

mentioned two more times in the next section of the libretto, each time as Father Enlil, which corresponds with the translation.

In all, the names of gods occur only six times in Martinů's libretto. A minor goddess named Aruru is called "Goddess Aruru", another example of Martinů identifying her divine status when the original translation simply calls her by her name, and is mentioned as the creator of Enkidu. This is the only name given of a deity in the first two parts of Martinů's work. Since the original story has the gods playing important roles in the epic, particularly Inanna and Anu, this is quite exceptional. In Part III, as we have seen, the god Enlil, commonly known as the most dominant of Sumerian gods, is referred to three times. The last god to be mentioned is in the same section as Enlil—the god Ea, who is called "Ea, my Father", much like Enlil. The appellation "father" is sourced directly from the translation. Ea's name is invoked twice. Otherwise, none of the myriad other gods are named.

Here is another example of source and libretto in which we find Martinů working around the usage of names in the pantheon of Mesopotamian gods. It is also a useful example of the composer picking phrases from different lines and then assembling them into sharply reduced but effective lines of text. Here is Campbell-Thompson's original from Tablet VII in which Enkidu is recounting a dream that took him into the Underworld:

> When I enter'd into (this) House of the Dust, were High Priest and acolyte sitting,
>
> Seer and magician, the priest who the Sea of the great gods anointed,

(Here) sat Etana, Sumuqan; the Queen of the Underworld (also)

Ereshkigal, in whose presence doth bow the Recorder of Hades,

[Belit]-seri, and readeth before her; [she lifted] her head (and) beheld me (1928, p. 39)

And now here is Martinů's reduction in the recitative of the tenor:

> When I enter'd into the House of the Dust, the Queen of the Underworld, she saw me, she lifted her head, she saw me (2017, p. 50)

The Queen of the Underworld does not receive her name Ereshkigal, and in fact, she appears in Martinů's libretto to be the only deity there when Enkidu enters. Martinů's version may be less picturesque than the original, but it serves to simplify the action for a modern audience of this oratorio and heightens the connection between Enkidu and the deity in the room that matters the most, even if we never hear her name.

The changes discussed thus far in Martinů's adaptation of the ancient text have been mainly concerned with the composer's simplifications of the ancient material in order to facilitate an understanding of the narrative for a contemporary audience. As observed above, the themes of the epic of greatest interest for the composer are timeless ones, so Martinů's changes to the text help to shear away extraneous cultural artefacts that might obscure the heart of these themes. In addition to these concerns, Martinů also went to some lengths to accommodate the mores and sensibilities of his 1950s audiences. The original

ancient text as translated by Campbell-Thompson is somewhat unsparing, for example, in the sexuality at the root of Enkidu's transformation into a "civilised" human being. Martinů clearly works around some of the explicit nature of the original. While the original stresses the long bout of lovemaking between Enkidu and Shamhat—"six days, (aye) seven nights"—Martinů prefers to dispense with the details and allow one observation of the hierodule's enthusiasm to convey the entire tableau: "bashful she was not, ravish'd the soul of him, loosing her mantle." The next line has the post-coital Enkidu turning towards the cattle, which run away from him now that he has been humanized through the sex act. The incredible duration of the act is omitted by the composer, sparing his audience any chinks to the armour of a modern moralistic viewpoint at the hands of a more unabashed and arguably more liberated ancient story.

IV. "The Zero-level of Communism"/ Conclusion

Perhaps the most important reflection that can be made about Martinů's concerns at the time of his composition of this oratorio is of a more national or political character. As has been noted above, Martinů began composing *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in October 1954 in self-exile in France. Only six years earlier was the Czechoslovak coup d'état in "Victorious February"; i.e. the Communist takeover of Martinů's homeland, an upheaval that left the composer despondent so that "whatever enthusiasm he had about visiting his homeland had now been drained" (Rybka, 2011. p. 190). The Communist authorities had blacklisted Martinů's music. The purge involving the composer was part of a larger general musicological struggle that had been taking place between cultural minister and highly influential music critic Zdeněk Nejedlý ("best known for his life-long

project to destroy Antonín Dvořák" [Svatos, 2009a, p. 5) and his students who believed that music must be a pedagogical, socialist tool uplifting the masses and those like Martinů who believed music to be a craft in which the composer need not provide any discourse on a work's motivations (Svatos, 2009b, p. 62). With the upswing of his fortunes in the new Communist era in Czechoslovakia, Nejedlý was poised for revenge against his opponents. One such opponent was Martinů's close friend Václav Talich, the conductor of the Czech Philharmonic who brought that orchestra international prestige during his tenure (1919-1941). Since Talich championed modern Czech music like Martinů's, i.e. music without a neo-romantic socialist program as an aim, he was naturally a magnet for suspicion by the Nejedlý camp. A wave of anti-German hysteria had begun in 1945 against "*Sudeten* (Germanized) Czechs, some of whom had been Nazis." Talich was caught up in this and "falsely accused of collaborating with the Nazis during the war simply because he had led the orchestra in a concert in Berlin" (Rybka, 2011, p. 178). The great conductor was unceremoniously stripped of his role as head of the Czech Philharmonic. The effect on Martinů when he heard the news was unnerving (p. 179). The tide had clearly turned against artists in Martinů's homeland who did not embrace the state-sponsored ideology in their work.

Evidence exists in Martinů's libretto for the *Epic of Gilgamesh* that shows the composer working linguistically to distance himself from Communism in a very basic way. The word "comrade" is famously loaded with Communist ideology. Jodi Dean (2018) writes,

> The comrade is the zero-level of communism because it designates the relation between those on the same side of the struggle to produce a new

set of free, just, and equal social relations, relations without exploitation. Their relation is political, divisive (p. 100).

The long history of the word coming from Spanish and making its way into the Bolshevik lexicon in its Russian iteration is beyond the scope of the present analysis. Nor is it within our scope to examine why the word is so prevalent in Campbell-Thompson's translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Nonetheless, the fact is that the translator often puts the word into Gilgamesh's mouth in describing Enkidu. For Martinů, so at odds with the Communist establishment in his homeland, this is simply a word to be avoided. Here is Campbell-Thompson's translation of Gilgamesh speaking to Siduri at her tavern in Tablet X with the word placed in bold italics:

...the hap of my ***comrade***

[Lay on me heavy (?)-- O 'tis a long road that I range o'er} the desert!

Enkidu, (yea), [of my ***comrade*** the hap lay heavy (?) upon me]--

['Tis a long road] that I range o'er the desert-- O, how to be silent],

(Aye, or) how to give voice? [(For) the ***comrade*** I ha' (so) lovéd] (1928, p. 45)

And now Martinů's adaptation of these lines with substitutions in bold italics:

The hap of my ***friend*** lay on me heavy. O 'tis a long road that I range o'er the desert.

Yea, of my ***friend*** the hap lay heavy upon me! O, how to be silent?

How to give voice? ***Enkidu*** I ha' so loved (2017, p. 52)

Martinů streamlines the passage confronting him in his usual way, but what he does take from the translation tends to be repeated elsewhere word for word. The clear exception here is embodied in the three instances of the word "comrade". It is only for this word that the composer proposes substitutions: first, by using "friend" and then by the proper noun of the friend's name, "Enkidu." In addition to this passage, Martinů replaces the word five other times in his libretto, not once allowing it into his narrative. Since the composer's opposition to the Nejedlý camp was based on a fundamental disagreement on the nature of a musical work, it is to this end that we may look for an explanation of this lexical omission. It may be that Martinů is ensuring even in the details of the libretto that no ideological framework, particularly communism, could use the oratorio as a pedagogical and political tool. This sort of utilitarian view went entirely contrary to his musical beliefs in which a synthesis of music and ideas was to be avoided in favour of the pure craft of music itself. It is important to recall that Martinů hoped for his oratorio to play in Czechoslovakia (Březina, 2017, p. 8), so the libretto shorn of such a loaded word as "comrade" would be an argument by design supporting his own view of pure music without any tangible political or ideological associations.

Martinů laboured against programmatic expression in music. "My feeling is that this aesthetic, at the expense of pure music, has deprived us of the joy of music.…It is self-evident that, over time, false conclusions were made on many matters which became transformed into complete dogma and that it was upon this basis that critical opinion was built and perpetuated" (Svatos, 2018, p. 22). The composer was also dismayed by the critical vogue long in place in

Czechoslovakia of insisting on a neo-romantic resolution to works in which audiences were to "commiserate in suffering and become inspired by 'victory' in the face of overwhelming odds" (p.22). With this in mind, the ending to the oratorio becomes even more striking in its calm ambiguity. Enkidu (bass) is responding to the questions of Gilgamesh (baritone) regarding the presence of various figures in the underworld.

Baritone: Then, the hero, slain in fight, didst thou see him?

Bass: Aye, I saw.

Choir: O'er him his wife in bitter woe.

Baritone: He whose corpse in desert lieth, didst thou see him?

Bass: Aye, I saw, I saw!

Choir: Not in earth doth rest his spirit.

Baritone: He whose ghost hath none to tend, didst thou see him?

Bass and Choir: Aye, I saw, I saw! (2017, p. 60)

This is the antithesis of the ending required by socialist orthodoxy in Martinů's native land. There is no victory here, and the audience is not given any keys to unlock such a conclusion, no objective dissemination of ideas that will enhance societal harmony or docility. Campbell-Thompson's translation of Tablet XII ends on a similarly bleak note as well. In choosing to present Tablet XII as one-third of his oratorio, Martinů is clearly interested in the thematic content of the text. He also begins his adaptation of Tablet XII at the midpoint when

Enkidu is already dead and abiding in the underworld. This suggests that Martinů was careful to avoid the awkward beginning of the tablet in which we find Enkidu still alive when his death had already been dramatized in the previous part of the oratorio. This means that the three parts of Martinů's work convey the three basic stages of human existence in the character of Enkidu in the earthly and spiritual realms: Part 1 is the birth and development of Enkidu; Part 2 is the death of Enkidu; Part 3 is the afterlife of Enkidu. This is the overall vision of the ancient material that interests Martinů rather than the episodic adventure tales or the cultural anthropology of the Mesopotamian civilisation itself. Martinů's adaptation of the text shows a keen interest and management of the thematic material of the story and a forthright sense that for him the most effective adaptation should focus on those points that are universally relevant to the human condition, particularly in light of the difficult situation that led to his self-exile from his homeland at the time of this work's composition.

6. Per Nørgård's *Gilgamesh*: The Path to Individuation

I. The Geography of the Stage

Two of the chapters in *Gilgamesh among Us* by Theodore Ziolkowski (2011) cover the years 1941-1958 and 1959-1978 respectively. With regard to music, he calls Martinů's oratorio "the high point" of the former period and Per Nørgård's opera "a major culmination" of the latter (p. 105). Nevertheless, the differences between Per Nørgård's 1973 adaptation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and Martinů's could not be more striking. To begin with, Martinů's oratorio is in a standard three-act structure, but Nørgård's opera is made up of scenes divided into six days and seven nights, subdivided in order by night, day, and evening. Ziolkowski calls this structure a dimension "with distinct biblical overtones" (p. 105), but "six days and seven nights" is a timescale that runs throughout the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as a trope. It is, for example, the duration of lovemaking between Shamhat and Enkidu (Tablet I), the time of mourning for Enkidu by Gilgamesh (mentioned in Tablet X), the period of the flood (Tablet XI), and the length of time that Gilgamesh sleeps after being tested by Utnapishtim to stay awake (Tablet XI). The number seven itself was a mystical number for the ancient Mesopotamians who operated with a sexagesimal system rather than our own decimal system of numbers, and it appears many times in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. According to this sexagesimal system in ancient Mesopotamia, numbers were counted by 60 or numbers that could be divided into 60. One, two, three, four, five, and six are whole numbers that can be divided into 60, but seven is the first number that cannot, so the number came to have symbolic significance as

measuring something mysteriously manifold and vast all over the region since attempting to divide it into 60 resulted in infinitely repeating fractions.[2] Consequently, if Nørgård intended anything distinctly biblical in the structure of his opera, it is not readily apparent.

There is a ritualistic aura to this temporal structure heightened by the role of the conductor as the sun god Shamash who is in constant movement around an inner circle on the stage, moving each day from south to north and then back again. This is part of the geography of the stage in which the conductor, musicians, singers, and audience are all integrated into the mythic world of the narrative (see Figure 2 below).

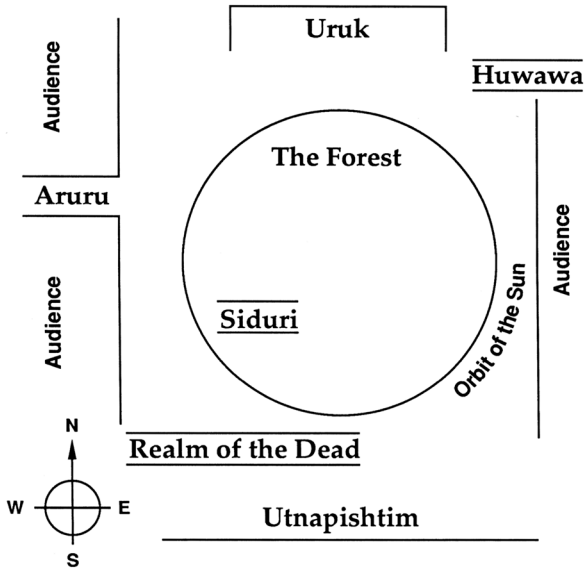

Figure 2: Diagram of the opera setting (in Jensen, 1990, p. 19)

Beyond the conductor or Shamash's orbit of the sun on the north side is Uruk, the city of southwest Sumer (now Iraq) where Gilgamesh is king, on the south side Utnapishtim's immortal island. Therefore, Gilgamesh's journey from the former to the latter and then back again will be the essential movement

[2] See Muroi (2014) for a fuller account.

through the long space of the stage over the course of the opera. Huwawa (the Sumerian name for Humbaba) and the Forest are near Uruk on the north side (though quite distant in the epic), whereas the Realm of the Dead is at the opposite extreme with Utnapishtim, who as an immortal man lives beyond that realm. This unusual configuration means that all of the musicians are onstage moving amongst the singers with some taking up character roles; for example, the trombonist plays the role of the Bull of Heaven attacking Gilgamesh during The Fifth Day sequence with great angry bellowing from the instrument and dies when Gilgamesh succeeds in pulling out his slide. Moreover, because all of the musicians are divided into small groups and placed into different geographical groupings onstage (e.g. two violins, one mandolin, two flutes, and two clarinets in the Forest), the opera features a chamber-music quality unlike the full orchestra employed by Martinů 18 years earlier.

Nørgård (1973) calls the Forest and the City (Uruk) "two vital opposites", explaining the difference musically for the temporal divisions of his operatic structure:

> As a rule, only 'Forest music' is heard at night, and in the daytime this music is blended with music from the City. The music of the Forest is soft, improvised and rhythmically free, while the music of the City is bold, determined and rhythmically bound (p. 1).

This is but one example of the composer articulating major thematic elements musicologically as the narrative unfolds. His infinity series will also

play a part in the growth of the characters during the opera that build subtly on information gleaned from the libretto.

II. "The Words Do Not Play the Leading Part"

Another difference between Nørgård's opera and Martinů's oratorio is that the former has no narrator. The citizens of Uruk will occasionally comment on the action like an ancient Greek chorus, but the narrative is mainly conveyed in the staging as well as the text of Nørgård's libretto, such as it is. The composer confirms that

> Gilgamesh' is not a play set to music, but a dramatico-musical unity in which the words—mostly taken from the epic—do not play the leading part except in a few passages. In the… greater part of the opera the words are significant to a certain extent only (Nørgård, 1990, p. 21).

The libretto, composed in Danish and Swedish, consists in fact of mainly the repetition of names and phonetic elements in the first few "days" of the opera by the lead protagonists. In the latter portion of the opera, there are fuller passages of sung dialogue (and spoken word sections), which, the composer writes, "have been composed with the utmost regard for the comprehensibility of the text" (p. 21).[3] Before moving into a commentary on the opera's libretto, it is essential to note that it is unfortunately not clear which of the translations of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* Nørgård consulted for the libretto which he wrote for his opera. As it was composed in 1971-1972 with a premiere in 1973, it seems

[3] Here I follow Ziolkowski in assuming that the unnamed writer of the introduction to the libretto included in the CD booklet is the composer himself (Ziolkowski, 2011, p. 216, footnote 43).

prudent to consult Speiser's translation of the epic from 1969 in order to get an accurate sense of the state of the text when Nørgård sat down to compose his opera, although it is possible that he would have consulted translations in Danish.[4] However, as noted with Martinů in the previous chapter, it is by no means certain that a composer working with this material will draw from the most recent translation. Nonetheless, at least it is possible to understand roughly the condition of the epic at the time the opera was composed, and that is the working method adopted here while bearing in mind the caveat above.

The opera begins with The First Night, subtitled "Creation of Gods, Demons, Animals, and Men". A stage direction directs a light on Uruk with a spotlight on the gods, goddesses, and demons taking their place around the stage as they are created by being named. It is the citizens of Uruk who have these first lines:

> See the Sun God—Shamash!
>
> See the great goddesses!
>
> See the demons—Huwawa and the Bull of Heaven (Nørgård, 1990, p.22)

The Mesopotamians, like many ancient peoples, had a range of creation stories, but none of them appear in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, so the adaptation is immediately forging its own path into the ancient narrative. Huwawa is the guardian of the Forest, placed by the gods as the caretaker of this sacred geography, but he is not mentioned in the epic until Tablet III when Gilgamesh

[4] Sophus Helle, the recent translator of the epic into both Danish and English, wrote in an email message to the author that if Nørgård consulted a Danish translation, then "it would almost certainly have been the 1953 translation by Otto Ravn" (Helle, 2024).

proposes to Enkidu the long expedition out of Uruk to the sacred Cedar Forest that will lead to the killing of Huwawa and the taking of the timber under his watch in Tablet V (Speiser, 1969, p, 78). The Bull of Heaven is a celestial monster called upon by the goddess of love and war Ishtar to avenge her when Gilgamesh rejects her proposal in Tablet VI (p. 84). Befitting the act of creation, the opening of the opera has a mysterious aura heightened by the use of electronics as these characters from various segments of the story are introduced and take their places on the stage all at the same time.

In The First Day that follows, the citizens echo the lines from the epic's narrator (Speiser, 1969. p. 73) in the opening lines of Tablet I: "Climb upon Uruk's wall. The wall around Uruk… Innin, Ishtar's Eanna" (Nørgård, 1990, p.22). Eanna is the temple precinct in Uruk belonging to Ishtar, and Innin is another name for the goddess. It is clear from this passage that Nørgård does not share Martinů's reticence for intoning the ancient names of deities before his contemporary audience as the name Innin is a rare appellation. This is followed by a priest warning the citizens about Huwawa, a warning that does not appear in the original epic: "Beware Huwawa, giant Huwawa" just before what the libretto calls "the evening howl" in The First Evening that follows, an occurrence that will happen each evening until it is heard last on The Fifth Day just before Huwawa is killed. This howl that fills the city of Uruk with dread is at odds with the epic where Huwawa lives a vast distance from the city, a 15-day journey for Gilgamesh and Enkidu even with their heroically exaggerated striding, equivalent to a journey of seven and a half months normally (George, 2003, p. 463). The heroes, in fact, do not hear the roar of his voice until sitting on a ridge

just outside of the Cedar Forest (Foster, 2019, p. 36). Moreover, there is no hint that the guardian of that distant forest ever poses any threat to the people of Uruk. This is what makes Gilgamesh's proposed expedition to kill Huwawa in the epic so irrational and needless, a proposition of buoyant hubris generated by a youthful, brash, indomitable energy.

III. The Individuation of Gilgamesh: The First Stages

The Second Day begins with the citizens intoning the same observation about the walls of Uruk from the previous day. Then a parenthetical stage direction notes that "time stands still. Aruru creates Gilgamesh" (Nørgård, 1990, p.22). Aruru is a creator goddess who fashions Enkidu from clay in the epic and is responsible for the creation of human beings (Speiser, 1969, p. 74). Here she not only creates Gilgamesh but she also appears every night playing "on the sound waves of the forest," as the libretto describes it—her soprano voice combined with a flute and cello (Nørgård, 1973/ 2015, p. 20b) and another of the repeated motifs and events in the opera that contributes to the work's ritualistic qualities. In the epic, on the other hand, Gilgamesh is the son of the goddess Ninsun and Lugalbanda, the previous king of Uruk, and is a fully grown adult when the narrative begins. However, Nørgård alters the origins of Gilgamesh here to heighten a sense of becoming rather than being—a process rather than a state, one that is in its initial stages.

Gilgamesh's first utterance in the opera is "I, I!" ("Jeg, jeg!"), a declaration of personhood, separation, distinctness, and self-awareness that is one key stage of infancy. The second "jeg" is an octave above the first, suggesting an

overarching, all-encompassing ego. He then continues with attempts to say his name and a few of his attributes handled by narration in the original epic: "Gilgamesh, Gish, Gishbil, Gishbilgamesh, Gishbilgamash—mish. Eleven cubits tall! A chest nine spans wide! Two-thirds god, one-third man: Gilgamesh, Gish, Gishbil, Gishgibil, Gishbilgamash—mish" (Nørgård, 1990, p. 22). Bilgamesh is the Sumerian name for the Akkadian Gilgamesh, so Nørgård is mixing the two in the protagonist's outburst of self-identity. Rivkah Schärf Kluger (1991) believes that from a Jungian standpoint individuation

> begins at birth. It is a natural process of growth…There is a frequent misunderstanding that Jungian psychology is especially for the second half of life, and that is when individuation begins. Individuation is the innate drive for completeness. For a young person, finding roots in life belongs to individuation. Otherwise, what we think is individuation in the second half of life, is twisted, because something has not been grounded yet...Individuation is something highly individual, as the word indicates. This is why we must rely on the unconscious...in the unconscious, in our own inner processes, we are led in a roundabout way, not in a straight line as we sometimes would expect. So Gilgamesh, I feel, had to do what he did, which is no pattern or specific example as such for man's individuation process (pp. 121-123)

Barry Wiener (2023) adds that "Nørgård's modification of the Gilgamesh narrative parallels extensions of Jung's theories by the latter's disciples, who applied the concept of individuation to the psychic processes that take place at the beginning of life" (p. 6). The character begins with an insistent pronoun "Jeg,

jeg!" and then attempts in various ways to get his name satisfactorily asserted before the citizens under his charge. However, that is not all that is happening here. He begins on the Second Day but continues on garbling and shouting varieties of his name through The Second Evening, The Third Day, and The Third Evening. Finally on The Fourth Night, the citizens, presumably sleepless, pray for deliverance: "Aruru, give Uruk peace", and the Priest follows with "You created Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh raves!" (Nørgård, 1990, p. 24). Gilgamesh's constant exertions all this time over his name, a bellowing ego that prevents others from expression, becomes symbolic for his tyranny over the people of Uruk, a tyranny which the narrator in Speiser's translation of the epic explains as "Gilgamesh leaves not the maid to her mother" (1969, p. 73), generally interpreted to mean that the king enjoys a privileged *droit du signeur* not recognised as a feature of his regnal powers by the people. [5] The epic's narrator adds of the men, "Gilgamesh leaves not the son to his father" (p. 74), understood from clues on various tablets of this part of the narrative to mean that the king exhausts the men of Uruk through long athletic contests. [6] Therefore, Nørgård has made a significant modification here, one that Wiener points out enables the composer "to engage the concept of individuation on a deeper psychological level than would have been possible if he had simply transferred the epic unchanged to the operatic stage" (2023, p. 6). Linda Hutcheon's (2013) description of an essential aspect of a creative adaptation from the second chapter of this commentary comes to the fore here with Nørgård certainly making the text his own, converting the epic into an autonomous work (p. 21).

[5] See Foster (2019), pp. 5-6, 16 and George (2003), p.449.
[6] Ibid, but especially George (2003).

IV. Shamhat/ Ishara

What has been discussed thus far takes the listener into The Fourth Night, a substantial piece that is about the same length in duration as all of the preceding movements combined. It begins with the citizens and the priest praying to Aruru to create Enkido and to give Uruk peace. A parenthetical stage direction then notes that the goddess answers their prayers and creates him, whereupon "Uruk selects a hetaera, Ishara, to seduce Enkido" (Nørgård, 1990, p. 24), a selection made by Gilgamesh in the epic. The composer has here made a rather curious choice in names. By the general consensus of Assyriologists today, the character Nørgård refers to as Ishara is named Shamhat, the hetaera or harlot that seduces Enkidu. There is good reason to suppose, however, that in 1971-1972, the years of the opera's composition, Nørgård would not have been familiar with the name Shamhat, although that is the name that is written in the original tablets. [7] With her introduction as a character in Tablet I of the epic, R. Campbell Thompson in 1928 calls her "the hetaera" or "the courtesan-girl". Alexander Heidel in 1946 introduces her as "a courtesan, a prostitute" and briefly as "meretrix". The reason for this brief but deliberate change is that midstream in his English translation Heidel, being ever mindful of the assumed fragility of his readers and sparing of those less classically gifted in their learning, renders the entire sex sequence between the "meretrix" and Enkidu into a heady Latin, an outbreak of scrupulous censorship lasting 14 lines before once again navigating back into safer waters for English for the remainder of his translation

[7] Andrew George gives a brief history of the name's origins and writes that the name "was borne by at least one...woman outside of the epic" (2003, p.148).

(p. 21-22). [8] Speiser in 1969 introduces the Shamhat character as a "harlot-lass" (p. 75), thereafter shortened to just "lass". Ironically, George Smith, the epic's first translator who renders Gilgamesh's name as Idzubar, translates the hetaera's name as "Samhat" (1876). Otherwise, the next translator of the epic into English to introduce the name Shamhat is Stephanie Dalley in 1989 (p. 54), remarking in an end note, "Shamhat is used as a personal name here; it means 'voluptuous woman, prostitute', in particular as a type of cultic devotee of Ishtar in Uruk" (p. 126, n. 14). She has been known as Shamhat in every English translation since.

Naturally then, neither Martinů nor Nørgård refers to the hetaera by this name in their libretti. Martinů follows R. Campbell Thompson's omission of the proper name, using "courtesan girl" in its stead, but Nørgård has named her Ishara. Ishara is mentioned once in the Epic of Gilgamesh in Tablet II. When Gilgamesh is about to enter a bridal chamber to conduct his alleged *droit du seigneur* privilege, Enkidu stands between the door and the king challenging him to fight. Before Gilgamesh goes to the door, we are told that "for Ishara the bed is laid out" (Speiser, 1969, p. 78). Therefore, if this Ishara has any connection to a character in the narrative, it is with Gilgamesh, not Enkidu. Speiser glosses her name as "a form of Ishtar as goddess of love" (p. 78, n. 59). There is a syncretism behind such an identification as Ishara is a goddess from the ancient pantheon of the Hurrians, a people who lived in what is now the country of Turkey, and also "the most important deity of Ebla", an ancient kingdom of northern Syria (Archi,

[8] This in a way hearkens back to the elitist tendencies of practitioners in Classicism discussed in the introductory chapter of the present study as well as the growing lack of Classical language knowledge—here assumed by Heidel in much of his readership already by 1946, the year of publication.

2002, p. 27). As often happened in the ancient world, when one deity migrated into another culture, the god or goddess was then equated with a local deity, for example Aphrodite born into the Roman world as Venus. Ishara from these northern kingdoms then had been syncretized here with Ishtar by the time the standard version of the epic was composed (ca. 1200 BCE). Regardless, the use of her name in the epic would seem to demonstrate that the ancient author did not intend for her to be equated with the hetaera charged with seducing Enkidu. The character later known as Shamhat was a cultic devotee whose duties were sacred to the goddess Ishtar, but there is no indication in the text that she is Ishtar herself. The question then is why the composer has taken this name and applied it to the hierodule. One possible answer is that he is emphasising the sacred nature of sexuality by pairing Enkido with the goddess of love and lovemaking. She initiates Enkido into his own sense of individuation:

> Ishara: Lovely Enkido
>
> Enkido: "Enkido"?
>
> Ishara: I am Ishara.
>
> Enkido: "Ishara"? Lovely Ishara.
>
> Ishara: (seduces him)…
>
> Enkido: Enkido! I am Enkido! I am Enkido. Enkido… (Nørgård, 1990, p. 24)

At this self-identification, the Forest becomes silent, according to a parenthetical stage direction, symbolically rejecting Enkido now that he has been

civilised through human sexuality just as the animals do at the watering hole in the original epic (Speiser, 1969, p. 75). As a consequence, Enkido becomes panic-stricken just at the end of the scene:

> Enkido: (to himself) Am I Enkido? Am *I* Enkido?
>
> Ishara: You *are* Enkido. You are a *man* like a god. A man like Gilgamesh!
>
> Enkido: "Gilgamesh?" Take me to Gilgamesh. (Nørgård, 1990, p. 24) [9]

Kluger (1991) writes of the hetaera that "there cannot be any doubt about her role being a spiritual one" (p. 40). She argues that she brings Enkidu to his destiny under the guidance of the gods. "That is the important experience at the bottom of many starts of the way of individuation", she writes, "a feeling of destiny, of being meant" (p.47). Nørgård's libretto here in this scene appears to be adhering to this same idea. Once Enkido hears the name of "Gilgamesh", he seems to understand implicitly that he has a purpose apart from the one he had had in the now silent Forest and immediately asks to be taken to the king. This is accomplished with great concision by Nørgård in his libretto as the epic source has the hetaera describe the city of Uruk and its king in far more detail (Speiser, 1969, p. 75). Therefore, by calling the hetaera after the goddess Ishara, the composer is in effect stressing that the outcome of this encounter—Enkido's individuation process and his destiny so integral to it—is spiritual and entirely officiated under divine guidance.

[9] There is at the time of this writing a marvelous video clip available online of this section of the opera taken from The Rued Langaard Festival in September 2022. Herresthal (2023).

V. Individuation- The Next Stages

The battle sequence that follows after Enkido bars the way of Gilgamesh to the bridal chamber is disposed of with great celerity and minimal drama—it is a battle consisting of the two heroes entering a dialogue asserting their names at each other:

> Gilgamesh; Galgi, Gilga, Gil-ga-mesh
>
> Enkidu: Kido, En, En-ki-do… (Nørgård, 1990, p. 25)

A parenthetical stage direction reveals that "neither wins and they embrace as friends" (p. 24). This is in great contrast to the epic where the two heroes engage in battle "holding fast like bulls" in a physical confrontation described as a wrestling match ("they grappled each other") that is so tumultuous that the doorpost shatters and the walls shake (Speiser, 1969, p. 78). In Speiser's time it was not clear who emerged victorious in this first meeting of the two heroes, but new tablets and scholarly consensus now finds that Gilgamesh defeated Enkidu but not without great admiration for his opponent, leading to friendship. [10] Nørgård's Gilgamesh confirms this friendship at the end of the battle, "I am you, we are I, I, we, we are one!" (1990, p. 25). This is an inchoate awareness and acceptance of the other on the part of Gilgamesh, retaining his individuality while developing a consciousness of his place within a collective existence. And this is the next step in his path of individuation. As Jung (1928) puts it,

[10] See Foster (2018), p. 17.

> This extended consciousness ceases to be a knot of personal wishes, fears, hopes, and ambitions...Instead it now becomes a function of relation that is linked up with the world of objects, and by which the individual is pledged to an unconditioned, responsible, and indissoluble intercourse with the world. The complications that belong to this stage are no longer egoistic wish-conflicts, but difficulties that concern others just as much as oneself. Fundamentally, it is collective problems that have to be dealt with at this stage (p. 189)

Empathy is certainly one way to respond to such collective problems, and this is the tenor of Gilgamesh's first true interaction after confirming his new friendship. The Fourth Evening brings the last of Huwawa's evening howls. The Fifth Night that follows features Enkido staying awake all night addressing himself to the Forest from the outside since his new found humanity alienates him from the nature he was born into. This is at once his own acknowledgment of the other and the confusion of his new condition: "You are, you are, you are I, you, are we, we, we…" (Nørgård, 1990, p. 25), showing that he has come to a similar stage of individuation as Gilgamesh, but one tinged with loss and a fresh need to find a way of regaining himself. As Aruru again "plays on the soundwaves of the Forest" from within, Enkido expresses his distress by chanting "A -u, a -u, a -u" plaintively from without (p.25). Gilgamesh imagines that he has heard in this the name Huwawa, which gives him the idea of getting Enkido out of his doldrums: "Huwawa? Huwawa! (decisively) Huwawa must be killed!" (p. 25). This is a vast change from the original source as there Gilgamesh's proposition to go to the Cedar Forest to kill its guardian is incited mainly by his own desire for his name

to be remembered by posterity (Speiser, 1969, p. 79). Here in Nørgård's opera he seems to be countering his friend's homesickness for the Forest by suggesting this distracting adventure, a suggestion driven more by responsive, empathic interaction than hubris. The latter would contradict this stage of the individuation process highlighted by Jung (1928) who writes, as mentioned above, that the individual at this stage bears "no longer egoistic wish-conflicts" (p. 189), and the now collective problem of Enkido's homesickness, since Gilgamesh is sensitive to it, must be "dealt with" and assuaged. Nørgård's adaptation of the story accentuates the path of individuation for the protagonists via the polarities of self and other leading up to the many events of The Fifth Day ahead. As Barry Wiener (2023) observes, the composer has "reconceived the Gilgamesh epic to create a parable about the growth of human consciousness" (p. 5).

VI. The Infinity Series

Nørgård has highlighted this growth in human consciousness in his compositional techniques in the opera as well. Some background is necessary. In the late 1950s, the composer took an interest in serial techniques but, as Erling Kullberg (1996) writes, although Nørgård

> may have been interested in the actual idea of predetermination, the idea that a pre-compositional choice of material (i.e. the series or row) determines the pitches used in a work...he was not content to work with serial processes that were simply the result of an arbitrary choice by the composer (p. 72)

In such processes the composer still determines the initial figure and the intervals that will proceed from it, but Nørgård searched for a system that would eliminate one of these two elements in such a way that the work could proceed organically without intervention from the composer. What developed was the basic melodic infinity series, a series based on interval sequences that bears some relation to fractal geometry (see Figure 3a below).

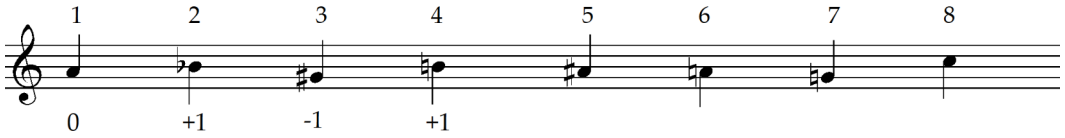

Figure 3A: The Infinity Series

Figure 3A shows eight integers in the infinity series beginning with A natural. The second integer is a +1 from Integer 1 as it is a half step above A natural, whereas the third integer is -1, being a half step below A natural. The interval between Integers 1 and 2 is called the germinal interval. From this point it is useful to consider that the even-numbered integers with downward stems belong to their own discrete sequence while the odd-numbered integers with upright stems belong to a selfsame sequence as well with the two sequences interweaving but distinct from each other. With this in mind, the germinal integer, Integer 1 is related to Integer 3 as a -1 so Integer 2 will relate to Integer 4 as a +1. It is important to note that these will always be inverted as the sequences go; therefore, it is really the first two integers, the germinal interval, that determine the path ahead.

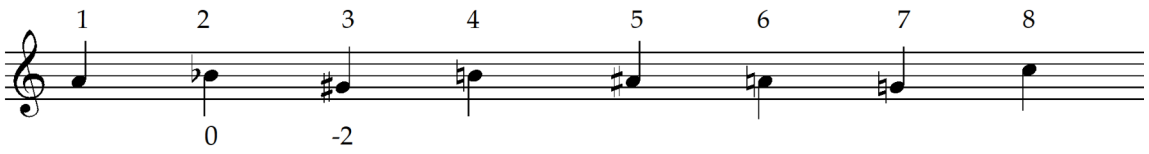

Figure 3b: The Infinity Series

For the next sequence (Figure 3b) Integer 2 and 3 become the germinal interval. The intervallic relationship between these two integers will direct the next integers. As Integer 2 is B flat and Integer 3 is G sharp, this is a -2. Therefore, Integer 4, the next even integer will relate to the next even integer as Integer 2 had related in its germinal interval to Integer 3 by descending two half steps. As the odd numbers will have an inverted relationship to the even ones, Integer 5 will be +2 above Integer 3. Note that the even integers here (4 to 6) are a minus, whereas in Figure 3A, the even integers (2 to 4) were a plus. Therefore, we know that the even integers stemming from the next germinal intervallic relationship (6 to 8) will again be a plus. This is how the inversion will work throughout.

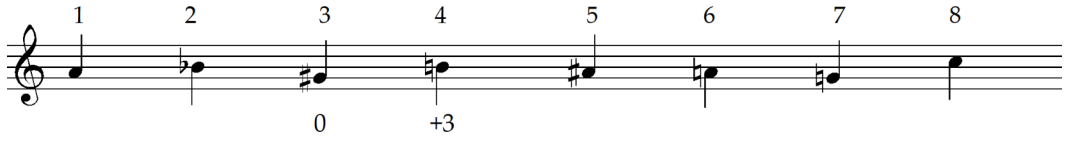

Figure 3C: The Infinity Series

When Integers 3 and 4 become the next germinal interval (Figure 3c), then a +3 is established; the odd integers will have a -3 so that Integer 5 descends three half steps to get to Interval 7 because of the inversion required here as the odd integers in the previous sequence were intervallically positive (Figure 3B), whereas the interval between Integer 6 and 8 moves up three because the even

integers were intervallically negative in the previous germinal interval sequence. This sort of binary sequence can go on infinitely in any chosen scale, thus behaving in accordance with its name. [11]

It's this melodic infinity series that characterises Gilgamesh in the opera, a symbol of civilisation in contrast to Enkidu whose character is manifested through the harmonic overtone series (see Figure 5), a symbol of nature, according to Jens Brincker (1996, p. 201). He further notes that "the expanding intervals of the infinity series express the strength and the will to power that underlie the titles the hero gives himself" (p. 200) (see Figure 4).

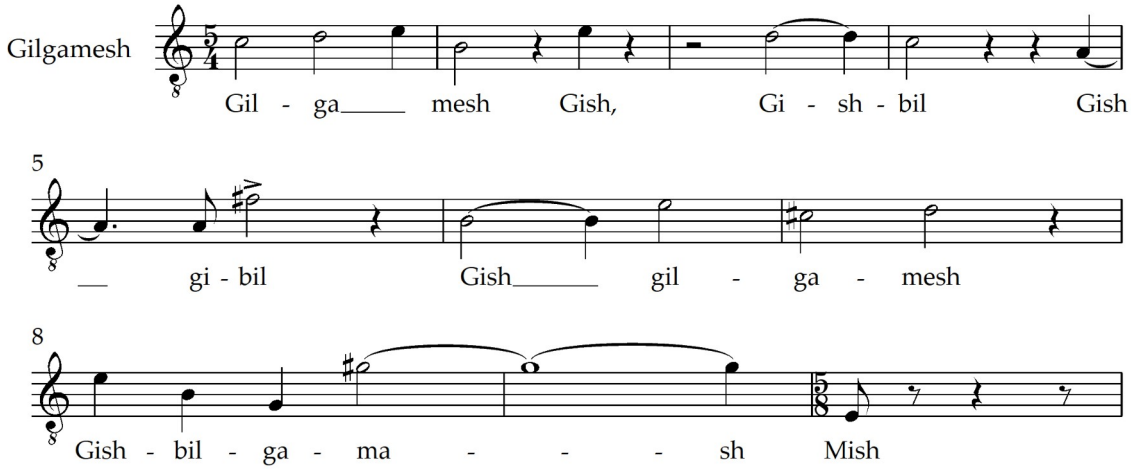

Figure 4: Gilgamesh's "expanding intervals" in the infinity series (adapted from Brincker 1996, p. 200).

For the character of Enkido, Nørgård marks passages "tempi independenti (ad lib.)" in his score to accentuate a wild nature unbound by societal strictures in Enkido's scenes in the Forest (Nørgård, 1973/2015, p. 91). The musicians in the Forest improvise and Enkido joins them in their improvisations. However, once he is cast out of the Forest, he gradually sings at a determined tempo suggesting absorption into his human existence (See Figure 5).

[11] For more on the infinity series and how it operates see Hall (2019)

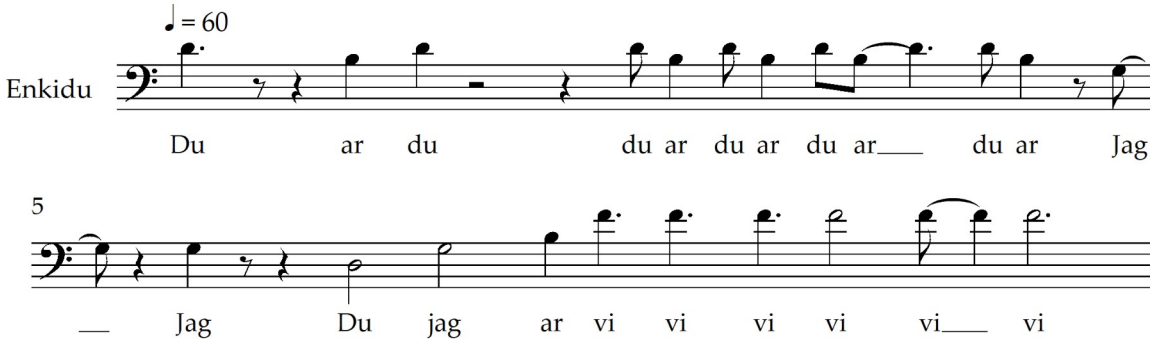

Figure 5: Enkidu's harmonic overtone series (Nørgård 1973/ 2015, p. 92a)

In this way Nørgård has integrated a pitch-organising technique into the characterization of both Gilgamesh and Enkidu. There is a fruitful culmination of these ideas after Enkido dies. The composer, as Brincker (1996) points out, insinuates a change in the eponymous character

> with a brilliant compositional device: he allows the diatonic infinity series, associated as a *leitmotiv* with Gilgamesh, to absorb intervals from Enkido's harmonic series, and to be thus transformed into a chromatic infinity series. In this way, Gilgamesh bears within him the memory of his dead partner (1996, p. 202)

Although an audience might not be aware consciously of the different series that Nørgård utilises in order to explore the characterisation of the protagonists, the composer relies on the feeling and intuition of listeners to grasp these subtle differences unconsciously. Accepting the Nordic Council's Music Prize in 1974, Nørgård "emphasized the unconscious wisdom allegedly present in every individual, as opposed to the short-sighted intention determined by our conscious thinking" (p. 205). It is clear that the composer has crafted his opera

with this tenet in mind not only with respect to the characters portrayed in the narrative but also with the relationship of the work to his audience as well.

VII. Individuation: the Final Stages

The Fifth Day section undoubtedly contains the most action of the opera and covers quickly a vast arc of the epic narrative. It begins with Gilgamesh suggesting the expedition to kill Huwawa. Interestingly, the episode is entirely shorn of any ecological content stemming from the original source when the king justifies the enterprise as a chance to return to Uruk with timber from the Cedar Forest. Huwawa is in fact rather quickly dispatched when the character's only lines in the opera are ignored by the heroes: "Gilgamesh! I am your servant. Gilgamesh, you are my lord. Gilgamesh, I am your servant" (Nørgård, 1990, p. 26). There is also no aid from Shamash here, no 13 winds coming from the sun god to help incapacitate the sacred forest's guardian at the crucial moment. It was remarked in the previous chapter that Tablet V was in quite a fragmented state; however, these aspects of the scene are legible and included in Speiser's translation (1969, p. 83). The 13 winds in the epic come out of a prayer from Ninsun to the sun god Shamash, but since she is Gilgamesh's mother in the epic, the composer has little need to include her here considering the alterations made in the hero's origins in his libretto. Therefore, the omission is deliberate.

In fact, Nørgård has trimmed the story of almost all of the scenes with the gods in the epic. Shamash, Aruru, and Ishtar are the only gods in the Babylonian pantheon mentioned in the opera, and all are physically accounted for on the stage. Ishtar makes her appearance immediately after Huwawa is killed and

propositions the king. Just as in the epic, albeit much briefer, Gilgamesh rejects her by remarking how misfortunes follow any who succumb to her enticements. In the epic, she was then "enraged and mounted to heaven" (Speiser, 1969, p. 84) weeping to her father Anu, the sky god, asking for the Bull of Heaven to go forth to the earth and smite the recalcitrant object of her affection. In the opera she simply tears away a curtain saying "Kill, kill!" and out leaps the trombonist as the Bull of Heaven to attack Gilgamesh. Another difference between the epic and Nørgård's adaptation is that the citizens are present with Gilgamesh and Enkido throughout all of these episodes, so that when Ishtar unleashes the Bull of Heaven, the female citizens, swept up in her feminine energy, shout out, "Kill Gilgamesh! Kill Enkido!", whereas the male citizens cheer them on (1990, p. 27). Shamash then distracts the bull by ringing a bell, Gilgamesh pulls out the trombone slide, and the bull is vanquished. When this happens the women turn their backs towards the men.

A parenthetical stage direction then explains that "The Scorpion People go to work. They cover the upper part of Huwawa's body with a black sack and put the bull's head—a mask—on top. They get ready to move towards Enkido" (p. 27). In the epic the Scorpion People, really a scorpion husband and wife, guard the gate before a mountain called Mashu, where there is a cave through which the sun travels every night before emerging out of the other side. Here in the opera, however, they are undertakers and harbingers of death and have no connection with the mountain range. The Fifth Day sequence ends with Gilgamesh and the citizens doing a victory dance of sorts and Enkido paralyzed with fear as he watches the Scorpion People approach.

In terms of the tablets that constitute the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* this roughly 12-minute series of episodes covers more than half of the epic. In Tablet III, Gilgamesh proposes the expedition to the Cedar Forest; in Tablet IV the heroes make the journey, the two of them alone; in Tablet V they battle and behead Huwawa; in Tablet VI on their return Ishtar proposes to Gilgamesh, who rejects her, which brings on ultimately the battle with and defeat of the Bull of Heaven; in Tablet VII Enkidu dies; and in Tablet IX the scorpion couple attempt to talk Gilgamesh out of entering the cave at Mount Mashu. All of these episodes from the epic except the one involving Mount Mashu appear here on the Fifth Day of the opera in rapid succession.

The Fifth Evening, one of the shortest scenes in the opera, follows on wordlessly with the Scorpion People putting the sack over Enkido's head and leading him with Huwawa and the Bull of Heaven along the Road of Shamash before they are ferried to the Realm of the Dead by the silent boatman Urshanabi, who like the Scorpion People is considered to be another representative of the Realm of the Dead (p. 27). Therefore, at variance with the original epic, Enkido is given no parting lines, and there is no sense of retribution by the gods for the killing of Huwawa or the Bull of Heaven in the matter. He simply dies without a word.

The Sixth Night, the longest portion of the opera, begins with Gilgamesh's lament over the death of his friend. It is in this section that Gilgamesh meets Utnapishtim, the immortal man living beyond the Realm of Death. The composer continues to highlight Gilgamesh's evolving consciousness here by adding rapid spoken passages and recitatives, shared with the person of highest consciousness,

Utnapishtim, who also has a spoken passage. This is a long way from the phonemic character of Gilgamesh's initial verbal offerings. In the epic Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh about a great flood that occurred and how the gods bestowed immortality on him and his wife. Like Martinů before him, Nørgård makes no mention of the Flood, but rather, he has Utnapishtim exhort the king not only to disavow his impossible quest for immortality but also to "wake up" to his true nature (1990, p. 29).

This sets in motion The Sixth Day, which the composer has subtitled "The Creation Symphony" coming in seven sections or seven days. On the first day Gilgamesh says, "I am waking up" (p. 29). The next day he sees Enkido, presumably a dramatisation of Tablet XII in the epic, the appended translation of the Sumerian story of Enkidu in the underworld that Martinů drew from for the final act of his oratorio. Utnapishtim turns to the king and counsels him, "Conquer your world!" (p. 29). On the third day Gilgamesh tries to rescue Enkido "only to find that Enkido is bound to Huwawa and the Bull of Heaven. He attacks these two and forces them to ground. Enkido is forced to follow" (p. 30). Utnapishtim responds "The fourth day: You should have conquered your world with *insight*" (p.30). Barry Wiener (2023) observes here that the contrast in Gilgamesh's impulses and Utnapishtim's response is

> the opera's didactic message: rather than attempting to conquer the external world by force, Gilgamesh (symbolising all of humanity) needs to turn inward—to conquer his [own] world with *insight*—in order to reach personal fulfilment and create societal harmony (2023, p. 11)

In the end Gilgamesh is changed and then created anew by Aruru, the composer stipulating that "Gilgamesh is recreated but is now played by someone else" (1973, p. 5). This new beginning is emphasised cyclically by the new Gilgamesh entering just as the old one did at the beginning of the opera. The connotation from this is that he has fulfilled his purpose of achieving a higher consciousness. Shamash the conductor lifts his arms, and just as all prepare to sing or play, the opera ends.

VIII. Conclusion

Per Nørgård's adaptation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is based on principles proposed by 20th century psychologists, particularly Carl Jung and his associates. His reworking of the myth allows for the audience to witness the psychological development of the main character towards a complete sense of individuation, a higher consciousness for which the composer believes all individuals have the capacity. This is an adaptation that certainly fulfils Linda Hutcheon's (2013) ideas of a work that is "a derivation that is not derivative" (p. 9). The epic here is respected, while the composer's work with it, as Ziolkowski (2011) puts it, is "as daringly experimental with the subject matter of the epic as with its musical form" (p. 105). It features the compression one might expect from an operatic adaptation, but it succeeds as a singular vision from a composer unafraid to look "beyond the text" and to utilise compositional techniques to highlight aspects of psychological progression in the characters. This is one of "the processes of proximation and updating" that Julie Sanders (2016) finds essential in modern adaptation work (p. 23). And as such, the opera succeeds admirably.

7. *Gilgamesh*: A New Adaptation

I. Introduction

Despite the magnificent adaptations of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* that have been immensely rewarding for me to delve into and discuss in the present commentary, I believe that there is room for another *Gilgamesh,* the reasons for which will be discussed in the next section. This belief began 11 years ago when I first conceived the project as a concept album. Only in the final 18 months of composing was it clear that this project would be developed for the stage. Therefore, the last pieces to be composed were conceived as stage pieces. “Enkidu in the City”, the penultimate composed piece, for example, which contains elements of both dance and battle, is a crowd scene that is imagined implicitly with stage choreography in mind because of this new mode of presenting the work that had developed in the final phase. Nevertheless, the recording itself retains all the elements of its initial concept album roots. The narrator addresses the listener throughout regardless of the latter’s environment.

This narrator was not part of the original vision of this concept album. The narration was written in 2022, a full eight years after the project was begun, because it became clear that not everything in the story could be dramatised effectively and still fall within the duration of a listening experience that could be experienced in a single sitting, a prime objective for a concept album. Therefore, the narration allowed me to construct a fuller story with less compression this way. I consulted numerous Mesopotamian history works, particularly those focused on the daily life of the ancient people in order to dramatise and narrate

sections dealing with, for example, the food people ate, the layout of urban architectural spaces, funerary rites, kingship, the occupations of certain characters in the *dramatis personae*, sacred rites, modes of transport, and the materials for furnishings. It was accuracy in the elements of the story and the time period that concerned me for the concept album. This, it was hoped, would compensate for the music which would be entirely outside of the ancient period in both its instrumentation and form. Gilgamesh the historical figure lived well over a millennium before the earliest notated music, so any anthropological conjecture of how music sounded in his time is based on instruments found through archaeological digs and depicted in the imagery from the period.

Stylistically, the concept album began as a rock album with orchestral elements; however, after composing and recording "Ninsun's Song" in 2014, I discarded almost all of the material I had amassed up to that time, about a year's worth of material, in favour of a reverse ratio in which the orchestral elements moved forward and rock instruments receded, soon vanishing almost altogether. The heart of this transition stems from the satisfaction that developed out of the recording of "Ninsun's Song". Making the work solely orchestral was more challenging and fulfilling for me as a composer than a rock album would have been, and I felt that it was a more effective way of telling this epic story.

The process of composition can be divided into two visual arts analogies. First, a melody line, usually vocal in quality, would come to mind. If away from my home instruments, I would record this melody line into a portable recorder. I would return to it again later when the melody was forgotten with a fresh perspective as a listener. Most of the time, the melody would not feel like

anything that should be pursued. However, at times I felt there was potential of developing the line into something that could work for the project. I would then record the line into a DAW project track and see how it could be developed, not only musically but in terms of the lyrics and potential characterisation, all of which would be settled on gradually. The arrangement would come this way through added instrumentation and harmonies both conceptually and intuitively constructed and tried out within the DAW. This is analogous to painting a central figure (melody line) and then drawing the setting or other subsidiary figures around it. The second visual art analogy is that of found objects. In this process, I would scour various sample libraries at my disposal for various sonic textures, particularly to support narration sequences. With the narration in one track, I would simply find sounds to underscore the mood of the words and Jeremy Irons' dramatic interpretation of them for emotional impact. Therefore, I usually had no pre-conceived notions about how the piece would sound at the beginning; it was simply a matter of laying down tracks to build a cumulative impression that was intuitive throughout the process, a process of sound design similar to abstract works designed from found objects in volumetric sculptural forms.

In the conceptualising process of the work 11 years ago, I performed much of the material myself with collaborators brought in casually on occasion. Through connections at the university where I worked, I was introduced to Maya Hayashi, a Japanese soprano and the first professional singer to be part of the project. After recording her performance on "Ninsun's Song" in a rented studio, I was then introduced to string players in her professional orbit, and so the recordings began to take on a more polished tone over time. Over the years I

found websites facilitating musical collaborations remotely by providing a catalogue of musicians grouped by instrument with their own recording equipment pitching their services to other musicians, songwriters and composers. It was on one of these websites, for example, that I heard the demo recordings of a tenor who seemed to possess the exceptional bravado and tenderness needed to perform the part of Gilgamesh at either end of the character's spectrum, John Riesen, and so began a fruitful collaboration on the many pieces that required the eponymous character. He then introduced to me his brother, his wife, and a colleague—all of whom took on important roles in the recording.

Each singer was provided with a recording of my own limited vocal version so that the emotional tenor of what I hoped each performance would elicit from the piece could be assessed by the performer before going to the microphone, though often at some sacrifice, particularly (but by no means exclusively) in soprano roles, of accurate pitch. Instrumental musicians were given a recorded mock-up of their instrument gained through a sample library recording of that instrument. As it seemed unnecessary to notate the entire orchestra for the performer making a recording for what was conceived of as a concept album without any foreseeable live performance at the time, a partial score including of course the instrument or voice to be performed was offered with accompanying parts around it just substantial enough for the performers to orientate themselves within the recording. For example, the soprano performing the song "Free" was given a partial score that in addition to the vocal parts contained just the violins, celli, and harp since these instruments are present throughout or in key sections of the song. The score did not include the woodwinds, brass, and

percussion since these appear only intermittently throughout the piece, but the backing track recording of course would fill this in aurally for the performer.

The process of composing has always been summed up for me in the task of problem-solving. As pointed out by Ulla Pohjannoro (2016), the condition of the composer with regard to problem-solving is

> more complicated than the conditions of typical high-stakes professions such as intensive care workers, surgeons and fire-fighters. Artists not only solve practical professional (e.g. compositional) problems but also create the problems; something novel is to be created out of nothing, and moreover the results have to satisfy the criteria of aesthetic coherence and the composer's expressive needs (p. 208)

For a composer working on music that identifies as a narrative adaptation, it is not quite a case of creating something out of nothing. There is an image from the narrative already present in the mind at the point of conception. For me, the point at which the psychological evolution of the character is at during the scene I am setting musically brings with it another associative image or feeling that is a starting point for the music. A musical idea that can come at any moment in daily life, particularly when I am fixated on one scene in the narrative, gets matched to the scene. It is intuition that does the matching based on whether the musical idea feels right for the scene, "the criteria of aesthetic coherence" that must be satisfied when working with a narrative. A film soundtrack composer undoubtedly comes to such a decision in much the same way. From this initial idea, which may have a duration of only 10-30 seconds in general, problems that

need to be solved present themselves in succession until a satisfying end to the process at last closes the compositional process. The first problem once the initial idea has been established and recorded in the DAW is the problem of arrangement. Using a DAW and sample libraries allows me to hear various instruments and then to make a rational decision on which sound textures evolving out of this process seem most descriptive of the feeling or image associated with the character and scene. Therefore, there is a combination of intuitive and rational decision-making at the heart of the compositional process of *Gilgamesh*. As Pohjannoro (2016) put it, "Generating novel solutions seems to require divergent, associative thinking. Furthermore, convergent, analytical reflection is needed to create and sustain aesthetic coherence" (p. 208).

In the longer pieces in particular, there were extensive amendments and rewritten passages. In general, I would construct the different narrative episodes delineated in these longer pieces in succession from the opening to the final section. For example, in "Humbaba and the Cedar Forest", there are four main parts that needed dramatisation: 1) "Rise up, Cicadas", in which Humbaba is shown as a true caretaker of his subjects, a kingly foil to Gilgamesh; 2) "Who Goes There?" in which the guards and Humbaba feel an ominous presence approaching the forest; 3) "13 Winds" in which Gilgamesh and Enkidu call upon the 13 winds that Ninsun had beseeched Shamash to bring during this battle to subdue Humbaba; and 4) "The Curse" in which Humbaba, paralysed by the winds and cursing one of the pair to die and the other to live without him, is slain by Gilgamesh himself. These episodes were composed in this order, sometimes weeks apart. Each part had to be rewritten extensively before moving onto the

next, and for matters of arrangement there was some backtracking. Working with a DAW made recollection of past work easy to recall from a simple playback, even if it had been weeks since the section in question had been composed. Repeated listening of a section would help me to resolve any anxieties concerning the quality of the composition or arrangement so that amendments could be decided upon. I would ask myself if each arrangement was the most effective I could manage for each section of the narrative, and when I had no anxieties remaining on this point, I would continue on with the next section. Therefore, intuition is at the basis of this method, but the overall structure holding up the narrative was reflective and rational in nature.

II. A New Gilgamesh

As mentioned above, there is room for another *Gilgamesh*. There are three reasons for this. First, as discussed in the introductory chapter of this commentary as well as chapter 3, there have been myriad archaeological findings of tablets all over the lands that once constituted Mesopotamia since the 20th century adaptations were made by the composers discussed in the previous chapters. Per Nørgård's opera premiered over 50 years ago, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* has grown much since then and continues to grow with each archaeological discovery in the field. There has even been some movement afoot to use artificial intelligence to precipitate further filling in of the gaps still present in the tablets that is supported by eminent scholars in Gilgamesh studies, although these findings are not a part of my own adaptation. [12] Simply

[12] See Ofgang (2024)

put, there are narrative developments in the epic that neither Martinů nor Nørgård could have known about at the time of their compositions.

Second, in my view, both Martinů and Nørgård have over-compressed the material of the epic. While it is true that the epic was not as fleshed out as it is currently when their works were composed, it is also true that they eliminated large portions of the known narrative material in order to suit their own compositional objectives. Both composers stated that the music was the essential aspect of their work while the libretto was made to serve it. Martinů, as we have seen, remarked that from the original source translation, "I have taken what I needed for the music" (Šafránek, 1962, p. 74). Nørgård, for his part, explained of his work, "In the… greater part of the opera the words are significant to a certain extent only" (1990, p. 21). His take on the epic is about psychological progression towards a higher consciousness, but the impression of Gilgamesh as a character that I came away with was a sort of "every one of us" figure, a character that reveals what each of us is capable of if we gain insight looking inward rather than outward. I have little sense of Gilgamesh as an individual in his own right, nor what may have made him the man he was. I accede to the point of view and the objective of his character's psychological and spiritual growth throughout the narrative as I believe these are implicit in the original text, which is why, like Nørgård's, the title of my adaptation is simply *Gilgamesh* rather than *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* but not to the extent of losing sight of his distinctive persona. My objective has been to compose a work that is just as important in its libretto as it is in its music.

Third, both composers chose to depict the events of Tablet XII; in fact, Martinů in particular spent one-third of his oratorio on it. However, this is mixing an older Sumerian tale with the standard version only because the ancient compiler of the standard version chose to append the first 11 tablets which constitute a cohesive narrative with a thematic supplement that does not logically follow, mainly because at the beginning of Tablet XII Enkidu is still alive. I believe that there is room for an adaptation that begins with Tablet I and ends with Tablet XI. This does not mean that compression of the story is not inevitable—it is. However, a version that takes these archetypal characters and endows them with greater emotional depth over the course of this standard version of the epic is one that has not been done before to my knowledge. This has been the principal objective of my work. And as with the case of Martinů, I consider my adaptation to be a personal one.

The recording project comes in two nearly equal parts in terms of duration. There are certain exceptions, but the general arc of it is that it begins with large orchestral forces as Gilgamesh is mainly involved in his palace or with Enkidu in the streets of Uruk, but gradually during Part 2 the instrumental forces are smaller as we get closer to Gilgamesh the man. “The Rejuvenation Plant” represents the epitome of this, a transformation of his character, in which he is accompanied by a string quartet only. Gilgamesh is 2/3 god and 1/3 human, according to the epic. By the end of this adaptation, he will be fully human.

II. The Prologue: Nineveh's Burning

The narrative of this recording project is bookended by a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue is entitled "Nineveh's Burning", a title which refers literally to the siege of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh by the Babylonians in 612 BCE that made the preservation of the tablets for posterity possible. Among the ironies of a brilliant and beautiful piece of literature being preserved through a brutal act of war is the irony that the epic was of Babylonian origin and kept in the Assyrian Library of Nineveh, built and with its collections curated by Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian king who had died roughly two decades previously. Therefore, the Babylonians in laying siege to a foreign kingdom preserved an enduring part of their own heritage that was being kept there. The metaphorical aspects of the title refer to the resonances in political and cultural history that have radiated out from the area since that day when the library collapsed, as well as a more universal implication. Ancient Nineveh is today in the Iraqi city of Mosul, which was at the centre of power of US forces when they took the city in 2003 followed by much resistance. [13] It was through the nightly news reports of the war at that time that the city came to my consciousness.

The first voices heard in the prologue and therefore in the recording project are those of American Apache helicopter pilots hovering two miles outside of Baghdad during the Second Gulf War. As heard in Australian journalist John Pilger's documentary, *The War You Don't See,* one of them says, "You see all those people standing down there? Light 'em all up"! Later when they realise that they had shot women, children, and male civilians on the ground, one of them says,

[13] See Sheridan (2003)

"We need to...uh...evac this child" (Pilger & Lowery, 2010). All of these voices appear in the prologue, which presents a thematic key to the rest of the recording project. The idea of an adaptation based on an ancient story beginning with recent modern history was an appealing way to begin for me. It announces that this is an adaptation with personal perspectives in the music, and as it is inevitable that an adaptation centred on the ancient world will reflect the mores and concerns of the adaptor's world to some extent, the idea of the 21st century world breaking in or threatening to break into the adaptation at times during the narrative but without compromising it is another element that proved irresistible to me. Linda Hutcheon's (2013) observation that adaptors are obliged to make the texts they are adapting their own if they are to create an autonomous work (p. 21) is at the heart of why I have approached this narrative with a prologue like this. These voices will be heard again and even quoted, or rather paraphrased, by a main character later in the narrative, so more will be discussed about them at the appropriate moments that will further clarify their presence here.

III. Part 1: From the Palace to the Sacred Forest: Key Pieces

A. "Uruk"/ This Is My Way

The narrator makes his first appearance in "'Uruk'/ This is My Way" by instructing listeners to close their eyes. Like Philip Glass (2015) in *Akhnaten*, I felt that a narrator would help to bridge the gap between the ancient story and the modern audience (p. 317). Further, it would allow me the freedom to decide which elements of the story would be better dramatised and which would be better described in order to set up or bridge those dramatisations. This

combination would permit a fuller account of the story, and I have always felt that those theatrical works in which characters move from speaking lines into singing them awkward and a little distracting as a viewer. In this adaptation the characters sing only (with a few very brief but conspicuous exceptions), and the narrator can cover aspects of the story that do not need dramatisation or singing. Making the narrator a character in the *dramatis personae* rather than an omniscient one standing outside of the narrative framework also justifies his presence here. Furthermore, supporting the narration led to some intriguing experiments in sound design that I found challenging and rewarding in the process. Whether narration or sung piece, however, the focus was always on the emotional tenor of the text or the lyrics.

What follows in the opening narration is a description of the growth of Uruk from the initial settlements in the Ubaid period down to Gilgamesh's day when the settlements had long been unified. I consulted Uruk palace layouts and diagrams to construct the imagery and orientation in the text. There was a stone temple in Anu's White Temple that the contemporary ziggurat had been built over, and so it was probably true that the people of Gilgamesh's time would not have remembered that it was there. The narrator gives away something about his mythic presence by acknowledging his memory of it. Despite the modern world threatening to break into the adaptation at times, I endeavoured in my research to make the ancient locales as realistic as possible to the imagination of the audience, experts included.

Musically, the most relevant part of the underscore occurs when the man and woman enter Uruk. The listeners hear for the first time the Uruk or home

theme that will occur again in key places throughout the entire work, most notably in the finale "Between Us", where it at lasts plays out in its entirety. The narration ends with the name of Gilgamesh heralded by a brass fanfare that leads to "This Is My Way", the introduction to his character.

I felt it imperative that Gilgamesh be first encountered by the audience in his milieu just as the woman does, so that when he takes her around the palace, the listeners accompany her. Through the lyrics here, it can be established that she is fearful and that he reminds her of her powerlessness: "You're far from it all —the stalls and the streets." Nørgård (1990) maintained that the words of his libretto were "mostly taken from the epic" (p. 21); Philip Glass (2015) said of *Akhnaten* that he used the original ancient Egyptian because "he liked the way the words could be sung" but "wanted the overall experience of the opera to come through movement, music, and image" rather than a focus on the words (p. 317); and Martinů's libretto was almost entirely taken from an English translation of the epic with only minor changes. These approaches were very effective for the operas and oratorio that each respectively composed. For my adaptation, I have done the opposite—very little of the words of the epic have been transported directly into the texts and lyrics. The language is modern conversational English, and I have not adopted any sort of epic tone or formalities in the language. My objective has been for the essence of the story to speak to the audience directly shorn of any sort of artifice associated with epics on my part or that of a translator. I have striven always to make no major changes to the story itself, but instead to give certain characters more of a voice than they had in the original source material because I find something familiar or even modern in many of the

situations they find themselves in. Some perspectives were changed only, but the story is preserved. It is a personal way of looking "beyond the text", as Brian Attebery (2013) put it in an earlier chapter, "toward other versions, other crystallizations" (p. 397). My look beyond the text has always been to ask what a character's emotions might be, and this is the crystallisation that my adaptation moves towards. It is, in effect, reading between the lines of all the translations that I have come across, forming a musical image from the collection of impressions that they have afforded, and then finding ways to allow the characters to explore the emotional crescendos that come with their predicaments within the framework of that musical image. Therefore, my goal is a work in which the music and libretto move very much in lockstep without one being subordinate to the other.

The piece ends with Gilgamesh dismissing the woman from his bedroom and glorying in the fact that he had taken her before her newly wedded husband. For all that has been said about giving characters a voice thus far, the woman taken to the palace has been given no chance to speak as the king is presented here in the opening as an overwhelming, oppressive presence that allows no voice to others in his orbit. The narrator follows with a description of her leaving with her husband the next morning with the citizens looking on. The destruction of family dynamics is a consequence of the king's actions when he should be supporting societal structures. The Priestess in the following piece called "Free" sums up the problem:

How can we understand such indifference?

How can a heart not beat with something more?

There must be something or someone who can see

what goes on behind that bolted door

The implication of the "bolted door" here is twofold. It seems to refer back to Gilgamesh's heart in this stanza as closed to his people, standing for the distance between the leader and the people he is obliged to protect. It could also be the physical door of the palace and how the activities behind the bolted door only spill out into the morning light as a consequence of the king's cruelty. The image of a bolted door will return in the finale "Between Us".

B. A Song of Everlasting Love

In the epic, the hetaera Shamhat is escorted into the wilderness by the trapper to the area where Enkidu has been freeing animals from his traps. When Enkidu arrives, he and Shamhat have sexual intercourse for six days and seven nights; Enkidu goes to a watering hole where the animals run away from him (an astute observation by the ancient Mesopotamians, who noticed that some animals shun their young when touched by human hands); and by and by he is taught by Shamhat to speak and wear clothing as well as eat bread and drink beer with the help of a group of shepherds. I had a segment with the shepherds composed at one time, but decided against bringing it into the final cut. My focus on this sequence came to rest on Enkidu and Shamhat alone.

Growing up in a family culture steeped in Christian ideas of Original Sin and associative guilt with physical intimacy, I found it refreshing to find sexuality as a condition for humanity. However, this scene proved to be a great challenge to dramatise. It seemed impossible at first, but it also seemed ill-advised to leave it only to the narration. It was never a question for me of translating the scene into Latin as Alexander Heidel infamously decided in 1946, but the simple idea of having Shamhat teach Enkidu language while at the same time indulging in sexual intercourse made all the difference. Compressing the two disparate episodes from the epic into one simultaneous action stresses Enkidu's budding humanity on both physical and mental planes at once.

What emerged was an outlier from the rest of the project as this is the only piece that is improvised by the performers for the most part. The Shamhat singer was given a list of phrases and words that Enkidu uses in later songs and told to sing them in any order she liked up to the repetition of the word "love", and the Enkidu singer would repeat as in a Berlitz language lesson her every cadence and mannerism. The idea was to suggest Enkidu's gradual proficiency with the phrases by having them spoken first, sung simply later, and still later sung more operatically and melismatically. In addition, towards the end of the piece, the Enkidu singer, instead of repeating exactly the cadences provided by the Shamhat singer, would gradually sing the phrases differently, going his own way with the language. This means that a live performance of the piece would be different every time depending on the choices made by the performers up until the word "love" just before the composed chorus, which is first sung by Shamhat alone and the second time as a duet with a more linguistically confident Enkidu,

Shamhat providing harmony rather than instruction. The music throughout hints at the mystical nature of sexuality as it is presented in the epic. However, the performers were asked to contribute a certain playfulness to the piece as I do not think that this is out of step with the way it is conveyed in the source material. In fact, there has been a recent fragment of Tablet II found that demonstrates that Shamhat and Enkidu make love for six days and seven nights on a second occasion in the epic.[14] For the purposes of the narrative here, however, one week was enough.

Shamhat takes Enkidu into the city and after a battle with the king before the door of another bride, they "become fast friends," as the narrator puts it. In the epic from this point Shamhat disappears from the story. The narration that covers Enkidu and Gilgamesh walking away from Shamhat ("In the Throes of Commerce") features a cello playing the chorus from "A Song of Everlasting Love" but with violins accompanying it with tritones to suggest Shamhat's feeling as the companion with whom she had shared so many days of passion leaves her side for good. It was in fact her purpose in the epic to guide Enkidu into Gilgamesh's life so that it should end this way. However, emotions do not always obediently align with the practical purposes that guide actions we are obligated to carry out. Although there is no hint of this in the source, it felt right to give her an aria of her own to follow this scene. This is an example of one objective of my adaptation—taking the archetypal characters from the epic and allowing them to express emotions brought on by the events in the narrative that would most likely have affected them.

[14] See George (2018)

C. Humbaba and the Cedar Forest

In Nørgård's adaptation of this story, the character of Humbaba (named as the Sumerian Huwawa) howls every evening bringing terror to the citizens of Uruk. However, later in the narrative he is dispatched by the heroes in short order. Martinů never mentions the character in his adaptation as Part 1 concludes with the battle between Enkidu and Gilgamesh, and Part 2 begins with Enkidu dying, the reason for which in Martinů's adaptation is unclear, only that the gods want him to die, according to the narrator. As an example of over-compression in these earlier adaptations, the figure of Humbaba stands out for me, although it must be acknowledged that each composer had aims with the story that did not require much involvement with this character, nor was Tablet V, the tablet that contains Humbaba's scenes, in a state of preservation prepossessing enough at the time to allow the composer to do very much with the character beyond the battle itself.

My adaptation takes advantage of the momentous find described in Chapter 3 of this commentary of a fairly large segment of Tablet V in 2011 that revealed more about Humbaba's role and the habitat over which he ruled:

> The cicada raised a shrill chorus…
>
> The forest was joyous with the [cry] of the stork,
>
> The forest was lavishly joyous with the francolin's [lilt].
>
> Mother monkeys kept up their calls, baby monkeys chirruped.
>
> Like a band of musicians and drummers,

They resounded all day long in the presence of Humbaba (Foster, 2019, p. 37)

A composer faced with dramatising this passage musically would be hard-pressed not to be inspired. For this recording, I focused on the cicadas because having lived through a number of Japanese summers, I was familiar with their electric shrill sounds beginning at sunrise in every tree of the neighbourhood. I have tried to avoid field recordings of nature for this project for the most part as I had hoped that orchestral instruments could provide the vibrant and colourful timbre needed without resorting to a reliance on electronics of any kind in cases like this. With this in mind and without an orchestra or even a sample library at my disposal that could provide the timbre I was searching for, I took my recording device to the office of composer James Saunders and asked him to take one of the violins in his possession and perform a series of scratching techniques on the instrument. He also had a small wooden frog with ridges along its back. Taking a long wooden peg and drawing it along those ridges produced a percussive sound that mixed well with the violin scratchings giving all of it a kind of rhythm familiar to me from those Japanese summer mornings. I took the recordings of all of these tracks, copied them, overlaid them on one another at varying lengths, and in the end what emerged was a fairly accurate replication of cicadas that could someday be performed by an orchestra using similar techniques. Flute trills as in the recording here could easily evoke bird calls punctuating the waves of buzzing cicadas. The main objective in terms of the narrative is to convey the joyousness of Humbaba's forest and to allow Humbaba

to react to it. The short life span of the cicadas which Humbaba recognises also permits a reinforcement of the theme of mortality at the heart of the story.

As Farouk Al-Rawi and Andrew George (2014) observe in the article announcing this new tablet fragment to the world, "Humbaba emerges not as a barbarian ogre but as a foreign ruler entertained with music at court in the manner of Babylonian kings, but music of a more exotic kind, played by a band of equally exotic musicians" (p. 75). This new impression of Humbaba as a ruler permitted me to make his character a kind of foil to Gilgamesh. Whereas Gilgamesh had abused and harried the people under his charge, Humbaba is surrounded by a raucous, "joyous" forest with his charges permitted to behave according to their natural proclivities unconstrained by any fear of impingement on their freedom. He is also introduced in "He Is Nature", the narration piece before this piece, not only as a guardian of the forest but as nature itself. In this perspective of his character I have been inspired by the Japanese film Princess Mononoke, a film which the director Hayao Miyazaki made as a result of reading *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Ota, 2005, p. 9). In the film the guardian of the forest, Shishigami, must be killed by the characters Jikobo and Eboshi so that they can cut down the timber. Jikobo even believes that Shishigami's blood could be given to the emperor to bestow immortality, perhaps another plot point inspired by the ancient epic. Shishigami is presented as a deer with a human face, and I have thought of Humbaba along similar lines, particularly with regard to the recent findings in Tablet V. If such is the case, then the earlier piece in the project "Rise above Humbaba" can be seen rightfully as propagandist fear-mongering in general currency among the people of Uruk over the forest guardian.

"Humbaba and the Cedar Forest" is presented from the perspective of Humbaba within the forest rather than the perspective of Gilgamesh and Enkidu coming upon it and entering, as it is in the epic. This allows the audience to catch a glimpse of how he rules over the forest and to feel the coming invasion from the inside with Humbaba and the guards sensing the danger. It begins in silence with Humbaba hearing the coming of the cicadas below ground first. They fill his court with their rhythmic buzzing, and he enjoins them to make the most of their short lives in a similar vein to the way Siduri will advise Gilgamesh in a later piece. However, he calls for silence when he senses a menacing presence in the forest about him. There is an exchange between him and the sentry guards about this, and their anxiety is palpable. In rare spoken lines, unheard by Humbaba and the guards, we hear Gilgamesh say to Enkidu, "See all of them standing down there?" This familiar quote is a variation on the one from the first voice heard in the recording project, that of a pilot inside an American Apache helicopter hovering lethally over a group of Iraqi civilians in Baghdad during the Second Gulf War. Loss of life follows in both instances. The parallel that is being worked out here is that just as the US had gone to Iraq with a brutal commitment to its own interests in the natural resources of the country, specifically its oil, so too is Gilgamesh here ready to take the timber of the forest at the cost of the lives below him. A lethal and youthful hubris is in effect in both instances. Timber was scarce in the Uruk region in ancient times, and such a venture was a historical reality if trade negotiations were not embarked upon or unsuccessful if they were.[15] Moreover, fame, Gilgamesh's declared primary motivation, did come to some Sumerian individuals who embarked on these

[15] See Schwarz and Hollander (2016) and Harrison (1992)

timber-extracting expeditions (Harrison, 1992, p. 17). Enkidu provides a difference in the kind of warfare here when he responds to Gilgamesh, “Yes, and hear them too.” Technology has long made killing easy and faceless; the helicopter pilots sounded very much like young men engaged in playing a video game, so casual were they about what they were moments from doing.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu are fully aware of the gravity of what they are about to do, which is one reason why Gilgamesh loses his nerve and has to be cajoled by Enkidu to administer the coup de grâce blow against Humbaba. This goes along with the epic narrative when Gilgamesh says to Enkidu:

> We strode up to him like heroes to vanquish him
>
> Yet my fearful heart does not calm itself quickly. (Foster, 2019, p. 41)

However, Shamash is with them. In “Ninsun’s Song” earlier in the project, Gilgamesh’s mother prayed to the sun god to protect her son by using his “13 winds” to paralyse Humbaba, an episode from Tablet III in the epic. The audience hears the opening theme of that song, and the rhythm which had accompanied Ninsun’s climb to the altar of the temple earlier is now the rhythm of Gilgamesh and Enkidu approaching Humbaba as they call eerily upon each wind by name. An intriguing question is why Shamash, the sun god, should help Gilgamesh and Enkidu carry out a sacrilegious crime not only against nature but also against the gods who created Humbaba and placed him in the forest to guard the sacred trees in the first place. There may not be a satisfying answer to this, but Shamash is also the god of justice—as the sun sees all where it shines—and it may be that the forest represents a canopied enclosure that the anthropomorphic

deity on high cannot see into, and this makes the forest irksome to him since it eludes his power. Certainly in literature throughout the ages and in mythology, the forest has been a place of lawlessness and hiding.[16]

The ecological repercussions of what Gilgamesh and Enkidu are doing are at the heart of Humbaba's response to his coming slaughter. This is ecocide, and Humbaba offers a warning to Gilgamesh and Enkidu that is meant to radiate out into the future: "You think you're separate from me, but this is your mistake." In the end, Humbaba curses the pair as he is dying: "How I curse you to live...one without the other." This is the end of Part 1 of the project.

IV. Part 2: From the Sacred Forest to the Palace: Key Pieces

A. Remorse

At first glance the ecological discussion above may seem like an anachronistic 21st century take on an ancient episode that was far from the intention of the ancient authors. However, in that same extraordinary fragment of Tablet V found in 2011 that brought such vivid and picturesque images of Humbaba's forest sharply into focus, there was also a fascinating new emotional outcome of the entire expedition to the Cedar Forest, one from which my adaptation benefits in the first sung piece of Part 2, "Remorse". In this newfound scene from the epic as Enkidu and Gilgamesh finish gathering the cut timber for transport, were lines unknown before 2011:

[Enkidu] made ready to speak to Gilgamesh:

[My friend], we have made a wasteland of the forest,

[16] See Harrison (1992), p.6 for more on this

[How] shall we answer for it to Enlil in Nippur (when he says):

"You slew the guardian as a deed of valor,

"But what was this, your fury, that you decimated the forest?" (Foster, 2019, p. 47)

In this passage is an unusually ecological view from the ancient world. It seems that in 1200 BCE or thereabouts, deforestation was already a concern. "Remorse" takes full advantage of this "proximation" gift from the ancient writer in order to focus on a legitimate global apprehension facing the modern world in the throes of global warming and rampant deforestation. This connection of shared concerns between the ancient world and us is heartening to me. Enkidu in the epic is afraid of what Enlil will say, but in the song, it is posterity that concerns him. In this way, the lines are conveyed with the audience directly in mind.

B. **Waiting**

For the transgression against the guardian of the forest and the ensuing decimation of the trees, Enkidu dies. My adaptation omits the episode with the Bull of Heaven as I felt that the focus should be on Humbaba and the ecological repercussions. The sacrilege of killing him and decimating the trees seemed enough to justify the subsequent events. As in Nørgård's adaptation, Enkidu is not given a farewell speech despite it being in the epic. In fact, the narrator makes it clear in the present adaptation that "we don't always get to say goodbye". This has been my experience as I lost a best friend some years ago and others to whom I have been close, and the shock of such sudden deaths has

stayed with me over the years. Therefore, through Enkidu's offstage death, the finality of it is stressed along with the concomitant shock of losing a main character so suddenly and unceremoniously in the fulfilment of Humbaba's curse. This loss is what Gilgamesh must face. However, he cannot bring himself to allow the priests to usher away Enkidu's corpse. In the piece "Waiting", the audience hears the point of view of the priests who are made to come to the burial chamber and prepare the body every day, but are forced by the intransigence of the king, who is in denial that his friend is gone, to leave again without being able to carry out the burial. The details of how the body was treated were meticulously researched so that the Chief Priest's direction of the other priests could be the essence of the verses.

After reading about Philip Glass's decision in *Akhnaten* in a previous chapter with regard to Egyptian funerals and how he used percussion to announce to the gods that a soul was on its way, I was inspired to do the same in this piece, although I do not know if Sumerian funerals would have been similar to the Egyptian ones described in the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* that Glass followed (1988, p. 154). Regardless of whether it is historically accurate, the outbursts of percussion between elegiac moments in the verses also suggested the tension in Gilgamesh's otherwise silent presence as the priests move about around him with the expectation that he will explode out of his incapacitating grief at any moment. This lends the title a double meaning as Gilgamesh is waiting for Enkidu to rise and the priests are waiting for the grieving king to come out of his stupor and allow them to finish the ritual. If sung live in the future, it would be ideal to have an all-male choir of priests looking down on the

scene from the rafters to provide a rich and deep drone that is only hinted at in the recording here. The priests will sing the Chief Priest's melody when Gilgamesh returns to Uruk in "Between Us" after searching for a way to avoid death out in the wilderness, the final piece before the Epilogue. Here, the following piece "Stand", which begins with the same gong that began its predecessor but with the added flourish of brass and a percussive whip, will provide the explosive anger from the king that the priests had been anticipating in "Waiting".

C. "Racing the Sun"

"Racing the Sun" is the third longest narration piece in the project and will prove to be the most difficult to perform live with an orchestra as the textures involved in the underscore beneath the narrator's voice are mostly the result of electronic sound design. In the epic, Gilgamesh encounters the Scorpion man and his wife in the wilderness, both of whom try to dissuade him from entering the cave in Mount Mashum. They do the same here, but there is the added suggestion of hallucination from the narrator, a part of the madness consuming Gilgamesh in this moment: "He sees scorpion people. They speak."

This is one of the main pieces in which modernity threatens to break through the adaptation in a similar manner as the breaking of the celluloid in Ingmar Bergman's film *Persona*. The rage, grief, and despair at the heart of Gilgamesh's mad quest for immortality in this moment becomes a nightmare in which "phantom voices fill his ears" as he makes his way down the sonic vortex of the cave. These phantom voices include not only the return of the American

Apache helicopter pilots but also those of George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein. The recording of Bush is taken from his now infamous "axis of evil" speech, and the first recording of Saddam Hussein is taken from his trial in which he says in Arabic, "But this is now, now, now." Siduri too will tell Gilgamesh that "now" is what we have in life and to leave off this anguish concerning his inevitable mortality. However, Gilgamesh will not listen to her any more than he will listen to an incomprehensible voice coming out of the cave walls at him as he runs heavily towards the unseen end of the cave in complete darkness.

When George W. Bush's voice says near the end, "Leaving the bodies of mothers huddling over their dead children", speaking of the Iraqi regime's treatment of its own citizens in his State of the Union Address in 2002, we hear the Apache helicopter pilot on the ground from "Nineveh's Burning" saying once again "Evac this child" repeatedly as if in response. The Uruk theme is then heard in the clarinet giving a glimmer of hope in this nightmarish tomb of a cave. And the piece ends with Saddam Hussein's recorded last words just before he was hanged.

The voices of real political leaders who had such an impact on this century's initial years and incited in various ways the suffering and deaths of so many are bound to bring on what Julie Sanders (2016) called "culturally loaded proximations" for the audience who remembers them (p. 26-27). They are a broad reference point but also a fact of my own personal lifetime experience. And it is worth noting that Saddam Hussein often identified himself with Gilgamesh (Ziolkowski, 2011, p. 187). Gilgamesh, at this point in the narrative, is likely to go in a similar direction as leaders like these with his ego-driven, cyclical rage at the

external world if he stays on this course. However, he is capable of atonement and a different fate, which is the glimmer of hope represented in the clarinet's Uruk theme. He must find his way out of this cave.

Trumpets can be heard in one passage in the middle of the piece followed by a crescendo of electronics and strings with bending pitches. This is actually the trumpet fanfare that appears just before the choir declaims the name "Gilgamesh" in the opening section of Martinů's oratorio, and it is here in "Racing the Sun" as an homage to the composer of the first great work based on the epic.

D. The Final Three Pieces

In brief, this adaptation ends with Gilgamesh the man facing the darkness in himself, overcoming it, reaching a higher consciousness, much as in the adaptation by Nørgård, and returning to Uruk a wiser human being, capable of being a wiser leader. The rejuvenation plant in the original epic conferred youth on the person who ate of its leaves, but in this adaptation Gilgamesh dives down into his own psyche and faces himself and the darkness within him as the mortal man that he is. When he ascends, he is made new by his own efforts, the consequences of which will appear in the narration piece that follows. This is his heroism. In my adaptation I have tried to bring out from the depths the emotional world of Gilgamesh in a way that, I feel, is largely absent from earlier adaptations.

By this time in the narrative, the narrator has identified himself as Utanapishtim, who as the immortal man, is here to tell that story to the audience now. If a narrator is chosen to bridge the gap between the ancient and modern

world, it seemed appropriate and even fortunate to find one that could literally do so as a citizen of both. As Gilgamesh breathes deeply at the oasis, he questions through the narrator whether the wind in the trees is his breath. He had decimated the forest. However, now Gilgamesh has a connection to nature that has been revealed to him in his long sojourn in the wilderness, a journey which comes to an end with the loss of the rejuvenation plant to the snake followed closely by the laughter that "surprised himself". For the first time he stands outside of himself in a way that allows him to laugh at the predicament he is in, a new way of responding to things that do not happen in his favour.

None of that is in the epic. After the snake eats the plant at the oasis while Gilgamesh is bathing, Gilgamesh sits down weeping near the end of Tablet XI (Foster, 2019, p. 100). Not only does this episode in the epic serve the aetiological function of why snakes slough off their skin, but it also may be a product of the ancient Mesopotamian sense of humour—the snake has outmanoeuvred the great king. It seemed better for the narrative in my adaptation to allow Gilgamesh himself to laugh as a result of that humour rather than being the object of it, a light-hearted moment that fit well before the narrator's last moments in the narrative.

The Epic of Gilgamesh ends with the following lines:

> Go up, Urshanabi, pace out the walls of Uruk.
>
> Study the foundation terrace and examine the brickwork.
>
> Is not the 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! (Foster, 2019, p.100)

Neither Nørgård nor Martinů preserve anything close to this ending in their adaptations. The former ends his adaptation with Gilgamesh made anew by Aruru and even featuring a new actor to represent this transformation, but there is nothing about what the city of Uruk might mean to him in his moment of return. However, by having Gilgamesh back in Uruk, as in the epic, Nørgård does move the story from Tablet XII back to Tablet XI. Martinů's ending stems from Tablet XII alone with the spirit of Enkidu in the Underworld gravely enumerating all of the dead that he saw there to Gilgamesh in the world of the living above through a hole opened up between the two worlds.

My decision was to make the ending much closer to that of the epic by having Gilgamesh, who had been so long in the wilderness, begin to fall in love anew with the city of his birth as his experiences have made him vulnerable to new impressions of the familiar. In this he might finally understand what Siduri in the earlier piece that bears her name had been telling him: "Your love remains, Gilgamesh, so go and give your life to her." He offers an unbolted door between himself and the citizens of Uruk, the same door that had been bolted in the earlier piece "Free". There is a mutual acceptance here between himself and the city that I felt important to dramatise. The music then moves into a reprise of the

palace theme first heard in "This Is My Way" before a final reprise of "Nineveh's Burning"; in effect, reprises in reverse order. The Epilogue was inspired by the resilience of Mosul in reclaiming its Book Festival and Music Festival after three years of the brutal reign of the Islamic fundamentalist group Daesh, who were finally ousted from the city in 2017 [17] In the place where the tablets were discovered, Gilgamesh becomes a byword for the binding power of art and the cultural heritage of the world.

This new adaptation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* aims to present the tale with greater emotional depth in its characterisation than in previous incarnations of the epic adapted for musical stage works. In addition, the work does not compress the tale nearly as much as those discussed in the previous two chapters; at nearly three hours in duration, the story is allowed to breathe in a much fuller account. Nonetheless, the works by Martinů and Nørgård are inspiring works of musical art that have definitely shown the way in terms of how powerful this story is even in disparate adaptations with differing motives and perspectives. In my adaptation, it is hoped that the universal themes of love, friendship, mortality, ecology, and the dynamic between leaders and those they govern all come into the adaptation from the original source intact but with greater emotional amplification in the songwriting and narration. This has been my aim. And as this commentary closes, it is my hope that in some way this work will contribute to what Linda Hutcheon (2013) describes as the "afterlife" of the adapted work (p. 176), that Gilgamesh will stride before a 21st century audience

[17] See Arraf (2018)

anew and bring them along for another journey into a very old story—the ancestor of all stories on earth.

8. Conclusion

At the beginning of this commentary two major research questions were proposed. The first concerned the decisions other composers have made for their libretto in a musical theatre work when the source of the adaptation is in a dead language. Sub-questions asked how the composers using such texts convey meaning explicitly and whether a narrator is found to be necessary.

As noted in chapter 4, the only composer in this commentary's case studies who worked directly with the dead language of his source material was Philip Glass for his opera *Akhnaten* in collaboration with an expert in Near Eastern languages, Shalom Goldman, his co-librettist. However, Glass made a number of accommodations to ensure that the audience for his work would find it comprehensible. For example, he bridges the gap between the ancient Egyptian characters on the stage and the modern audience with a narrator who doubles as an Egyptian scribe and, in the final section, transforms into a modern tour guide. Wherever the performance is, this narrator speaks the same language as the audience. Moreover, Glass's piece *Hymn to the Sun* is also sung in the language of the audience but with omissions from the original text that do not comply fully with the continuity between Akhnaten's world and ours, a continuity Glass stresses in his opera and his own writings on the opera. The chosen text that remains includes archaisms in the language giving it a sacred, authoritative aura despite the fact that, as we have seen, there were other translations done by Egyptologists without such archaisms.

Although the majority of the opera is in ancient Egyptian, Glass has clearly made these concessions to appeal to his contemporaries in the theatre

seats. Especially by means of a narrator setting up each piece in the audience's own language, the pieces sung in the dead language are made less intimidating than they might otherwise be. Naturally, the actions and mannerisms of the performers singing in the dead language will also contribute to comprehensibility.

Bohuslav Martinů used a modern translation of the ancient text in English, presumably because when he began composing there was no translation of the epic in Czech. Martinů's chosen 1928 translation is heavily archaised and in Homeric hexametres—therefore a translation exploiting links with a better known ancient culture for the audience to grasp onto. However, as we have seen, the composer would have preferred a Czech translation that was published too late for him to work with. As noted earlier, Martinů's narrator in his oratorio uses the parenthetical directions and notes of the translator for the narrated English texts. Therefore, the narrator stands outside of the framework of the story as an omniscient one.

Per Nørgård wrote his libretto in Danish with some Swedish, none of which appears to be in any way archaised. For much of the first half of the opera the eponymous hero and his companion sing in phonemes based on their names. However, Gilgamesh evolves as a character over the course of the opera, and the movement from phonemic singing to rapid spoken text in the second part of the opera is one way the libretto marks the character's psychological progression. Nørgård did not avail himself of a narrator, preferring to allow the staging configuration to convey much of the meaning of the story and allowing the audience entry into the world embodying the mythic narrative before their eyes.

Like the narrator in *Akhnaten,* the narrator in my own work helps as a bridge between the ancient world and our own and sets up each piece enhancing the continuity of the story. Also like Glass's narrator, the narrator in *Gilgamesh* is inside the story, revealing his identity as an important character in Part 2 of the work. Unlike Glass's narrator, however, the narrator in *Gilgamesh* speaks the same language as the sung material just as in Martinů's oratorio. My libretto is inspired by a reading of a number of translations, and in the end it is the desire to convey the emotional essence of the story rather than the literal words of it that is behind my decision. Moreover, using my own words helped to make the adaptation a more personal one for me, an autonomous work based on the epic rather than drawing from the epic's linguistic content.

The second major research question from the introductory chapter is about how the composer makes changes in the narrative to make the ancient text relevant for a modern audience. The sub-questions referred to specific changes in the text as well as possible changes to the characters to make them more understandable or sympathetic to modern audiences.

As we have seen, Philip Glass emphasised that the figure of Akhenaten was an important progenitor of today's major monotheistic religions. Stressing this importance in order to highlight a significant cultural connection to a modern audience in this way is what Julie Sanders termed a "culturally loaded proximation", a prime weapon in the arsenal of any artist adapting a text, but especially important in the context of ancient texts which could easily alienate modern audiences as containing matters remote and irrelevant to their world. Glass is at pains to make his connections so clear that as documented in chapter

4, a rendition of Psalm 104 that has parallels with Akhenaten's *Hymn to the Sun* is sung in Hebrew immediately after the latter with a translation in the audience's language projected onto the walls of the stage. Moreover, as mentioned above, his libretto omits passages from the original source whenever they might make his conclusions in the narrative more objectively ambiguous. The evidence in his reworking of this text suggests that Glass is committed to making Akhnaten a sympathetic character to his Judeo-Christian descendants in the modern world, but the question of whether Akhnaten as a character maintains integrity within his own cultural dynamic at the same time is an open one. Some Egyptologists, as we have seen, are less forthcoming on the pharaoh's influence on the monotheistic religions of the future and argue that his own religious proclivities leaned towards monolatry and have been mischaracterised as strict monotheism.

Bohuslav Martinů did not make any major changes in his libretto from the 1928 translation at the core of it. In fact, as we have seen, he even took the translator's explanatory notes and turned them into narration. The minor changes he made to the text had more to do with compression of linguistic elements for the sake of clarity in the lines that had been awkwardly lengthened by the translator's strategy of hexametres. Moreover, as noted in chapter 5, Martinů was reluctant to retain the names of gods in his libretto from the translation, more than likely concerned that his audience would not be able to relate to them or would find them confusing at best. He does not make any changes in the narrative itself, but his interests lay in the thematic elements of

the story as his narrative choices seem to bear out. This would make his long dramatization of Tablet XII perfectly in sync with such objectives.

Per Nørgård's adaptation is full of changes to the narrative right from the origins of Gilgamesh himself. This adaptation owes much of its take on the narrative to 20th century principles of psychology, particularly those espoused by Carl Jung and his followers. The individuation process leading to the final "insight" of Gilgamesh makes the opera, as Barry Wiener (2023) calls it, "a parable about the growth of human consciousness" (p. 5). As such, the ancient text and the narrative are conveyed to the audience as something in which they can partake, and the inclusion of the audience in the staging highlights this. This intriguing staging of the whole piece, giving important visual information about the mythic geography, the characters and their relationships with one another is a splendidly unique extra-textual way of presenting the world of Gilgamesh. In a way, this staging takes the place of a narrator for Nørgård's adaptation. Moreover, the composer's infinity series plays an important role in the development of the main character, showing another way of moving beyond the text.

My adaptation was made to accentuate the emotions of the characters in the story so that they become less archetypal and more individual to an audience. In order to make the text feel more relevant to a modern audience and from personal convictions, I have made the ecological theme that is present in the ancient text a focus of the climax of Part 1 in "Humbaba and the Cedar Forest". The omission of the textual episode with the Bull of Heaven was done to maintain the focal point on the Cedar Forest and the curse of Humbaba as the

cause of the ensuing death of Enkidu upon the proclamation of the gods. I have also changed the character of Humbaba from the ogre presented in the epic to a sympathetic symbol of nature, maximising the sense of an ecological crime when he is beheaded and his sacred forest is decimated. He is also introduced in the story as regal, a sort of anti-Gilgamesh, a sensitive caretaker of the subjects in his court. In addition, I have added 21st century political undertones here and there not only because these are a part of the history I have lived through but also for reasons of proximation and thematic continuity with regard to a prospective audience. Even while doing so, my aim has been to present a historically faithful narrative, researching a great many of the details of architecture, religion, daily life, and ritual that went into the lyrics of the pieces, focusing as well on the emotions and psychological makeup of the characters.

The exploration of how composers and librettists use ancient texts is ripe for greater study. The three case studies and my own adaptation demonstrate the variety of decisions that must be made when confronting ancient texts for a modern work of musical theatre. It is hoped that such a study as this has added to the scholarship on the three composers involved in these case studies by examining how they worked with original sources for their libretti, making autonomous works out of them in the best tradition of adaptations. As "adaptation is the lifeblood of opera" (Blake, 2010, p. 187), a study of how ancient texts are refashioned for modern musical theatre audiences would be a useful niche in opera studies. There are a great many operas and other musical theatre works based on ancient stories that could be treated in this way, and the results

would undoubtedly add to our knowledge of each composer and the working methods adopted for their creations. Such research would also benefit composers who understand how ancient cultures and stories can provide a vital source of inspiration to our own world. The operas discussed in this commentary by Philip Glass and Per Nørgård as well as the oratorio by Bohuslav Martinů have made the repertoire of such works unimaginably richer for the world of musical theatre. And the stories they drew inspiration from are treasures of the world's cultural heritage that are as relevant as ever. The religious zealotry of an Akhnaten, the ecological concerns present in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* along with its themes of love and friendship reach out to us from ancient times as familiar to our own experiences, only with the advantage that we know how their stories ended while we await what is to come for ourselves. Akhnaten fell, the city that Gilgamesh founded was abandoned as the soil all around was overtilled and natural resources ran out, the purpose of which is still little understood. There is nothing here that is not relevant to our world as our contemporary discussions in the media and among ourselves are often tempered by such themes. Whether an audience today is ripe for learning the lessons of the past is worth finding out.

Bibliography

al-Rawi, F.N.H and A.R. George (2014) Back to the Cedar Forest: The beginning and end of Tablet V of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (66), 69-90.

Anderson, R. (1993) Review of *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt* by Lise Manniche. Music Library Association. Second Series, *50* (1), 100-101.

Anglin, H. (2021). *Howard Anglin: The decline and fall of the classical education.* https://thehub.ca/2021/06/11/howard-anglin-the-decline-and-fall-of-the-classical-education/

Archi, A. (2002). Formation of the West Hurrian pantheon: The case of Ishara. In K.A. Yener and H.A. Hoffner Jr. (Eds.)*, Recent Developments in Hittite Archaeology and History,* 21-33. Eisenbrauns.

Arraf, J. (2018, November 13). *Book festival that drew thousands of people to downtown Mosul is far from ordinary.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2018/11/13/667544756/

Attebery, B. (2013) Introduction: Adapting to adaptations. *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts, 24* (3), 394-398.

Babbage, F. (2018) *Adaptation in contemporary theatre: Performing literature.* Bloomsbury Methuen.

Bassnett, S. and A. Lefevere (1990) *Translation, history, and culture.* Printer Publishers Limited.

Blake, A. (2010) 'Wort oder ton'? Reading the libretto in contemporary opera. *Contemporary Music Review*. *29* (2), 187-199.

Borges, J.L. (1998). *Jorge Luis Borges: Conversations.* Univ. Press of Mississippi.

Březina, A. (2017). Untitled [Liner notes in *Bohuslav Martinů: The Epic of Gilgamesh,* CD]. Supraphon.

Brincker, J. (1996). Per Nørgård's music drama: Failures, triumphs and new beginnings. In *The Music of Per Nørgård: Fourteen Interpretive Essays,* 189-215. Scolar.

Brown, H.M. (2001). Opera. *Grove Music Online*. Available at https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40726

Budge, E.A.W. (1895). *The book of the dead: The papyrus of Ani*. Plate VI. Available at http://www.sacred-texts.com/egy/ebod/index.htm

Clayton, P. (1994). *Chronicle of the pharaohs: The reign by reign record of the rulers and dynasties of ancient Egypt.* Thames & Hudson.

Dalley, S. (1989; rev. 2000). *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the flood, Gilgamesh and others.* Oxford University Press.

Dean, J. (2018). Comrade: The zero-level of communism. *Stasis. 6* (2), 100-117.

Discogs (2024). Untitled http://www.discogs.com/release/11935530/-Rudolf-Brucci-Gilgamesh

Foster, B. (2019). *The epic of Gilgamesh.* 2nd Norton Critical Edition. Norton.

Frandsen, P.J. (1993). Philip Glass's Akhnaten. In Kostelanetz, R. (Ed.) (1997) *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism,* 212-239. Schirmer.

Freud, S. (1941). *Moses and monotheism.* 2nd edn. Hogarth Press. https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.15272

George, A. (1999). *The epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian epic poem and other texts in Akkadian and Sumerian.* Penguin.

George, A. (2003). *The Babylonian Gilgamesh epic: Introduction, critical edition and cuneiform texts, volume 1.* Oxford University Press.

George, A. (2018). Enkidu and the harlot: Another fragment of old Babylonian Gilgameš. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie,* 108 (1). 10–21.

George, A. (2019). Email to Michael Guinn, 02 August.

Glass, P. *et al* (1984). *Akhnaten.* (Libretto). https://www.opera-arias.com/glass/akhnaten/libretto/

Glass, P. (1988). *Opera on the beach.* Faber and Faber.

Glass. P. (1995). *Music by Philip Glass*. Da Capo Press.

Glass, P. (2015). *Words without music.* Faber and Faber.

Godfrey, N. (2015) Pharaoh Akhenaten and his family adoring the Aten [Photograph]. https://vridar.org/2015/05/31

Halbreich, H. (1999). *Arthur Honegger*. Amadeus Press.

Hall, L. (2019, September 9). Per Nørgård's infinity series. *Lawton Hall: Composer.* https://www.lawtonhall.com/blog/2019/9/9/per-nrgrds-infinity-series

Harrison, R. (1992). *Forests: The shadow of civilization.* University of Chicago Press.

Heidel, A. (1946). *The Gilgamesh epic and Old Testament parallels.* University of Chicago Press.

Helle, S. (2024). Email to Michael Guinn, 24 July.

Herresthal, C. (2023, February 18). *Introducing Ishara- Gilgamesh at The Rued Langaard Festival* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yO8baSAgemQ&t=19s

Hutcheon, L. (2013). *A theory of adaptation.* Routledge.

Hutcheon, L. and Hutcheon, M. (2017). Literature/ Film Quarterly contribution to roundtable. *Literature/ Film Quarterly*. Spring 2017, *45* (2), 8-9.

Jensen, J. (1990). [CD Booklet]. In *Gilgamesh-Voyage into the Golden Screen* [CD]. Da Capo.

Jonson, B. (1623). *To the memory of my beloved master William Shakespeare*. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44466

Jung, C. (1928). *Two essays on analytical psychology.* Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.218694/page/n203/mode/2up

Kluger, R. (1991). *The archetypal significance of Gilgamesh: A modern ancient hero.* Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag.

Kullberg, E. (1996). Beyond infinity: On the infinity series—The DNA of hierarchical music. In *The Music of Per Nørgård: Fourteen Interpretive Essays,* 71-93. Scolar.

Lichtheim, M. (2006). *Ancient Egyptian literature: Volume II: The New Kingdom.* 2nd edn. University of California Press.

Martinů, B. (2017). *The epic of Gilgamesh.* (Liner notes). In t*he epic of Gilgamesh* [CD]. Supraphon.

Maycock, R. (2002). *Glass: A portrait.* Sanctuary Publishing.

Mitchell, S. (2013). *Gilgamesh*. Atria Paperback.

Muroi, K. (2014). *The origin of the mystical number seven in Mesopotamian culture; Division by seven in the sexagesimal number system.* https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2014arXiv1407.6246M/abstract

Nørgård, P. (1973). Gilgamesh—A 5000-Year-old topicality (1973). *Nutida Musik 17* (1), 1-5.

Nørgård, P. (1990). [Liner notes]. *Gilgamesh-Voyage into the golden screen* [CD]

Da Capo.

Nørgård, P. (2015). *Gilgamesh* [Musical score]. (Original work published 1973).

https://issuu.com/scoresondemand/docs/gilgamesh_21614

Ofgang, E. (2024, August 12). Piecing together an ancient epic was slow work. Until A.I.

got involved. *The New York Times.*

https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/12/books/booksupdate/ai-ancient-tablets-gilgamesh.html

Ota, T. (2005). On Princess Mononoke. *Obirin Review of International Studies,* (17), 7-21.

Pilger, J. (Writer/ Director) & Lowery, A. (Director). (2010). *The war you don't see.*

[DVD]. Network.

Pohjannoro, U. (2016). Capitalising on intuition and reflection: Making sense of a composer's creative process. *Musicae Scientiae*. *20* (2) 207–234

Popelka, I. (2012). *Martinů's letters home: Five decades of correspondence with family*

and friends. Ed. by Isa Popelka. Trans. by Ralph Slayton. Toccata Press.

Redford, D. (2013). Akhenaten: New theories and old facts.

Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, (369), 9-36.

Richardson, J. (1999). *Singing archaeology: Philip Glass's Akhnaten.* University Press of New England.

Rybka, F. (2011). *Bohuslav Martinů: The compulsion to compose.* The Scarecrow Press.

Šafránek, M. (1962). *Bohuslav Martinů: His life and works*. Translated by R. Finlayson-Samsourova. Allan Wingate.

Sanders, J. (2016). *Adaptation and appropriation.* Routledge.

Schwarz, M. and D. Hollander (2016). The Uruk expansion as dynamic process: A reconstruction of middle to late Uruk exchange patterns from bulk stable isotope analyses of bitumen artifacts. *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports. 7*, 884-899.

Sheridan, M. (2003. April 24) For help in rebuilding Mosul, U.S. turns to its former foes. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/04/25/for-help-in-rebuilding-mosul-us-turns-to-its-former-foes/

Smith, G. (1876). *The Chaldean account of Genesis.* https://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/caog/index.htm

Smith, P. (1993). New masks for old myths. *Opera News, 57* (16), 30.

Snelson, J. and A. Lamb (2001). Musical [musical comedy, musical play]. *Grove Music Online.* https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.19420

Speiser, E.A. (1969). 'The epic of Gilgamesh', in Pritchard, J. (ed.) *Ancient near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Princeton University Press, 72-99.

Svatos, T. (2009a). A clash over Julietta: the Martinů/Nejedlý political conflict and twentieh-century Czech critical culture. *Ex tempore. xiv/2*, 1-41.

Svatos, T. (2009b). Reasserting the centrality of musical craft: Martinů and his American diaries. *The Musical Times 150*(1907), 55–70.

Svatos, T. (2018). *Martinů's subliminal states: A study of the composer's writings and reception, with a translation of his "American diaries".* University of Rochester.

Svatos, T. (2024). *Bohuslav Martinů.* The Orel Foundation. http://orelfoundation.org/composers/article/bohuslav_martinu

Swed, M. (1993). 'Editor's preface to Philip Glass's Akhnaten by Paul John Frandsen', in Kostelanetz, R. (ed.) (1997) *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism.* Schirmer, 209-211.

Thompson, R.C. (1928). *The epic of Gilgamish.* https://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/eog/

Velikovsky, I. (1960). *Oedipus and Akhnaton: Myth and history.* Doubleday.

Wakeman, R. (Presenter), & Edwards, M. (Director). (2016). *When pop went epic: the crazy world of the concept album* [Film]. BBC Wales.

Wiener, B. (2023). Per Nørgård's tragic vision: A comparison of Gilgamesh (1972) and nuit des hommes (1996). *Cambridge Opera Journal*, *35*(3), 1-35.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586723000150

Williams, R.J. (1960). 'Hymn to the Aten', in Thomas, D.W. (ed.) (2005) *Full Text of 'Documents from Old Testament Times',* 143-149. https://archive.org/stream/documentsfromold00insoci/documentsfromold00ins

Ziolkowski, T. (2011). *Gilgamesh among us: Modern encounters with the ancient epic.* Cornell University Press.

Appendix 1: Synopsis of *Gilgamesh*

This adaptation comes in two parts. The first part begins with a prologue outside of the timeline of the narrative but offers background on how the story came to us. The narrative begins with a narrator setting up the scene at Uruk in what is now Warka in southern Iraq with a woman and man coming to the palace to meet with the king, who describes himself as 2/3 god, 1/3 human. The woman, as it turns out, is a kind of Bathsheeba to Gilgamesh's David, and we learn immediately how Gilgamesh is abusing his power. The people led by a priestess pray to the gods, Anu in particular, for deliverance from the excesses and volatile energies of the king. The gods answer this prayer by sending into the wilderness a half-human, half-animal named Enkidu to develop into a rival for Gilgamesh who will be equal in strength and energies to the king so that Uruk can gain relief. The narrator appears to have intimate knowledge of the city and Gilgamesh himself.

A trapper discovers Enkidu roaming his lands and setting free animals who get caught in his traps. As a consequence, the trapper goes to Gilgamesh's court to inform the king of the danger in the wilderness. A solution emerges: Shamhat, a temple courtesan and the king's favourite, should accompany the trapper back to the wilderness so that she can subdue Enkidu by means of her sensuality. It works. Shamhat and Enkidu have sexual intercourse for six straight days and seven nights. Shamhat teaches him language during this time that seems to be made up of random phrases, but all of these will be used by Enkidu in his upcoming songs. By the end of this "heroic copulation", as the

narrator puts it, the animals will not come near Enkidu anymore. He has been civilised via sexuality.

When Enkidu is brought to Uruk, he immediately steps between Gilgamesh and the door of a newly married couple where Gilgamesh hopes to enjoy his *droits du Signeur*. A fight ensues between them which Gilgamesh wins but not before acquiring great admiration for his rival. They become fast friends. They walk off arm-in-arm, Enkidu leaving Shamhat behind with only the briefest of glances.

Emboldened by this new friendship and as a means of achieving everlasting fame for himself, Gilgamesh proposes that he and Enkidu travel west to the sacred forest of cedars in Lebanon to kill its guardian Humbaba, cut down many of the trees, and return with the timber back to Uruk. Despite the fact that Humbaba has been placed in the sacred forest by the gods for its protection, Gilgamesh rationalises this as a favour for the gods since new temple doors can be constructed with the timber. First, the two go to Gilgamesh's mother, the goddess Ninsun, to get her blessing for the venture. She prays to the sun god Shamash to use his 13 winds to paralyse Humbaba and to protect her son and his companion. Despite the protests of the city elders and Enkidu himself regarding this reckless adventure, Gilgamesh and Enkidu leave the city and set out west. They come to Humbaba's court and find him enjoying the sight of newly arrived cicadas. An oppressive feeling soon takes over as Humbaba and the guards sense a dangerous presence. Gilgamesh and Enkidu reveal themselves, summon Shamash's 13 winds, and kill the paralysed Humbaba, who curses them for this deed. This ends Part 1.

Part 2 begins with the return of Gilgamesh and Enkidu to Uruk with Humbaba's severed head along with vast amounts of timber. On the way back, Enkidu expresses remorse for the cutting down of the trees.

Upon his return, Gilgamesh bathes in the river, a sight that ignites the passions of the goddess of love, Inanna (Ishtar). She proposes to him by insisting that he will be hers. Enkidu, in a jealous rage, tries to distract Gilgamesh from this proposal by warning Gilgamesh of the dangers of marrying her and also by implying that his own love for Gilgamesh is truer. Gilgamesh is won over by Enkidu's pledge, and Inanna flies off, humiliated by Gilgamesh's rejection. She goes to her father, the sky god Anu, and complains. It is decided among the gods that for this affront and for the cutting down of sacred trees, one of the two heroes must die. They choose Enkidu. Gilgamesh is distraught. When the priests come to collect Enkidu's body, he will not allow it. He hopes that Enkidu will wake up and live as before. Finally, when a maggot protrudes from the corpse's nose, Gilgamesh is persuaded to allow the last rites to be performed for his friend.

In complete mental and emotional disarray, Gilgamesh leaves the city. He has heard that there is a man and his wife living at the ends of the earth who have achieved immortality. It is a long journey to get there. Gilgamesh must contend with the solitude of traveling in the wilderness first. Then he must race the sun through the cave that the sun passes along throughout the night before reemerging in the east each day. Sounds come to him in the cave that make him question his sanity. Gilgamesh then finds himself in a jewelled garden. Beyond this, he meets the tavernkeeper at the end of the known world, Siduri. She tries

in vain to convince him to turn back, but can only direct him on how to boat across the Waters of Death to meet at last Utanapishtim and his wife, the immortal couple, when he won't listen to reason. It turns out that the narrator has been all along the immortal Utanapishtim. On his arrival, Utanapishtim sets Gilgamesh a test of staying awake seven days and nights in order to show readiness for the travails of immortality. However, exhausted after his long journey, Gilgamesh almost immediately falls asleep. Failing this test, Gilgamesh is given one more chance at a reward for his efforts: Utanapishtim and his wife tell him of a magical rejuvenation plant at the bottom of the sea. Gilgamesh leaves, finds the place, descends into the depths of the ocean, and recovers the plant. A transformation occurs in the character of Gilgamesh. At an oasis on the way back to Uruk, Gilgamesh sleeps, and as he does so, the plant is eaten by a snake who immediately sloughs off its skin to become young again. Gilgamesh is distraught, but something in him has changed because of all of these experiences. The citizens notice this change in him when he reenters the city and welcome him back. And so, he returns to Uruk a better king and a wiser human being. An epilogue reprises the opening prologue and highlights Gilgamesh's importance as a symbol in the modern world.

Appendix 2: Track List of *Gilgamesh*

1. Prologue: Nineveh's Burning (4:34)

2. "Uruk"/ This Is My Way (8:19)

3. "Not a Normal Day" (2:41)

4. Free (5:03)

5. "Enkidu Dances"/ "The First Animal Activist" (3:54)

6. The Trapper (6:47)

7. "The Most Fascinating of Spectacles"/ A Song of Everlasting Love (6:42)

8. Enkidu in Uruk (9:28)

9. "In the Throes of Commerce" (1:31)

10. The Morning Light (5:06)

11. "Hunger"/ Ninsun's Song (7:12)

12. "The Forest Is a Problem"/ Rise above Humbaba (4:44)

13. "House of the Dream Spirit" (1:46)

14. I Depend on You (6:43)

15. "He Is Nature" (0:58)

16. Humbaba and the Cedar Forest (9:36)

17. "The Cutting down of Trees" (2:06)

18. Remorse (2:55)

19. "The Goddess by the River" (2:15)

20. You're Going to Be Mine (4:06)

21. Not Love for Long (4:51)

22. “Enkidu Is Dying”/ The Mourners (3:31)

23. Waiting (4:23)

24. Stand (1:41)

25. “An Insidious Game”/ Decisions (5:09)

26. “Racing the Sun” (4:36)

27. “The Glittering Garden”/ Siduri (9:15)

28. “Crossing the Waters of Death” (3:00)

29. “Telling His Tale” (1:52)

30. One Cup and You’re Gone/ “Immortality”/ Wake Him up Now-There Is a Plant (11:46)

31. “Miracles beneath the Sea”/ The Rejuvenation Plant (8:26)

32. “The Oasis, the Snake, the Farewell” (5:55)

33. Between Us/ Epilogue: Nineveh’s Calling (11:33)

Appendix 3: The Cast of *Gilgamesh*

Jeremy Irons: Narrator

John Riesen: Gilgamesh

Stephen Riesen: Enkidu

Paul Goodwin: Prologue and Epilogue singer/ The Trapper

Mawgan Stott: Shamhat

Sean Anderson: Utanapishtim

Andrin Haag: High priest

Ryan C. Connelly: Humbaba

Anastasia Malliaras: Siduri

Helen Ostafew: Priestess

Maya Hayashi: Ninsun

Gillian Riesen: Utanapishtim's wife

Lizzie Hales: Inanna

Additional vocals:

Andrin Haag

Paul Goodwin

Sara Guinn

Marc Lowe

Jasmine Nesbitt-Larkin

Alastair Comery

Toby Lazenbury

Michael Guinn