

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON METAPHOR, AMBIGUITY AND LITERARY TRADITION

Simonetta Ponchia

Mesopotamian literary tradition includes compositions that defy our full understanding and challenge our analytical methodologies. They have received various, stimulating categorizations, including the label of parodic texts, but more often their setting is left undecided due to interpretive difficulties, deriving partly from their poor state of preservation and more often from the lack of sufficient comparable materials. This situation is particularly regrettable since these texts often appear to deal with sensitive matters such as the nature of royal and divine power. A potentially productive strategy is to investigate formal structures, looking in particular for those which seem to have undergone developments and recontextualizations through the centuries, and might be considered sources of inspiration and reflection. Scribal tradition, inasmuch as it heavily resorts to literary repertoire, allows us to follow this diachronical perspective. Although the study proposed here is a limited one, intended merely as an exemplification of possible analytical paths, it is a pleasure to present this paper to the honoree, who has contributed so much to the understanding of the richness of Mesopotamian linguistic and textual tradition and to illuminate its obscurities.

In approaching the study of metaphor, one of the most striking and attractive texts is the Sumerian composition *Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven* (GBH),<sup>1</sup> which

---

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi 1993 and subsequently in the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, with details about the different manuscripts (from Me-Turan and Nippur), variants, and about the restorations made on the basis of the surviving exemplars. See also George 2003: 11–12. For older forerunners of the text dated at the Early Dynastic period (approx. 2600 BC) see Alster 2004: 33 n. 15. On the difficulties of the text, see the regrets expressed in the first edition: “De toutes les légendes sumériennes tournant autour de Gilgameš aucune n’a été si peu étudiée ni traduite, et c’est dommage, car c’est un morceau remarquable, même s’il est plutôt difficile à digérer pour des esprits aussi éloignés de Sumer que les nôtres.” (Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi 1993: 97). A political interpretation was proposed by Wilcke 1973: 59, who read the tale as “mythische Bericht über einen erfolgreichen Freiheitskampf Sumers gegen die akkadische Oberherrschaft”. On the methodological problems linked to this kind of historicizing approach and to the latter interpretation in particular, cf. Cooper 2001: 134–142. For the archaeological context of the version from Me-Turan see now Cavigneaux 1999. For the reminiscence of the myth in the Euripidean tragedy of Hippolytus, see most recently Karahashi & López-Ruiz 2006. I am grateful to Prof. J.S. Cooper who, sometime ago, kindly discussed the subject with me and gave stimulating suggestions; the responsibility for mistakes is, obviously, only my own.

may at the same time exemplify intertextual relationships. The text displays a peculiar use of metaphor, which appears: a) to function simultaneously at different levels;<sup>2</sup> b) to play with the ambiguity of the identification of tenor and vehicle;<sup>3</sup> c) to interrelate with the ambiguity inherent in the use of various lexical, grammatical, and stylistic elements.

The tale moves around the image of the “bull”, an image that is frequently used in Sumerian literary texts and in the titulary of royal inscriptions and hymns.<sup>4</sup> In our text the image has two different interconnected levels: it is embodied by the Bull of Heaven (gud-an-na)<sup>5</sup> and metaphorically describes Gilgames’ valour. In the latter case two variants are used: the more literary one, *am*, is inserted in Inana’s speech (ll. 22 and 34 of the Me-Turan version), while in the incitement uttered by Enkidu at the crucial moment of the battle with the Bull of Heaven, the king of Uruk receives the epithet *gud*: *gud lipiš šà tuku mē-an-gub-ba*, “Furious-hearted Bull, standing ready for battle” (Me-Turan, l. 122 = Segment D: 41). There is then a simile build-up with a third epithet, *amar*, which, due to the fragmentary state of the passage, is not assignable with absolute certainty to one of the two contenders. If it refers to the Bull, it may be considered a play on tenor and vehicle:

<sup>2</sup> On the form of simile and metaphor, and related terminology, see Streck 1999, with reference to previous studies. On multi-layered images see Westenholz 1996: 193–200, and particularly: “Polysemic images simultaneously embodying several layers of meaning – the literal, metaphorical/figurative and symbolic/mythic – bring with them complexes of meanings” (p. 193). Theoretical and methodological considerations, as well as a detailed and extremely suggestive analysis of the imagery employed in the poem of *Lugalbanda*, are given in Black 1998. See also, most recently, Watanabe 2002: 16–21, Wasserman 2003: 99–156 and Feldt 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For the importance of literary ambiguity in Sumerian texts and for the interplay between it and metaphors see Vanstiphout 1996; for ambiguity inherent in the language and imagery of incantations, see Cooper 1996. Ambiguity is of course the fundament of word-play, for which see the overview of Klein & Sefati 2000.

<sup>4</sup> See in general The Sumerian Dictionary A: 180, for the usage of *am* as epithet for kings. See also Heimpel 1968: 79–121 (*am*) and 133–176 (*gu*), and Kramer 1969. An articulated example is offered by Šulgi D (quotations from Klein 1981: 73), where the king of Ur is depicted as: *gud-gal ā-gū-nu* (l. 2), “the great bull with splendid limbs”; *amar tūr-ḥé-gál-la tu-da*, “young bull born in the rich enclosure” (l. 3); *am-zi am-gal-šè tu-da-gim*, “like a rampant wild ox, born to be a great ox” (l. 29). An example that reveals the wide range of applicability of this image is given in the Uruk Lament (I 14) where the unidentified monster devastating the city is described as: *am gal-gin<sub>7</sub> gù maḥ im-mi-ib-dug<sub>4</sub> ḥeg<sub>11</sub>-bi e-ne ba-e-si*, “Like a great wild bull it bellowed mightily, how it filled (the world) with its roar!” (Green 1984: 266, I 14), and the dying city as: [*a*]m gal-gin<sub>7</sub> tī mu-ni-in-gíd-gíd-i..., “like a great wild bull which has been wounded with an arrow, ...” (Green 1984: 274, V 17). See now also Watanabe 2002: 57–64, *passim*, Waetzoldt 2007: 382–386 and Feldt 2007 in particular for the distribution of *am* and *gud*.

<sup>5</sup> Note that in Šulgi B the *gud-an-na* is mentioned together with the species of wild beasts that the king, among his princely activities, hunts in the mountains (Castellino 1972: 38, 85 and commentary in Watanabe 2002: 74–75).

amar giš nu-zu saḥar-ra ba-e-ne-ši-dul<sub>5</sub>, “It covered them with dust, like a young calf unused to the yoke.”<sup>6</sup>

The image of the bull is developed and expanded either along the lexical-semantic axis (i.e. as far as the vehicle is concerned), by the variation of the terms and by their nuanced meanings, and along the referential-denotative axis, by the association with different participants in the plot and the expansion of the effect of mirroring and redoubling that this creates on the tenor. The result is that of underlining the shared features of the two fighters, Gilgameš and the Bull, at the moment they are opposing each other.<sup>7</sup>

The efficacy of the image in representing heroism is variously developed in other texts: in *Gilgameš et la mort*, the dead hero is called by both the epithets am-gal and ur-saĝ (Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi 2000: 25, ll. 1–4). As noted by Finet (1996), in the fight between Gilgameš and Enkidu, narrated in the OB version of the *Gilgameš epic*, there is an ambiguous use of the term *li’u / lū* (“taureau, buffle”) or *le’u* (“capable”) (r.1, 19–23). Westenholz (1996: 191) notes additional examples such as: *qarrādūšu aplūnišu alpū rabūtu*, “His heroes answered him, the great bulls” and *mīrī dannūtīm ālilī uš[tālik]*, “the strong bulls, the warriors he put into action”.<sup>8</sup>

In GBH allusions to the symmetry of roles could have also been attained by means of repetition and of puns on different meanings of partly identical compound verbs and on personal pronouns.<sup>9</sup> To a certain extent they may mimic the difficulty of distinguishing problematic spheres of competence, which represents the central issue of the text. According to George, the Schøyen tablet offers the basis for a new reading of some difficult lines and more clearly reveals Inana’s intention of

<sup>6</sup> Nippur manuscript, l. 88 (see ETCSL); Me-Turan version, l. 118 (line numbering by Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi 1993), with some textual problems.

<sup>7</sup> Wrestling is in Mesopotamia a princely activity, as shown by written and figurative evidence. See the passages from Šulgi’s hymns quoted and commented by Klein 1993, and particularly the following: “In wrestling and athletics I made (my) strength truly radiate – let the praise thereof be sung” (p. 126), and: “Like breed-bulls (*gu<sub>4</sub>-dù-gim*) I turned them back by their horns!” (p. 128). The motif has a figurative representation in the Ur-Nammu stela (see n. 26, below) and might perhaps be recognized in the frequent scheme of symmetrical figures in plaques and seals, some of which depict lions, bulls, bull-men (see Borger 1972/1975, and, for a general overview with previous bibliography, Braun-Holzinger 1999, Battini 2000). It was part of ritual performances (see examples quoted in Azize 2002). Cf. also the symbolic value of the confrontation between the king and his alter ego, the lion, which is a central theme in Neo-Assyrian reliefs (Cassin 1987: 181–213, see also Watanabe 2000: 1149–1161; 2002: 69–88).

<sup>8</sup> On this aspect see also Heimpel 1968: 16–19, and Black 1998: 17 who discusses the problem. The play is reflected even in the values of the logogram: *gud*, in Akkadian *alpu*, may be read also *qarrādu*, “hero”.

<sup>9</sup> See in particular the use of the verbal root *bar*, which takes different objects (nos. 10–12, below). See also the function of the term *é-lá-e* (cf. nos. 10 and 21). Perhaps its literal meaning of “house which stretches” has something to do with the wall referred to in the final part of the tale. It might also refer to the double dimension, terrestrial and celestial, of the actions here narrated and, again ambiguously, to the E-ana.

seducing Gilgameš: “O my wild bull, *may you be* our man, I shall not let you go! O lord Bilgames, my wild bull, *may you be* our man, I shall not let you go!”<sup>10</sup> The solution the goddess proposes for the control of the E-ana seems to be that of marriage and shared sovereignty over the sanctuary: “O Bilgames, may you be its lord, let me be its lady!”<sup>11</sup> This solution the hero rejects, as later tradition well illustrates.

The insistence on the same verbal root in different syntagms may underline the origin and fundament of power: royal authority must be conceded and sanctioned by the supreme divine authority. The verb *bar* is repeated again in the request Inana urgently addresses to An for the Bull of Heaven. In the passage this repetition interlocks with the repetition of another verbal root, in *eme-sal* form, *zé.èm*, used referring to Inana herself and to the Bull.

The great bull on the loose, ... Unug! The great bull Gilgameš on the loose ... Unug! Because I cannot give my own self to him, tears are blurring (my) eyes (and) I am sobbing! May my father give me the Bull of Heaven! So I can kill the lord, so I can kill the lord, the lord Gilgameš, I can kill the lord.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> George 2003, 471–472 (italics by George). Combining the reading of George with the other known versions, we obtain the following hypothetical text: kù <sup>d</sup>inana-ke<sub>4</sub> é-lá-e igi mu-un-bar é abzu,-ta é-lá-e igi mu-un-bar [am-mu lú-me-en-dè-en šu nu-r]i-bar-re bí-in-dug<sub>4</sub> / e[n <sup>d</sup>bil-ga-me]s am-mu lú-me-en-dè-en šu nu-ri-bar-re gí<sub>6</sub>-pâr gú-mu kaš bar-re šu nu-ri-bar-re é-an-na an-na ki-ág di kud-dè šu nu-ri-bar-re, “Holy Inana perceived the canopy(?), from the palace of the *abzu* she perceived the canopy(?): ‘O my wild bull, may you be our man, I shall not let you go! Gilgameš, may you be our man, I shall not let you go! In my holy E-ana I shall not let you dispense justice! I shall not let you pronounce verdicts in my holy *gípar*! In the E-ana beloved by An I shall not let you dispense justice!’” (Nippur B: 5–11; Me-Turan A: 20–26; transl. ETCSL).

<sup>11</sup> <sup>d</sup>bil.ga.mes [za].e` [ù.m]u.un.bi.dè.mèn / [gá.e] ga.ša.an.bi.dè.mèn (George 2003: 472). An interesting similarity in the definition of Inana’s role and power may be found in *Inana C*: 14–15: <sup>d</sup>inana e-ne-da nu-me-a an gal ka-aš nu-um-bar <sup>d</sup>en-líl nam nu-un-tar, “Without Inana great An makes no decisions and Enlil determines no destinies.” (For the text see Sjöberg 1976 and ETCSL). The power of decision and judgment of Inana, as granted to her by An, is defined also in another hymn, see Sjöberg 1988: 167, ll. 9–10, with different terminology: di-gal kur-[kur-r]a ku<sub>5</sub>-da-e, “she renders judgments in all lands ...”

<sup>12</sup> gud gal šu bar-ra unug<sup>ki</sup>-ga ... [(...)] gud gal <sup>d</sup>bil-ga-mes šu bar-ra unug<sup>ki</sup>-[ga ...] mu ní-mà nu-mu-na-ab-zé-mà ér im-lù-lù-e síg gur<sub>4</sub>-gur<sub>4</sub>-re a-a-gu<sub>10</sub> gud-an-na ha-ma-zé-èm-ma en ga-mu-un-ga en ga-mu-un-ga en <sup>d</sup>bil-ga-mes en ga-mu-un-ga. The partly hypothetical composite text proposed here follows the recent reinterpretation given by George 2002: 144–145, and 149 for the translation. The scholar ascribes the sentence to Inana because *eme-sal* is used and discusses the relations of the passage with literary and cultic texts. The passage is preserved in the mss. from Nippur (see ETCSL, segment B ll. 39–40; Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi, ii 10–11). In Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi’s reading the words are attributed to An and contain the actual designation of the Bull of Heaven and not the metaphorical reference to Gilgameš: “Le grand Taureau, s’il est lâché [...] Uruk! Le grand Taureau, s’il est lâché (contre) Gilgameš, [...] Uruk! Je ne lui donnerai pas celui qui porte mon propre nom.”

The human hero and the celestial bull appear not only to share the same epithet/noun, but also to occupy two symmetric positions: Inana asks for the Bull to oppose and eventually to eliminate Gilgameš, whom she cannot have for herself.

The doxology adds the final nuance of ambiguity to the picture: the text begins as a hymn in praise of the hero of battle, Gilgameš,<sup>13</sup> but in the end it is Inana who is to be praised for the death of Gilgameš' antagonist, her own champion, the Bull of Heaven: gud-an-na ug<sub>5</sub>-ga kù <sup>d</sup>inana-ke<sub>4</sub> zà-mí-zu dùg-ga, "For the death of the Bull of Heaven: holy Inana, it is sweet to praise you!" (Me-Turan D: 59).

The play with images and symbols of heroism suggests relations of opposition, symmetry, and identification. Metaphor, thanks to its power in dissecting and composing the fields of experience, stresses similarities as well as ambiguities, and is the key of what may be called an ingenious *divertissement*.

The symbolic identification of two opposing entities might, on the other hand, resurface in the later versions of *Gilgameš*, where it is used in the definition of hero and man.<sup>14</sup> The play on identities and roles reveals a variety of possibilities, including also parodic effects, which, as shown by B. Alster's commentary of *Ninurta and the Turtle*, may also characterize mythological tales referring to the definition of power.<sup>15</sup> Ninurta is also the protagonist of another myth of conflict, showing the correspondences between the hero and his defeated enemy as observed by A. Annus: "Ninurta is equated with his slain enemy, Anzu (...) who becomes his symbol (...)"<sup>16</sup> Myths of conflict should certainly be thoroughly investigated for the use of metaphor especially to the extent that it is used to create intertextual links.

To better classify the linguistic and stylistic mechanisms reflected upon here, it seems appropriate also to consider their visual counterpart, the iconographic

<sup>13</sup> šul mē-kam šul mē-kam in-du-ni ga-an-dug<sub>4</sub> / en <sup>d</sup>bil-ga-mes šul mē-kam in-du-ni ga-an-dug<sub>4</sub> / en su ku<sub>10</sub>-ku<sub>10</sub> šul mē!-kam in-[du]-ni ga-an-dug<sub>4</sub>, "I will sing the song of the man of battle, the man of battle. I will sing the song of lord Gilgameš, the man of battle. I will sing the song of the lord with the very black beard, the man of battle." (Me-Turan A: 1–3).

<sup>14</sup> See tablet II, l. 185 of the OB version: "In build he (Enkidu) is the image of Gilgamesh, but shorter in stature, and bigger of bone." (see Cassin 1987: 36–38); and tablet XI, ll. 2–4 of the Ninevite version: "As I look at you, Uta-napišti: your form is not different, you are just like me, you are not different at all, you are just like me" (transl. George 2003: 703). On the fact that "equality and likeness of Gilgamesh and Enkidu forms a central theme in the Epic", see Parpola 1998: 321.

<sup>15</sup> According to the author, parody of the divine world is also present in Sumerian compositions related to Inana, in the *Gudam* text and in GBH (Alster 2006: 33–34). See also Feldt in Alster 2004, showing how Ninurta's mythology in general presents a series of correspondences also with the *Gudam* tale.

<sup>16</sup> Annus 2001: 9. Note also, in the myth of *Lugal-e*, that Asakku might be seen as a "mauvaise parodie" of Enlil (Bruschweiler 1987: 70). The same mechanism might also be recognized at the basis of the thought pattern of the coincidence of opposites, which appears in the description of divine personalities, like Inana-Ištar (see e.g. Harris 1991: 263: "... embodied within herself polarities and contraries ..."). The fragmentary state of the text of GBH hinders a more in-depth evaluation of the role and features of Inana in this tale, and in different genres of texts like commentaries and exegetic works (see e.g. Livingstone 1986: 28–29).

evidence. Particularly interesting are the representations on the third-millennium cylinder seals, where the bull-man or the human-headed bull are carved and where the artists often chose a scheme in which the change from man to hybrid and from hybrid to animal is depicted as continuous. The different images seem almost to vanish one into the other without a real interruption, while they are at the same time represented in contest scenes. This provides a visual version of the metaphors used for denoting the heroic qualities connected with kingship, that in GBH receive full narrative development.<sup>17</sup> Analogies and oppositions might on the other hand appear, in written and iconographic examples, as the “rules” according to which the cosmos is formed and organized. It would be interesting to look for a cultural and functional context upon which the peculiar usage of the linguistic (metaphor, symbol, ambiguity) but also iconographic tools might have been modelled, and in relation to which they may be used to bring ambivalence to the surface.

Only some cursory considerations may be proposed in this note, briefly taking into account a series of aspects. An interesting parallel is provided by the *Gudam* tale, a quite enigmatic text in which *Gudam* (“He is a bull/ox”) devours food reserves stored in Uruk and seems in the end to be stopped and defeated by a fisherman of Inana. Both GBH and the *Gudam* tale refer to a fundamental goal connected with divinity and kingship: the provision of abundance.<sup>18</sup> In GBH it is Gilgameš who declares: “let me provide the oxen of the mountain, let me make them numerous in their cow stall; let me provide the sheep of the mountain, let me make them numerous in their sheepfolds”; in the *Gudam* tale it is the bull himself that utters the promise, imploring for his life. The idea – which seems to be expressed more explicitly in *Gudam*, while in GBH it is inserted in a more complex narrative that blends together other themes – is to “domesticate” excessive energy and force it into governable and useful abundance.

On the other hand, some of the same features may be seen as components of power and heroism. Gilgameš, the prototype of the young hero, and Inana, the woman, may appear to personify innovation but also the “dark side” connected with heroism; both possess exceptional power, and may be prone to excessive reactions and “wild” behaviour that the bull embodies. This may give way to exaggerated reactions, also combining humorous effects. In the classical version of *Gilgameš epic* the episode of the confrontation with Ištar maintains a central role in the representation of the hero’s personality,<sup>19</sup> but it is also treated from an intertextual perspective, with the quotation of parallel myths and images. It is an aspect of the definition of heroism and power that certainly deserves closer attention. It may at

<sup>17</sup> For a recent treatment of this iconography see Marigliano 2004. Conceptual continuity may be detected with ritualized contest scenes such as Assurbanipal’s hunting representations (see Cassin 1987 and Watanabe 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Alster 2004: 34. For a full evaluation of concordances between the two texts see also most recently Gadotti 2006.

<sup>19</sup> On Gilgameš as young hero see in particular Harris 2000: 32–49.

least be pointed out that, in spite of a rich literary and celebrative tradition stressing the tight connection between kings and gods, this tale of separation between the human and divine spheres was considered crucial in the later definition of the complete, although tragic, figure of Gilgameš as man and king.

In GBH this peculiar perspective on heroism seems to characterize especially the final part of the tale with even mocking tones. In this part, images evoke an urban setting for the killing of the bull.

The Bull reared up so high, so high that it overbalanced. As if it were of clay it fell(?), it spread itself out like the harvested crop. The king took his knife in his hand, just as if he were a master chef. He hit Inana with a haunch, he made her flee away like a pigeon, and demolished those ramparts. Standing by(?) the Bull's head, the king wept bitter tears: 'Just as I can destroy you, so shall I do the same to her(?)' (transl. by ETCESL: Me-Turan D: 47–52)

A different interpretation for the last part is provided by Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi (1993: 126): "Puisque il m'a (tu m'as) démolì de cette façon, je vais faire de même." As revealed by the two diverging translations, ambiguity is probably not dissipated by the conclusion. And we suppose that the play with the pronominal elements, surely not an unknown one in Sumerian literature,<sup>20</sup> is intentional.

The king is finally described as "cook" (*muḫaldim*), and his acts are reminiscent of a scene of slaughtering and distribution of a sacrificial victim.<sup>21</sup>

As he spoke, he consigned its hide to the streets, he consigned its intestines to the broad square, and the widows' sons of his city each took their share of its meat in baskets. He consigned its carcass to the knacker's, and turned its two horns into flasks for pouring fine oil to Inana in E-ana.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Falkowitz 1984: 6–7.

<sup>21</sup> The problematic term *é-lá*, which designates the building erected by Gilgameš in the first part of the tale (cf. also nos. 9 and 10, above), might also be connected with this context. However, the reading *é-lá* in an administrative text (which records distributions of meat to various sanctuaries) is not the only possible reading (see the hypothesis put forward by Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi 1993: 109, commenting upon the text edited by Heimerdinger 1976, who read instead *lil-lá*). For the general theme of sacrifice, and further bibliography, bearing on the perspective of anthropology and history of religions, see for example: Burkert 1972, Grottanelli & Parise 1988, Quaegebeur 1993. More specifically, see also Milano 1998 and Lafont 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Me-Turan D: 53–58. A possible reference to a ritual context was indicated by Milano 1988: 81, n. 30, for the Akkadian version of the tale: "[...] lo stesso trattamento tocca al Toro celeste nel poema di Gilgameš: trattenuto da Enkidu per la coda, il Toro viene ucciso dall'eroe e poi sbudellato e smembrato come una vittima sacrificale (VI Tavola; ll. 135–167)". As to the distribution of the parts, the question might even be posed whether the wording of the passage refers to an usual practice or to a particular one. In other documents the use and the commercialization of the hide and the destination of the exta to divination are attested, but the present tale seems rather to underline the involvement of the whole city and the king's subjects in the process of meat consumption. The reference to the widows' sons may be connected to dispensing justice, a topic that appears in the first part of the tale, and is an act that Inana categorically prohibits Gilgameš doing in her holy *gīpar* (cf. n. 10, above).

The starting point of the tale seems to go back to an unclear division of roles in the exercise of power (including administration of justice, temple and divine prerogatives, and perhaps also economic management), which brings about the opposition between the king and Inana, with potentially extremely dangerous consequences, like the disruption of the cosmic order. On the other hand, the opposition and fight between the human hero and the celestial champion is described in a way that involves an ambiguous role of killer and victim and the transfer of prerogatives and forces between the two.<sup>23</sup> The last offence to Inana, the launch of the bull's thigh, must perhaps etiologically explain the astral setting of the bull. It seems also to represent the highest point of the opposition and identification of the protagonists. It may represent at the same time a distorted offering to the deity,<sup>24</sup> and an act of violence which reverberates against the offender.<sup>25</sup> The institutional and ritual space here evoked apparently implies the possibility to view oppositions in the form typical of sacrifice: offence to the deity to whom the killed animal belongs, and offering.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps urban space has a special influence in enhancing overtones, including parody, deriving from the combination of various motives and images.

On the other hand, the theme of the interconnection between terrestrial and heavenly phenomena<sup>27</sup> appears central or relevant in other compositions (which might reveal some connection with our text), thus suggesting a further reshaping of the problem. We may take into consideration what J. Cooper observed on the tale of

<sup>23</sup> See also the play on symmetry and reverberating actions in *Gudam*: "Brot hast du nicht gegessen, dein (eigenes) Fleisch hast du gegessen, [...] Bier hast du nicht getrunken, dein (eigenes) Blut hast du getrunken!" Römer 1991.

<sup>24</sup> This might be suggested also by the fact that the haunch is a peculiarly appreciated part in the distribution of the meat cuts and of the sacrificial cuts (see for general reference Zaccagnini 1988: 87–93). For an interpretation pointing out the erotic aspects of relationships, see Leick 1994: 262–269.

<sup>25</sup> On the relationship between victim and slaughterer in sacrifice extensive anthropological and historical literature exists. See for example Burkert 1998: 24: "sacrificante e vittima sono in rapporto l'uno con l'altro fino a diventare quasi una cosa sola." Burkert also singles out myths where an animal dies instead of a human being. See also Lafont 1999: 75–76, who discusses the role of sacrifice of the donkey in the Amorite milieu, particularly in treaty ceremonies. He recognizes "une dialectique sang de la victime / sang des contractants" and the nature of "un rituel de substitution", which imposes the choice of a victim, an animal associated with kingship. See also the extremely interesting considerations developed by Watanabe 2002: 78, referring in particular to royal hunt, where the king appears "to occupy the place of conjunction between the civilised and the wild domains" (p. 87).

<sup>26</sup> And perhaps also the destruction of life for guaranteeing its renovation. The investigation of the practice of sacrifice and the attempt at finding its origin might also perhaps be the subject of another text, the story of *Lugalbanda* in the mountain cave, see particularly ll. 361–390. Note also that wrestling and sacrifice are depicted in the Ur-Nammu stela (see Canby 2001) celebrating building, cultic and ceremonial activities carried out by the king.

<sup>27</sup> For this interpretation cf. R. Borger 1972/1975. For the astral role of the bull recorded in Sumerian texts see also van Dijk 1998: 27. For an overview of Sumerian references to star representations, see Horowitz 1998: 166–168, and Brown 2000: 245–250.

*Inana and Shukaletuda*: “The composition is about many things, including, as Volk also recognizes, the movements of the planet Venus. Inana leaves her sanctuaries and returns to them because Venus disappears and reappears. [...]. The same path is mentioned in *Inana and Ebiḫ*, and that text, too, is probably about the phases of Venus, as is surely *Inana’s Descent*.”<sup>28</sup> Ambivalence and overlapping of levels of meaning referring to the spheres of astral observation and cult have been noted, e.g., by J. Krecher for a *balbale* composition addressed to Suen, where images taken from rural life (cows, bulls, etc.) may represent, at the same time, in a mutually allusive way, celestial bodies and cultic practices.<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, if we attempt to find a context for GBH, we must admit that, notwithstanding the imperfect comprehension of the text we have at the moment, it seems to be, as it is often the case in literary texts, “about many things”. Metaphor appears certainly as a powerful tool for bridging the gap between different spheres of culture and experience and for discovering their possible connections.<sup>30</sup> It may also have a part in the superimposition of different tones. Enlarging the perspective, moreover, we can recognize that metaphor may also function as tool for pointing out correspondences between different motives and texts. We should also consider the study of images as a creative tool in generating intertextuality.

<sup>28</sup> Cooper 2001: 143, and see also the methodological observations with which the article concludes. Note also that Gudea describes the correspondence between the plans in heaven and on earth in his cylinder A (ll. 68–101), as underlined by Brown 2000: 247. See also the myth *Inanna raubt den ‘grossen Himmel’*, where the goddess seems to be connected, and somehow held responsible, for the shortening of daylight after the autumn equinox (Brown & Zólyomi 2001: 154–155). Another extremely interesting text in this respect is *Lugalbanda* in the mountain cave, where the light of Venus (like that of the sun and of the moon) is seen by the hero through the narrow opening of the cave where he is lying ill, a situation that might suggest a practice of astral observation.

<sup>29</sup> See for quotation, bibliographic reference and comments Black 1998: 11–12. For another text related to Inana and explainable through an astral interpretation see Alster 2004: 36.

<sup>30</sup> And, therefore, also to show the risks deriving from the lack of distinctions? For an analysis of the modes in which themes and images evoke each other within the same text and for the function of metaphor in creating intertextual relations, and thus opening other textual expansions, see Black 1998: 159–167 and 118–124. On the function of metaphors in Gilgames’ tales see also, most recently, Sallaberger 2008: 109–111, who also offers interesting insights on the function of other formal structures such as repetition and direct speech (Sallaberger 2008: 104–109).

