

A Suitable Match: Eve, Enkidu, and the Boundaries of Humanity in the Eden Narrative and the Epic of Gilgamesh

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■ Abstract

Juxtaposing the shared emphasis on the basic human need for companionship in the Eden Narrative and the Epic of Gilgamesh provides new insight, both into how the texts respectively present companionship and into the issues of anthropology and gender that have previously distracted readers from this theme. Focus on parallels between Eve and Shamhat, who initiates Enkidu into human civilization, has obscured Eve's resonance with Enkidu, created to be a match for Gilgamesh, as Eve was for Adam. The match created for the semidivine Gilgamesh is the male, semibestial Enkidu; however, Adam's "helper" is a female, explicitly contrasted with the animals, and "bone of [his] bones and flesh of [his] flesh." Though the heroes of the epic constantly struggle at the boundaries of human existence, the Eden Narrative depicts humans, male and female, together created distinct from god and animal, though likewise compelled to acknowledge their limitations.

■ Keywords

Genesis 2–3, Epic of Gilgamesh, anthropology, gender, wisdom, intertextuality

■ Introduction

Comparing texts, whether to identify common forms, shared genres, or ancient Near Eastern parallels, gives sight that creates blindness. Focusing attention on the similarities that enable comparison forces other textual features into peripheral obscurity. Once those similarities have produced a shared interpretive framework,

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whether a form, genre, or mythological structure, then the differences may be examined, though only in relation to the ordering framework, lest the comparison revert back into a chaos of idiosyncrasies. Having slayed the chaos-dragon, comparative frameworks are naturally tenacious, passed down, often uncritically, across generations of interpreters. This article considers not merely the structural question of what those frameworks may be or the intertextual question of how they facilitate the discovery of meaning between texts, but the meta-structural and even meta-intertextual (if such a thing were possible) questions of how certain frameworks become dominant, blinding interpreters to the insight offered by alternative comparative perspectives.¹

The deep ruts that intertextual comparisons wear into the interpretive landscape are evident in the comparison of the Eden Narrative and the Epic of Gilgamesh, as they both engage the perennial question, what does it mean to be human?² Focus on similarities between the woman (later named Eve [Gen 3:20]) and the prostitute, Shamhat,³ who initiates Enkidu into human civilization through a sexual awakening, has obscured an alternative comparative framework in which Eve resonates with Enkidu himself, created to be a match for Gilgamesh, as Eve was for the man (who receives the name Adam).⁴ Though the author(s) of the Eden Narrative may have been aware of and intentionally responding to the epic's anthropology if not the

¹ Given that "intertextuality," a literary theory initiated by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, claims that all texts and even all of life consists of words already said, "meta-intertextuality" would be impossible. However, this theory is often applied as a method for textual comparison, which would invite such meta-analysis. The argument made here examines the ways intertextuality is employed as a method by which to compare texts and draw new meaning from them, rather than only as a theory about human understanding, given that the theory is applied in this way both in biblical studies and literary studies more broadly (for discussion, see John Barton, "Déjà lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?," in *Reading Job Intertextually* [ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes; LHBOTS 574; New York: T&T Clark, 2013] 1–16; Will Kynes, "Intertextuality: Method and Theory in Job and Psalm 119," in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of Professor John Barton* [ed. Katharine J. Dell and Paul M. Joyce; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013] 201–13).

² See William L. Moran, "The Epic of Gilgamesh: A Document of Ancient Humanism," *The Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies Bulletin* 22 (1991) 15–22. Due to the significance of these texts for addressing this vital question, the literature on each individually, as well as the comparison between them, is voluminous. I have endeavored to engage with relevant studies from a broad range of perspectives, but space limitations have restricted how deeply I could do so.

³ For "Shamhat" as a personal name, though with an "obvious allusion" to *šamḫatu*, the common noun for prostitute, see Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 1:148.

⁴ Against Phyllis Trible's view that the initial human in Eden only becomes male when the female is created, see, e.g., S. S. Lanser, "Feminist Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2–3," *Semeia* 41 (1988) 67–84, at 69–72; David J. A. Clines, "What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1–3," in *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 25–48, at 40–41; John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1–11* (LHBOTS 592; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013) 33; cf. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 80. The first unambiguous appearance of the name "Adam" appears at Gen 4:25.

epic itself,⁵ this article is focused on the underlying hermeneutical issues that face readers of these texts. Only when readers have compared texts, noticing similarities and differences between them, may the historical likelihood that a comparative framework represents the author's intention be analyzed. Even if not intended by the author, however, identification of the texts' relative presentation of shared issues still has interpretive value, as decades of comparative studies have demonstrated.⁶ Thus, focusing on the "suitable match" created within each text will raise the question of how a suitable match is created between the texts, which underscores the interpretive insights offered by alternative comparative frameworks.

In Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural approach to myth, for example, the creation of textual frameworks comes to the forefront. He equates mythic elements with variables in an equation.⁷ Which elements make it into the equation, however, will determine the solution it provides. Lévi-Strauss, as Aryeh Amihay argues, insists that myth be understood as "relational rather than symbolic," with attention focused on elements in combination rather than in isolation.⁸ That relational meaning emerges not merely within a text but also between texts.

Because no two texts are the same, comparison inevitably reveals contrast. Inordinate contrast may invalidate the comparison, but, amid sufficient similarity, those contrasts may illuminate significant features of textual meaning. Amihay demonstrates this phenomenon through comparing what he terms Lévi-Strauss's "inversion principle" with Yair Zakovitch's conception of "mirror narratives." The inversion principle holds that elements omitted from myths in later versions will reappear in those versions with an inverted function, like images reflected upside down in a camera obscura.⁹ The European Cinderella tale, for example, centers on a pretty female with a double family (through her father's remarriage) who is luxuriously clothed with supernatural help, but the North American Zuni story of the Ash Boy describes an ugly orphaned boy who is supernaturally stripped of his

⁵ For the likelihood that the authors of Genesis, regardless of one's historical reconstruction, were familiar with oral if not written versions of the story of Gilgamesh, see Esther J. Hamori, "Echoes of Gilgamesh in the Jacob Story," *JBL* 130 (2011) 625–42, at 639–41. See also Friedhelm Hartenstein, "'Und weit war seine Einsicht' (Gilgamesch I,202). Menschwerdung im Gilgamesch-Epos und in der Paradieserzählung Genesis 2-3," in *Essen und Trinken in der Bibel. Ein literarisches Festmahl für Rainer Kessler zur 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Michaela Geiger, Christl M. Maier, and Uta Schmidt; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 2009) 101–15, at 103–4. For Gen 1–11 similarly demonstrating knowledge of and intentionally creating a "counter-story" to *Enuma elish*, see Eckart Frahm, "Counter-texts, Commentaries, and Adaptations: Politically Motivated Responses to the Babylonian Epic of Creation in Mesopotamia, the Biblical World, and Elsewhere," *Orient* 45 (2010) 3–33, at 14–17.

⁶ See, e.g., nn. 24 and 27 below.

⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf; New York: Basic Books, 1963) 228.

⁸ Aryeh Amihay, "Biblical Myths and the Inversion Principle: A Neostructuralist Approach," *JBL* 137 (2018) 555–79, at 559–60; see Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 210–11.

⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology: Volume 2* (trans. Monique Layton; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 259–60; cf. idem, *Structural Anthropology*, 206–31.

ugliness.¹⁰ The parallels between the two tales are evident, even though multiple elements, including the sex, familial status, and appearance of the protagonists are inverted. For Lévi-Strauss, these links in stories from distant and disparate cultures are evidence of subconscious inherent conceptual structures.

In Zakovitch’s mirror narratives, however, biblical authors draw parallels intentionally between their narratives and earlier ones such that they are “reflected back—somewhat altered—from a multitude of mirrors.”¹¹ For example, he argues that the flood narrative begins with the “sons of God” initiating relations with the “daughters of men” and ends with a drunken incestuous sexual encounter between a son and his father, while the story of Sodom and Gomorrah starts with men pursuing intercourse with angels and ends with drunken incest between two daughters and their father. In between, both stories recount divine punitive destruction; the first by universal flood, the second by local fire. Together they disparage nations that surround Israel (Gen 9:25–7; cf. Deut 23:3–4) and warn of the perils of drunkenness (cf. e.g., Prov 23:30–35).¹² Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch employ the parallel to argue that Ham had intercourse with his father, though adding a third line (in italics) to the “perfectly oppositional symmetry” that they note between the stories could indicate the opposite, which underscores the role that framework creation plays in textual comparison:

	Flood	Sodom
Before	sons of God → daughters of men (males → females) consummated	humans → angels (males → males) unconsummated
After	father → son (male → male) unconsummated	daughters → father (females → male) consummated

Though Amihay attempts to distinguish between subconsciously inverted myths and intentionally mirrored narratives, arguing that some potential cases of intentional adaptation, like the flood and Sodom parallel just discussed, are better explained by the inversion principle, he acknowledges an inevitable overlap between them.¹³ Where does subconsciousness end and consciousness begin? Identifying either type of textual interaction requires readers to create shared frameworks

¹⁰ Ibid., 226. See Amihay, “Biblical Myths,” 560.

¹¹ Yair Zakovitch, “Inner-Biblical Interpretation,” in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods* (ed. Ronald S. Hendel; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 92–118, at 95. See also idem, *Through the Looking Glass: Mirror Narratives in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995) (Hebrew); Amihay, “Biblical Myths,” 560–61.

¹² Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch, *From Gods to God: How the Bible Debunked, Suppressed, or Changed Ancient Myths and Legends* (trans. Valerie Zakovitch; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012) 131–37.

¹³ Amihay, “Biblical Myths,” 579; cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (Massey Lectures 1977; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. New York: Schocken, 1995) 38.

through which to perform intertextual comparison. Thus, regardless of whether one is interested in diachronic (sequential and author-oriented) or synchronic (simultaneous and reader-oriented) intertextual analysis,¹⁴ interpreters must reckon with the prior hermeneutical step of creating such frameworks without which comparison or allusion identification would be impossible.¹⁵ And, significantly for the alternative framework proposed below, the arguments for both inversions and mirror narratives rely on noting contrast in the midst of similarity. Rather than attempting to sweep these contrasts under the rug, these approaches focus attention on them as hermeneutically significant, given the other significant parallels between the texts.

Recent interpretation supports the likelihood that the similarity between the Eden Narrative and the Epic of Gilgamesh highlights significant dissimilarities between them. First, Amihay argues that the biblical flood story later in Genesis (chs. 6–9) is a subconscious inversion of the close parallel in the Epic of Gilgamesh.¹⁶ Rather than being rewarded with immortality after the flood as Utnapishtim is, Noah descends into drunken slumber, similar to that which proves to Gilgamesh his mortality. And yet, the element of immortality resurfaces from the myth in Enoch, who is closely associated with Noah and is the only figure not said to have died in the genealogy in Gen 5 (v. 24). Second, Esther Hamori has argued that later in Genesis another text also traditionally attributed to J builds up a number of parallels between the Epic of Gilgamesh and the story of Jacob and Esau. It links Esau, the hairy hunter, with Enkidu, the wild man, but then upends the reader's expectations by replacing Esau with God when Jacob, the protagonist, should meet his wild double in a wrestling match (Gen 32; cf. Gilgamesh II 100–15).¹⁷ The author, she argues, does this “so that the precise echoes of the story of Gilgamesh should throw emphasis on the ideologically essential point where he diverges from it.”¹⁸ While Hamori argues that the epic is intentionally subverted elsewhere in Genesis, Abraham Winitzer provides an example of the Eden Narrative intentionally inverting another ancient Near Eastern myth. Citing Lévi-Strauss's inversion principle to explain a case of intentional borrowing, he argues that repeated wordplays from Etana in the Eden Narrative demonstrate that it “builds on the Mesopotamian story,” but, by emphasizing human choice rather than inevitable natural processes, “does so in ways that in the end must be deemed no less revolutionary than evolutionary.”¹⁹

¹⁴ For the distinctions between these approaches, see Kynes, “Intertextuality,” 202.

¹⁵ Thus, the argument made here does not take a side regarding the debate over whether intertextuality may legitimately be applied to the analysis of specific allusions between texts.

¹⁶ Amihay, “Biblical Myths,” 565–69.

¹⁷ In this article, I focus on the Standard Version of the epic. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from George's translation of that version (see n. 3 above). The Old Babylonian version of the epic differs at points in its aim and assumptions, and, where relevant, I acknowledge those differences (see, e.g., nn. 50, 102 below), but I leave a thorough analysis of the relationship between the versions to others.

¹⁸ Hamori, “Echoes of Gilgamesh,” 641.

¹⁹ Abraham Winitzer, “Etana in Eden: New Light on the Mesopotamian and Biblical Tales in

Though they address authorial intention differently, in these studies, texts elsewhere in Genesis are placed in comparative frameworks with Gilgamesh, and the Eden Narrative is compared to another ancient Near Eastern myth, and in each case a series of similarities underscore significant contrasts between the texts.

Though authorial dependence, subconscious influence, or likely some combination of both may be involved in the case described below, my concern is not to determine the type of influence between the texts. Instead, I would like to take the relational interpretation of myth a step further to consider the multiple ways in which, not merely ancient authors, but also modern interpreters combine elements as they compare mythic narratives, creating the structures through which these comparisons operate. Thus, my argument is more meta-structural than structural. For example, taking an explicitly structuralist approach, David Jobling argues that most readers interpret the Eden Narrative according to a “creation and fall” narrative model, but he suggests that this is in tension with a model of “a man to till the earth,” which also could explain the tale (Gen 2:15).²⁰ Each of these models would inspire comparisons between the Eden narrative and different ancient Near Eastern texts, such as Adapa, in which a human loses a chance at immortality, for the former, and Atrahasis, in which humans are created to do agricultural labor, for the latter. Jobling quotes Lévi-Strauss’s view that as the Hebrew Bible “puts to use mythic materials,” it “borrows them with a different goal in mind from their original one,” in which the redactors “have deformed them in interpreting them.”²¹ Even when they are not taking an explicitly structuralist approach, interpreters, such as Zakovitch in his “inner-biblical interpretation,” still create common narrative structures through which to compare texts. This intertextual comparison, the comparative framework through which similarities between the texts are seen, strongly influences which conclusions the hermeneutical methods applied to the comparison will be able to provide and can hide alternative interpretations from consideration.

■ The Eve-Shamhat Framework

Morris Jastrow laid out the dominant comparative framework for Gilgamesh and Genesis, which I will call the Eve-Shamhat framework, as far back as 1899.²² He lists a number of similarities between the Enkidu-Shamhat episode and the Eden Narrative, which include the following. 1) Enkidu and Adam are both created from earth and are said to return to the earth at death. 2) Enkidu recognizes Shamhat as a companion, as Adam does Eve. 3) Shamhat leads Enkidu away from affiliation

Their Semitic Context,” *JAOS* 133 (2013) 441–65, at 464–65.

²⁰ David Jobling, “Myth and Its Limits in Genesis 2.4b–3.24,” in idem, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analysis in the Hebrew Bible* (2 vols.; JSOTSup 39; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) 2:17–42.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18; citing Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Reponse à quelques questions,” *Esprit* 31 (1963) 628–53, at 631–32.

²² Morris Jastrow, “Adam and Eve in Babylonian Literature,” *AJSL* 15 (1899) 193–214, at 211–12. He refers to Enkidu as “Eabani” and Shamhat as “Ukhat.”

with animals through sexual intercourse; “veiled expressions” are used to relate the “same story” for Eve’s relationship with Adam. 4) The two couples are naked and “unabashed.” 5) The Hunter and Shamhat direct Enkidu to “a higher path of existence”; Eve and the serpent do the same for Adam. 6) Enkidu curses Shamhat and the Hunter for bringing death upon him, and eventual death is the punishment Adam and Eve receive for achieving “higher dignity.” 7) The Hunter tempts Enkidu with Shamhat; the serpent similarly “beguiles Eve,” who then “makes the advances to Adam.” Both women “conquer the man by arousing his sexual passion or instinct.” 8) Shamhat claims Enkidu becomes “like a god”; the serpent, whose role becomes confused with Eve’s, makes a similar promise.²³

Though some of its details have been forgotten or disputed, subsequent scholarship indicates how durable this interpretive tradition has become. It is widespread, frequently appearing in some form in commentaries on Genesis.²⁴ It is entrenched enough that John Bailey, while disputing Jastrow’s conclusions about the sexual nature of “the Fall,” still follows his framework, even acknowledging that an earlier version of the tradition may have more closely corresponded to it.²⁵ It is also now assumed, such that its scholarly origins are either unknown or deemed unworthy of mention, and alternative frameworks are rarely considered.²⁶ Exactly a century later, Ronald Veenker repeats the basic details of Jastrow’s comparison without mentioning him. His summary demonstrates how little the tradition has progressed in that time:

When we first encounter Enkidu, like Adam, he is in the company of beasts having as yet no knowledge of a woman. Both Adam and Enkidu experience the ascent of knowledge through seduction and *sexual* knowing. The experience results in wisdom, but it is bought at a great price. . . . Enkidu’s and Adam’s lives of innocence are lost to the past and there lies ahead for

²³ Jastrow (“Adam and Eve”) argues that Shamhat’s words (I 207) should be read in the future tense as a promise, a view that is no longer held (e.g., George, *Gilgamesh*, 1:551). Tense aside, interpreters continue to note this connection. See, e.g., Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. John Scullion; London: SPCK, 1984) 248.

²⁴ E.g., Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 204, 226, 235, 240, 247–48, 270; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (2nd ed.; AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) 26–27; J. Alberto Soggin, *Das Buch Genesis* (trans. Thomas Frauenlob; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997) 75–76; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1910) 91. Hermann Gunkel, however, rejects Jastrow’s reading (*Genesis* [trans. Mark E. Biddle; Mercer Library of Biblical Studies; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997] 38).

²⁵ John A. Bailey, “Initiation and the Primal Woman in *Gilgamesh* and Genesis 2–3,” *JBL* 89 (1970) 137–50, at 147–48.

²⁶ It is a testament to the widespread influence of the Eve-Shamhat framework in biblical scholarship that the closest parallel to the Eve-Enkidu framework described below that I have found appears in a popular treatment by someone outside the guild: Stephen Greenblatt in *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve* (New York: Norton, 2017). Though Greenblatt notices several of the connections below, the genre of his work prevents him from exploring them in depth. Addressing a similar audience, Mark Jarman also notes the similarity between Enkidu and Eve as figures created to provide companionship but does not explore the link further (Mark Jarman, “When the Light Came On: The Epic *Gilgamesh*,” *Hudson Review* 58 [2005] 329–34, at 330).

the both of them a painful and difficult road as each leaves the simplicity of nature for the ambiguous complexities of human culture.²⁷

■ The Eve-Enkidu Framework

The shared narrative that unites these stories could be told another way, however. In this version, which I will call the Eve-Enkidu framework, Adam is like Gilgamesh, not Enkidu, who instead shares his role with Eve. This framework follows the broad pattern of inversion described above. The two texts follow a similar narrative progression, but several contrasts in the Eden Narrative, most significantly the inversion of the match's gender, offer a distinct perspective on anthropology and gender.

A. Uniqueness

The first commonality between the texts is the ontologically unique position of their protagonists. King Gilgamesh, the two-thirds divine product of a human-divine union (I 48) is not physically alone (this is the problem!), as Adam is, but he is ontologically unique, between gods and mortals without a suitable match, or, as the text says, an "equal" (I 65). Thomas Van Nortwick claims Gilgamesh is, therefore, "an isolated, lonely man."²⁸ Though the text does not make Gilgamesh's subjective state explicit, we can infer his loneliness from the pleasure he associates with a potential match in his dreams predicting the match's arrival (I 246–97).²⁹ Without a match, Gilgamesh tyrannically oppresses his subjects, who cry out to the gods. In Genesis, YHWH observes that the man is alone and declares it "not good" (2:18).³⁰ Like the inhabitants of Uruk, the animals, which YHWH first offers as a potential match, fall short.

²⁷ Ronald A. Veenker, "Forbidden Fruit: Ancient Near Eastern Sexual Metaphors," *HUCA* 70 (1999) 57–73, at 73; italics in original. See also, e.g., Robert Gordis, "The Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Old Testament and the Qumran Scrolls," *JBL* 76 (1957) 123–38, at 135; S. G. F. Brandon, "The Origin of Death in Some Ancient Near Eastern Religions," *RelS* 1 (1966) 217–28, at 226; Herbert Chanan Brichto, *The Names of God: Poetic Readings in Biblical Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 86–94; Ronald A. Simkins, "Gender Construction in the Yahwist Creation Myth," in *Genesis* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 2/1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998) 32–52, at 48; Hartenstein, "Menschwerdung im Gilgamesch-Epos," 101–15; Arthur George and Elena George, *The Mythology of Eden* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) 234–37; Mark S. Smith, *The Genesis of Good and Evil: The Fall(out) and Original Sin in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018) 39.

²⁸ Thomas Van Nortwick, "The Wild Man: The Epic of Gilgamesh," in *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled: The Second Self and the Hero's Journey in Ancient Epic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 8–38, at 12–13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12–13

³⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical translations are from the NRSV. Whether being "alone" also implies that the man is "lonely" or simply insufficient to his charge is also a matter of debate. See Karalina Matskevich, *Construction of Gender and Identity in Genesis: The Subject and the Other* (LHBOTS 647; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019) 13.

B. A Match

Both Gilgamesh and the man receive, therefore, a divinely created match. In response to the cries of the citizens of Uruk, the gods create Enkidu for Gilgamesh to “be equal to the storm of his heart” (I 97).³¹ In Gilgamesh’s dreams about his match (I 244–98), Enkidu is described as Gilgamesh’s “equal” and a “mighty companion,” who will be “the saviour of (his) friend” (I 266, 268, 290–91), and whom Gilgamesh will love “like a wife” (I 271, 289). This leaves Gilgamesh longing for “a friend, a counselor” (I 296–97). Enkidu, it appears, is designed to be Gilgamesh’s “double” or “second self.”³² Companionship is a dominant theme in the epic, with the word “friend” (*ibru*) repeated throughout.³³ A broken section of the tablet (V 72–77) even appears to include an encomium to friendship similar to Eccl 4:10–12, including the same image of a “three-ply rope.” Thus, Georges Dossin suggests a more appropriate title for the epic would be “Histoire tragique d’une amitié” (A Tragic Story of a Friendship).³⁴

This focus on friendship in the epic, one of the most popular texts in the ancient Near East, would likely bring it to mind for the readers, if not the authors, of Genesis when that text raises the same theme. There, YHWH also decides to provide the man a companion, described as an עזר כנגדו (2:18, 20). However this phrase is translated, the context makes clear that this figure is suitable for the man in a way that the animals cannot be. Corresponding to Gilgamesh and Enkidu’s “equal” status, Carol Meyers claims the prepositional phrase כנגדו indicates a “nonhierarchical relationship” between the two, as, she proposes, the woman as “helper” (עזר) is “‘opposite,’ or ‘corresponding to,’ or ‘parallel with,’ or ‘on a par with’” the man.³⁵ The “help” she offers is not merely in procreation but in true companionship,³⁶ like

³¹ Filling a lacuna in the standard text, George reads a fragment from an exercise tablet in Nippur as the goddess Aururu’s charge: “[Let her create] his [equal]” (George, *Gilgamesh*, 1:290–91). Following George, italics indicate uncertainty in translation.

³² John Maier, “Gilgamesh: Anonymous Tradition and Authorial Value,” *Neohelicon* 14 (1987) 83–95, at 88; Van Nortwick, “Wild Man,” 8–38.

³³ See I 214, 268, 291, 296–97; II 186, 189, 194, 199, 241; III 5, 8, 15, 219, 224, 230; IV 17–18, 21, 27–28, 30, 50–51, 54, 95–96, 99, 108–9, 137–38, 141, 155, 178–79, 182, 212, 215, 218, 233, 237, 243; V 66, 96, 100, 102, 157, 182, 241, 257, 259, 262, 293; VI 130, 132, 183; VII 1, 30, 67, 69, 71, 84, 88, 95–96, 139, 164–65, 176, 252–53, 263, 266; VIII 2, 44, 50–51, 59, 68–70, 97–102, 105–6, 108, 110, 112–15, 117–18, 120–22, 124, 126, 130–32, 138, 142, 147, 151, 156, 161, 166–67, 173–74, 183, 188, 199, 203; IX 1; X 30, 53–56, 63, 65, 68–69, 126–27, 132–33, 140, 142, 145–46, 226–27, 232–33, 240, 242, 245–46; XII 90, 92, 96.

³⁴ Georges Dossin, “Enkidou dans l’Épopée de Gilgames,” *Bulletin de la classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques* 42 (1956) 580–93, at 582.

³⁵ Carol L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 73; similarly, Speiser, *Genesis*, 17; Tribble, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 90.

³⁶ Pace Clines, “What Does Eve Do?” 27–37; see Tribble, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 89–90; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 232; Helen Schüngel-Straumann, “On the Creation of Man and Woman in Genesis 1–3: The History and Reception of the Texts Reconsidered,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993) 53–76, at 66; Day, *Creation to Babel*, 34.

that which Enkidu provides Gilgamesh.³⁷ Indeed, the comparison with Enkidu supports other interpretations of the term עֹזֵר in support of gender equality. Lyn Bechtel claims, “An ‘*ēzer* is an individual or group who delivers from a predicament of danger or need.”³⁸ This corresponds with the description of Gilgamesh’s match as “the saviour of (his) friend” (I 268, 291). Similarly, David Freedman argues עֹזֵר כְּגִבּוֹר should be translated “a power equal to him.”³⁹ In Enkidu, the gods provide Gilgamesh a match who is “*equal to the storm of his heart*” to “rival” him (I 97–98), whose comparable power is requested by the inhabitants of Uruk (I 82), predicted throughout Gilgamesh’s dreams (I 249–50, 263–64, 268–70, 291–93), and demonstrated in the wrestling match they have on meeting (II 111–15). Indeed, in tablet III,

Gilgamesh emphasizes the hero’s equality with Enkidu in every way, using not only the vocabulary of equal status between male citizens that is seen in the laws (*tappā’u* [*tappū*]) but also the more abstract terminology of equality that is represented by the term *mehru*—a term whose shades of meaning encompass geometric congruence, replication and copying, and counterparts or rivals.⁴⁰

And yet, Van Nortwick argues, though designed to be Gilgamesh’s “second self,” Enkidu “embodies qualities not identical with but complementary to those of the hero, so that the two may be seen as adding up to a third, richer entity.”⁴¹ Meyers similarly claims that the Edenic couple “complement each other.”⁴² Both matches

³⁷ Demonstrating the interpretive influence of the Eve-Shamhat framework, Stephen Mitchell also mentions the parallel between the matches, but, rather than associating Enkidu with Eve, he only connects Enkidu to Adam further, since both find a match (*Gilgamesh* [New York: Free Press, 2004] 10, 15, 17). This overlooks that Enkidu was created to be a match rather than to find one. Hartenstein similarly notes that Enkidu was created to be a corresponding companion, but then, instead of noting that the same is true of Eve, claims that Adam similarly finds fulfillment in the woman (“Menschwerdung im Gilgamesch-Epos,” 114).

³⁸ L. M. Bechtel, “Genesis 2.4B–3.24: A Myth about Human Maturation,” *JSOT* 20 (1995) 3–26, at 15.

³⁹ R. David Freedman, “Woman, a Power Equal to Man: Translation of Woman as a ‘Fit Helpmate’ for Man Is Questioned,” *BAR* 9 (1983) 56–58. Ziony Zevit employs the comparison with Gilgamesh to dispute this interpretation, claiming that, since a male is chosen to match Gilgamesh’s power in the epic and a female to pacify the impetuous goddess Ishata in an Old Babylonian hymn, the woman in Genesis, as a different gender, could not be a “powerful counterpart” to Adam (*What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden* [Yale University Press, 2013] 133–34). This overlooks the “inversion principle” discussed above.

⁴⁰ Ann K. Guinan and Peter Morris, “Mesopotamia Before and After Sodom: Colleagues, Crack Troops, Comrades-in-arms,” in *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity* (ed. Ilona Zsolnay; London: Routledge, 2016) 150–75, at 163–64.

⁴¹ Van Nortwick, “Wild Man,” 14–15. Enkidu, he claims, “is, in tune with the natural world, while Gilgamesh is a man of the city; his ties are to animals, Gilgamesh’s to humans; he dresses in animal skins, Gilgamesh (we suppose) in the finery of a king.”

⁴² Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 74. See, similarly, Greenblatt, *Rise and Fall*, 61.

are equal yet not identical, expressing, as Mieke Bal says of the Edenic couple, the “tension between the *same* and the *different*.”⁴³

C. *Creation of Match*

The creation of the two matches, however, is radically different, which indicates the inversion of the epic in Genesis. Enkidu, formed from clay, is initially more animal than human: naked, covered in hair, living with gazelles, and grazing on grass (I 105–12; cf. VIII 3–6, 50–51). He must make an “ascent of knowledge” from animal to human existence.⁴⁴ After his encounter with Shamhat, the text declares, “Enkidu had defiled his body so pure,”⁴⁵ and he is separated from his animal companions, “but now he had *reason*, he [was] wide of understanding” (I 199–202). Shamhat then exclaims, “You are handsome,⁴⁶ Enkidu, you are just like a god” (I 207). Enkidu listens to Shamhat’s tales of Gilgamesh, for “his heart (now) wise was seeking a friend” (I 214). Later, she clothes Enkidu (II 34–35), and in a lacuna filled by the Pennsylvania tablet, he eats bread, drinks ale, has his hair cut, is anointed with oil, and, the text says, he “became a man” (P 109).⁴⁷ While many attribute Enkidu’s transformation to his sexual encounter with Shamhat,⁴⁸ Christian Zgoll argues, based on a comparison of this episode with Odysseus’s encounter with Nausikaa in Homer’s *Odyssey*, book six, that it is not sex that humanizes Enkidu but the fruits of culture (clothing, food, and hygiene).⁴⁹ For both, he argues, this process culminates with friendship, indicating social integration.⁵⁰ Likely, both factors contribute; Zgoll refers to the sexual encounter as a “prelude” to Enkidu’s humanization.

The depiction of Enkidu’s evolution is complex; he “is neither the ‘noble savage’ nor the subhuman beast, though he does have some of the features of

⁴³ Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 115 (italics in original).

⁴⁴ Benjamin Foster, “Gilgamesh: Sex, Love and the Ascent of Knowledge,” in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good; Guilford, CT: Four Quarters, 1987) 21–42, at 22.

⁴⁵ For discussion of the translation of this passage, see Neal H. Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death: Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Myth* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001) 27.

⁴⁶ The reading of this phrase is uncertain. It may be *damqata* (you are handsome), as George reads it here, but the reading *enqāta* (second person singular stative of *emēqu*, “to be wise”) is also frequently attested, leading to the translation, “you are wise.” For discussion, see Rainer Albertz, “‘Ihr werdet sein wie Gott.’ Gen 3, 1–7 auf dem Hintergrund des alttestamentlichen und des sumerisch-babylonischen Menschenbildes,” *WO* (1993) 89–111, at 103–4. Albertz concludes that however this phrase is translated, the context, which describes Enkidu gaining reason and entering civilization (cf. I 214), ties wisdom with being like God as in Gen 3:5.

⁴⁷ See Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982) 210. This could also be translated, “became like a man.”

⁴⁸ E.g., Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 26–27.

⁴⁹ Christian Zgoll, “From Wild Being to Human to Friend: Reflections on Anthropology in the Gilgamesh Epic and in Homer’s *Odyssey*,” *Kaskal* 9 (2012) 137–55, at 142–49.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

both.”⁵¹ Some have suggested this combination of features results from competing presentations of Enkidu in the epic’s source material,⁵² while others have argued it reflects the influence of traditions associated with either primordial humanity or the seminomadic Amorites on the outskirts of Sumerian civilization.⁵³ Rejecting the latter view, Jeffrey Tigay proposes that Enkidu is modeled on Mesopotamian descriptions of “primordial man” (e.g., *The Dispute between Cattle [or Sheep] and Grain*, 19–24), as he argues the description of Enkidu, *lullû amēlu*, should be translated (I 178; cf. I 185, 192).⁵⁴ Whatever may lie behind the text, the Standard Babylonian Epic presents the early Enkidu at the animal-human boundary, a liminal state that the potential combination of these earlier traditions would only accentuate by associating uncivilized and primordial existence with animal-like qualities. As Tigay observes, “Enkidu needed to become, not simply civilized, but first humanized.”⁵⁵

The traces of primordial humanity in the depiction of Enkidu may have lent the text to comparison with the depiction of human origins in the Eden Narrative. However, unlike the geographical, cultural, and ontological distance initially separating the semidivine king of the city of Uruk from the semibestial Enkidu’s feral origins in the distant wild, in Genesis, the woman’s creation is intimately close to the man, from his very body. Whereas Enkidu is initially identified with the animals, Eve is clearly distinguished from them, created only after they are found to be unsuitable matches. In the epic, the narrator’s description of Enkidu’s animal qualities (I 105–12) immediately precedes the hunter’s shocked response to him (I 113–21), which magnifies his unsettling “strangeness.”⁵⁶ In Genesis, immediately after the narrative description of the woman’s creation comes the man’s response, rejoicing in her similarity, her ontological unity with him, as “at last . . . bone of

⁵¹ Aage Westenholz and Ulla Koch-Westenholz, “Enkidu—the Noble Savage?,” in *Wisdom, Gods and Literature: Studies in Assyriology in Honour of W. G. Lambert* (ed. A. R. George and I. L. Finkel; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000) 437–51, at 444.

⁵² See Daniel E. Fleming and Sara J. Milstein, *The Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic: The Akkadian Huwawa Narrative* (CM 39; Leiden: Brill, 2010). They argue that two different Enkidus lie behind the Standard Version: the shepherd of the Yale tablet and the wild man of the Pennsylvania tablet. For criticism of this reconstruction, see Benjamin R. Foster, review of *The Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic: The Akkadian Huwawa Narrative*, by Daniel E. Fleming and Sara J. Milstein, *JAOS* 131 (2011) 146–48.

⁵³ For early hints at this view, see Morris Jastrow and Albert Tobias Clay, *An Old Babylonian Version of the Gilgamesh Epic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920) 25. See also, e.g., Dossin, who suggests the Epic was written to advocate for the coexistence of the urban and nomadic populations (“Enkidou,” 589, 592–93).

⁵⁴ Tigay rejects the Amorite comparison due to the close association of Enkidu with animals, which is not found in descriptions of the Amorites, and the “extensive physical changes” Enkidu’s intercourse with Shamhat causes (I 199–202) (*Gilgamesh Epic*, 200–203). George translates *lullû amēlu* “man-savage” (*Gilgamesh*, 1:450).

⁵⁵ Tigay, *Gilgamesh Epic*, 202.

⁵⁶ Keith Dickson, “Looking at the Other in ‘Gilgamesh,’” *JAOS* 127 (2007) 171–82, at 173–74.

[his] bones and flesh of [his] flesh” (2:23).⁵⁷ Not only do these words affirm that the two are “of common substances,”⁵⁸ they also use a “traditional kinship formula” to emphasize the intimacy of their social connection,⁵⁹ and thus “speak unity, solidarity, mutuality, and equality.”⁶⁰

D. *The Boundaries of Humanity*

The contrast with the epic in this framework, therefore, draws attention to the Eden Narrative’s distinctive anthropological perspective. As Hope Nash Wolff observes: “One of the oldest and simplest ways of describing man’s place in the world is to set him between animal and god; but these elements are often mixed, notoriously so in ancient Near Eastern art and literature.”⁶¹ This mixing is clearly evident in the epic. Both heroes play at the liminal boundaries of humanity.⁶² The two-thirds divine Gilgamesh is born on the human-divine boundary. By growing in wisdom, he moves further toward the divine,⁶³ though he is stopped at immortality, which the gods set aside for themselves.⁶⁴ Enkidu, the “man-beast” (cf. I 178), is created on the opposite, animal-human boundary.⁶⁵ He crosses it to “become a man” (P 109; cf. I 199–202), gaining reason and wisdom to “become like a god” (I 207). Though Neal

⁵⁷ This verse offers another possible parallel between Enkidu and Eve, once again emphasizing her equality to the man, since Enkidu is described as “in build . . . the equal of Gilgamesh, (but) shorter in stature, sturdier of bone” in the Pennsylvania tablet (OB II 80–81, 183–84).

⁵⁸ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 75. The text repeats three times that the woman is “taken” (נָקַח) from the man (vv. 21, 22, 23) (Alan Jon Hauser, “Genesis 2–3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation,” in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* [ed. D. J. A. Clines, D. M. Gunn, and A. J. Hauser; JSOTSup 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982] 20–36, at 24). Joel Baden has argued that the creation of woman from the man draws on a horticultural metaphor of taking a cutting from one plant to produce another. This only reinforces the “shared species” of the resulting organism (Joel Baden, “An Unnoted Nuance in Genesis 2:21–22,” *VT* 69 [2019] 167–72, at 170).

⁵⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 70; cf. Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12–13. See also Hauser, “Genesis 2–3,” 24; David M. Carr, “Competing Construals of Human Relations with ‘Animal’ Others in the Primeval History (Genesis 1–11),” *JBL* 140 (2021) 251–69, at 257.

⁶⁰ Tribble, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 99.

⁶¹ Hope Nash Wolff, “Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Heroic Life,” *JAOS* 89 (1969) 392–98, at 394.

⁶² Sara Mandell, “Liminality, Altered States, and the Gilgamesh Epic,” in *Gilgamesh: A Reader* (ed. John Maier; Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1997) 122–30; Susan Ackerman, *When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 106–8.

⁶³ “Wisdom” is associated with the gods, when Anu, Enlil, and Ea are said to have broadened Gilgamesh’s wisdom even before Enkidu meets him (I 242). However, his wisdom subsequently increases, because the epic opens by praising Gilgamesh, who “[learn] the totality of wisdom about everything,” including secrets from the antediluvian age (I 6–8), which he only gains after meeting Enkidu.

⁶⁴ See the Old Babylonian tablet of the epic reportedly from Sippar (OB VA+BM) (iii. 3–5) (George, *Gilgamesh*, 1:279).

⁶⁵ Brichto, *Names of God*, 87. Dossin, similarly, calls him “mi-homme, mi-bête” (half-man, half-beast) and emphasizes that he was “plus de la bête que de l’être humain” (more beast than human) in his original animal-like existence (“Enkidou,” 583, 588–89).

Walls considers this a hyperbolic description of how Enkidu has become “godlike in his human potential,”⁶⁶ the following narrative explores the degree to which he has gained superhuman god-like status, as he, with Gilgamesh, tests the limits of his mortality in combat with semidivine creatures. Eventually, though, divine capital punishment bars him from immortality. Gilgamesh, who describes Enkidu with animal imagery again at his death (VIII 49), responds to his companion’s demise by simultaneously moving toward both boundaries of humanity, as he attempts “to become what Enkidu was before he was civilized,”⁶⁷ donning “the skin of a lion and . . . roaming the [wild]” (VII 147), while searching for immortality. The scorpion-beings (IX 48–51) and Siduri (X 5–9) describe him after his journeys as a mixture of animal, human, and god.⁶⁸ The epic provides “a parallel case of animal-man and man-god existing side by side; moreover, the man-god [i.e., Gilgamesh] is an animal, and the circle is nearly complete.”⁶⁹

In contrast, many interpreters have noticed the emphasis on “the enforcement of distinct limits upon the human race” both in the Eden Narrative and throughout Gen 1–11, where boundary transgressions are repeatedly condemned (e.g., Gen 6:1–4; 11:1–9).⁷⁰ Most, however, focus exclusively on the divine-human boundary where Eden and the epic are more similar. Tryggve Mettinger, for example, claims that a comparison with the epic (and the Adapa myth) shows that Gen 2–3 “shares the common ancient Near Eastern notion of wisdom and immortality as marking out the ontological boundary between gods and humans.”⁷¹ Though humans may become like god through gaining wisdom, eternal life, “the ultimate divide between gods and humans,” is reserved for the gods.⁷²

Defining humanity, however, also requires distinguishing humans from animals.⁷³ Here, the Eve-Shamhat framework has obscured the Eden Narrative’s distinctive

⁶⁶ Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 28.

⁶⁷ Maier, “Gilgamesh,” 92.

⁶⁸ Dickson, “Looking at the Other,” 176.

⁶⁹ Wolff, “Gilgamesh,” 394. Further, Walls notes how “divine-human, divine-animal, and human-animal engagements” contribute to the epic’s construction of a “poetics of desire” (*Desire, Discord and Death*, 48).

⁷⁰ Paul D. Hanson, “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 (1977) 195–233, at 214; see also Robert A. Oden, “Divine Aspirations in Atrahasis and in Genesis 1–11,” *ZAW* 93 (1981) 197–216, at 215–16; Gale A. Yee, “Gender, Class, and the Social-Scientific Study of Genesis 2–3,” *Semeia* 87 (1999) 177–92, at 182.

⁷¹ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 2–3* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007) 126; cf. 99–122; see also Day, *Creation to Babel*, 25. See, e.g., the two trees in Eden (Gen 2:16–17; 3:5–6, 22), and Adapa, which indicates these two divine prerogatives: “To [Adapa] [Ea] gave wisdom, but did not give eternal life” (Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989] 182).

⁷² Mettinger, *Eden Narrative*, 126. Uta-napishti and his wife are the exception that proves this rule. When they receive immortality, the god Enlil proclaims they “shall be like us gods” (XI 204). See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 272.

⁷³ See Carol Newsom, “Gen 2–3 and 1 Enoch 6–16: Two Myths of Origins and Their Ethical

contribution. Following this framework, Veenker, for example, attempts to connect Adam with Enkidu by claiming that we “first encounter” both in the company of beasts and without knowledge of a woman. He claims that Adam “begins to move away from his beastliness into his humanity” through naming the animals, but, ultimately, both texts describe an “ascent of knowledge through seduction and sexual knowing.”⁷⁴ However, this case is overstated. We do not first encounter Adam in the company of animals; they are only mentioned after his aloneness is observed. He does not, like Enkidu, enter their world; they enter his. The general category of “living being” (נפש חיה) to which man and animal both belong need not be defined as “beastly.” After the detailed account of the man’s receiving of the “breath of life” from God (Gen 2:7), the application of “living being” to the animals (2:19) associates them with him as living, not him with them as animals (cf. Gen 9:12, 15–16).⁷⁵ The lack of a match among the animals communicates clearly that the man is already distinct before the woman appears.⁷⁶ The woman does not create that difference; she corresponds with and clarifies it. He may share the category “living being” with the animals, but, with the woman, he fits in a different subcategory: human.

Because it uses the animal episode to demonstrate clearly that the man is already distinct from the animals before the woman appears or the fruit is tasted, the text simply does not present “men’s separation from animals in order to be directed into the path of civilization as an evil that eventually brings on death as a punishment.”⁷⁷ Whether by God or the man (the subject of the verb מצא [“to find”] is ambiguous), the animals are rejected as partners for the man before the “fall,” whereas the animals reject Enkidu after his ascent through sexual knowing (I 198). While acknowledging the distinct perspectives on animals as potential corresponding

Implications,” in *Shaking Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Walter Brueggemann and Charles B. Cousar* (ed. Christine Roy Yoder et al.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005) 7–22, at 9–10. For the speaking serpent’s violation of this boundary, which “challenges the hierarchical order of the universe,” see George Savran, “Beastly Speech: Intertextuality, Balaam’s Ass and the Garden of Eden,” *JSOT* 19 (1994) 33–55, at 34, 39. For further reflection on this boundary in Dan 4, see Matthias Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar: The Ancient Near Eastern Origins and Early History of Interpretation of Daniel 4* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

⁷⁴ Veenker, “Forbidden Fruit,” 73, 70 n. 50 (italics in original). For similar attempts to associate Adam initially with the animals, frequently in comparison with Enkidu, see Karen Randolph Joines, “The Serpent in Gen 3,” *ZAW* 87 (1975) 1–11, at 7; Moran, “Epic of Gilgamesh,” 121–22; Bechtel, “Genesis 2.4B–3.24,” 11 n. 21, 15–16; Gregory Mobley, “The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East,” *JBL* 116 (1997) 217–33, at 227; Brichto, *Names of God*, 86–90; Robert S. Kawashima, “*Homo Faber* in J’s Primeval History,” *ZAW* 116 (2004) 483–501, at 484; Carr, “Competing Construals,” 256.

⁷⁵ Contra Kawashima, “*Homo Faber*,” 487; Richard Bauckham, “Humans, Animals, and the Environment in Genesis 1–3,” in *Genesis and Christian Theology* (ed. Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 175–89, at 187; Carr, “Competing Construals,” 256. See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis = Be-reshit* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 17.

⁷⁶ Greenblatt, *Rise and Fall*, 57.

⁷⁷ Jastrow, “Adam and Eve,” 210.

helpers in the two texts, Claus Westermann notes the similarity between the two-stage creation of Enkidu—from living with animals, when he “was not really a man,” to human status, thanks to Shamhat—and the two acts of creation in Gen 2—first animals and then woman.⁷⁸ However, significantly in Gen 2, those two “stages” are represented by clearly distinguished figures, the nonmatching animals and the matching woman, and distinct acts of creation, from the earth and then from the man.

E. Gender of Match

The inversion of the epic continues in the gender of the match in Genesis, which gains additional significance in comparison with the epic. There, women are poorly represented, as male companionship is valorized and the most developed female character is a prostitute, a seductress used by men as a means to an end, while Enkidu reserves his love and friendship for Gilgamesh in “a relationship which will be terminated only by death.”⁷⁹ This contrasts strikingly with the woman’s focal role in Gen 2.⁸⁰ In “the only account of the creation of woman as such in ancient Near Eastern literature,” the woman is commonly characterized as the “crown of creation.”⁸¹ The woman’s union with the man is the goal of the text, rather than an episode that advances the man’s pursuit of greater goals, as in Enkidu’s friendship with Gilgamesh.⁸² Though some have taken it to communicate women’s subordinate social status (see 1 Cor 11:8), considering that Gilgamesh’s suitable match must ascend from the beasts to become his equal, God’s creation of the woman from the man himself in Genesis is, in fact, a compelling presentation of the ontological equality of the sexes (1 Cor 11:12).⁸³ It embodies the clarification in Gen 1:27 that “humankind” (אדם) created in God’s image includes both “male and female.”

⁷⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 226.

⁷⁹ Bailey, “Primal Woman,” 150, 140; see also Mandell, “Liminality,” 124; Rivkah Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: The Gilgamesh Epic and Other Ancient Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000) 120; Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 29; Julia Assante, “Men Looking at Men: The Homoerotics of Power in the State Arts of Assyria,” in *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity* (ed. Ilona Zsolnay; London: Routledge, 2016) 52–92, at 47.

⁸⁰ Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 52; Hartenstein, “Menschwerdung im Gilgamesch-Epos,” 108, 114.

⁸¹ Bailey, “Primal Woman,” 150. See also Schüngel-Straumann, “On the Creation,” 66–67.

⁸² Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 226; Schüngel-Straumann, “On the Creation,” 66–67.

⁸³ Further, in earlier Sumerian texts, Enkidu initially plays the role of Gilgamesh’s servant and is only later elevated to equal companionship (George, *Gilgamesh*, 1:140–43). David Halperin argues that, despite the emphasis on Enkidu’s equality in the later versions, narrative features, such as Gilgamesh’s continued protagonist role, maintain the hierarchical relationship between them, consistent with other ancient friendship narratives (“Heroes and Their Pals,” in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* [New York: Routledge, 1990] 75–87). That social inequality does not, however, invalidate the emphasis on (initial or eventual) ontological equality in both texts. For this “complex” tension in 1 Cor 11:8–12, see Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1997) 188.

F. *Ontological Equality*

The contrast with the epic in the Eve-Enkidu framework therefore makes sense of the episode of Adam looking unsuccessfully for a partner among the animals, which often strikes interpreters as “curious,” “purely gratuitous,” “contrary to all expectation,” in short, “a problem.”⁸⁴ James Barr finds “highly incongruous” the “idea that woman was an afterthought” following God’s naive assumption that Adam “would have found satisfactory companionship in a lot of cows and sheep, enlivened perhaps by an occasional lion or leopard.”⁸⁵ However, Barr acknowledges that this feature of the story emphasizes both “the distance existing between the man and the animals” and how “man and woman, by contrast, form a closely-knit and united pair.”⁸⁶ The phrase “and he brought her to the man” (ויבאה אל האדם) (2:22) echoes God’s presentation of the animals to the man (ויבא אל האדם) (2:19), which deliberately contrasts the woman with the animals,⁸⁷ as do other similarities between the woman and the animals, such as the man’s naming of both, which are subverted to accentuate her difference.⁸⁸ As Phyllis Tribble writes of the animals: “‘Helpers’ they may be; companions they are not.”⁸⁹ The creation of the animals extends the divine-human hierarchy established in the creation of the man to one that places humanity between God and the animals and requires the woman to be taken from the man if she is to be a fitting counterpart.⁹⁰

Though it is difficult to read Gen 2–3 in a way that conforms to modern standards of gender equality,⁹¹ when placed in the ancient Near Eastern context in which its views are more fairly judged,⁹² the Eve-Enkidu framework suggests that it has a relatively high view of women. The woman’s ontological equality to man as the same type of being is strongly emphasized and her worthiness to be his ideal companion is praised.⁹³ Unlike Enkidu, she does not need to ascend from a lower status to be his suitable match. Though those employing the Eve-

⁸⁴ George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (FOTL 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 53; Jobling, “Myth and Its Limits,” 35; Gary A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 45; Matskevich, *Construction of Gender*, 16.

⁸⁵ James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM, 1992) 71–72.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 72. Similarly, Richard Whitekettle, “Oxen Can Plow, But Women Can Ruminant: Animal Classification and the Helper in Genesis 2,18–24,” *SJOT* 23 (2009) 243–56, at 254–56; Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, 54.

⁸⁷ Hauser, “Genesis 2–3,” 23.

⁸⁸ Jobling, “Myth and Its Limits,” 35–36.

⁸⁹ Tribble, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 92.

⁹⁰ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 74.

⁹¹ See, e.g., Lanser, “Feminist Criticism,” 76; Clines, “What Does Eve Do?,” 25–41; Yee, “Genesis 2–3,” 182. However, Tribble argues that the text “presages a break with patriarchy” (Phyllis Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *JAAR* 41 (1973) 30–48, at 42; cf. *idem*, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 72–143).

⁹² Schüngel-Straumann, “On the Creation,” 66.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, 66, 72.

Shamhat framework frequently insert such an ascent into Gen 2,⁹⁴ the Eve-Enkidu framework underscores the significance of its absence: both man and woman are created equally and distinctly human.

G. Marriage

Because Eve does not need to ascend to Adam's status, the Shamhat episode is unnecessary in Gen 2, and Enkidu's sexual "defilement" (I 199; cf. VII 128) can be reconfigured into unashamed marital union.⁹⁵ God's provision of a suitable match for the man (Gen 2:21–23) is logically connected to the institution of marriage through the observation that "therefore" (על־כן) a man leaves his parents to "become one flesh" with his "wife" (Gen 2:24).⁹⁶

Gilgamesh and Enkidu's initial encounter, however, interrupts a marriage (II 100–115). A large lacuna at this point leaves the nature of this marriage unclear. Reading the text as Enkidu's opposition to Gilgamesh's wedding, Thorkild Jacobsen claims the hero's "first meeting with Enkidu is a rejection of marriage for a boyhood friendship."⁹⁷ However, most argue on the basis of the parallel in the Pennsylvania tablet (OB II 123–78) that Gilgamesh was himself interrupting a marriage through *jus primae noctis*, demanding for himself the right to deflower the bride before the bridegroom consummates the marriage.⁹⁸ The latter view fits with Gilgamesh's oppression of his people and better explains Enkidu's efforts to stop him. Either way, and even if in this moment Enkidu has "become a champion of the cultural institution of marriage,"⁹⁹ this scene contributes to the broader subversion of marriage across the epic.¹⁰⁰ It presents "the confrontation of Enkidu, the type of the true bridegroom, but mated to a harlot, and of Gilgamesh, type of the false bridegroom, to be mated to a real bride," as Benjamin Foster puts it.¹⁰¹ Like Jacobsen, Foster observes that the relationship between the two replaces marriage

⁹⁴ See section D, "The Boundaries of Humanity" above.

⁹⁵ See Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and the Bible* (CBQMS 26; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994) 148–49. For a defense of a reference to marriage in Gen 2:24 rather than simply to "love" as a "natural drive" or "elemental power," see Angelo Tosato, "On Genesis 2:24," *CBQ* 52 (1990) 389–409, at 398–404.

⁹⁶ The Hebrew word אִשָּׁה is the same word previously used for "woman," but the context justifies the NRSV translation here, particularly with a pronomial suffix. See Tosato, "On Genesis 2:24," 402.

⁹⁷ Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) 218. See also Benno Landsberger, "Jungfräulichkeit. Ein Beitrag zum Thema 'Beilager und Eheschliessung,'" in *Symbolae Iuridicae et Historicae Martino David Dedicatae* (2 vols.; ed. J. A. Ankum, Robert Feenstra, and William F. Leemans; Leiden: Brill, 1968) 2:41–105, at 83–84.

⁹⁸ E.g., J. J. Finkelstein, "On Some Recent Studies in Cuneiform Law," *JAOS* 90 (1970) 243–56, at 251–52; Tigay, *Gilgamesh Epic*, 182–84; Foster, "Gilgamesh," 31; George, *Gilgamesh*, 1:455.

⁹⁹ Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 30.

¹⁰⁰ Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 218.

¹⁰¹ Foster, "Gilgamesh," 31.

for them, as their unity, “cemented by a violent physical struggle before a wedding,” represents a “complete reversal of the natural way of things.”¹⁰²

Whatever Gilgamesh’s purpose, Enkidu bars him from entering the “wedding house” (II 113). No wife for Gilgamesh is ever mentioned, and Enkidu also appears to leave Shamhat behind; she is not mentioned again until Enkidu curses her for her role in initiating his downfall. Later, Gilgamesh will vehemently reject an offer of marriage from the goddess Ishtar, accusing her of transforming her lovers into animals (VI 1–79), a reversal of Enkidu’s experience.¹⁰³ Instead, Enkidu becomes, as the text repeatedly says, “like a wife” to Gilgamesh (e.g., I 289). This contributes to the broader subversion of marriage throughout the epic, where language more appropriate to marriage is applied to Gilgamesh’s relationship with Enkidu, whom Gilgamesh veils “like a bride” at his death (VIII 59).¹⁰⁴ Their close companionship is expressed through the analogy of heterosexual coupling, indicating that marriage is still the dominant image of loyal companionship in Akkadian culture.¹⁰⁵ However, the epic subverts rather than celebrates that institution,¹⁰⁶ whether the heroes’ relationship is sexual or not.¹⁰⁷ Even Siduri’s advice to “let a wife ever delight in your lap” (OBM iii 12–13) is omitted in the Standard Version.¹⁰⁸

The comparison with Gen 2–3 highlights this subversion of marriage. If the author(s) of the Eden Narrative were aware of the epic, the text’s depiction of marriage may even be a response to it. Whereas the relationship between the two suitable partners in the epic begins at the frustration of a marriage, the marriage language in Gen 2 is the climax of the passage, which seals the man and woman,

¹⁰² Ibid., 33.

¹⁰³ Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 28, 36. Foster sees this as a rejection of sexual attraction as an “outside threat” to the heroes’ unity (“Gilgamesh,” 34).

¹⁰⁴ See Harris, *Gender and Aging*, 127. For further textual details playing on Enkidu as the wife of Gilgamesh, see Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, “A Note on an Overlooked Word-Play in the Akkadian Gilgamesh,” in *ZIKIR ŠUMIM: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (ed. George van Driel et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1982) 128–32, at 130.

¹⁰⁵ Diane M. Sharon, “The Doom of Paradise: Literary Patterns in Accounts of Paradise and Mortality in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,” in *Genesis* (ed. Brenner) 53–80, at 77.

¹⁰⁶ Though the postmortem comfort associated with having multiple sons in the later-added tablet XII (102–16) may implicitly endorse marriage and procreation, this potential message is overshadowed by the text’s misogynistic depiction of “the superiority of male homosocial experience to heterosexual relations” (Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 77).

¹⁰⁷ Assante, for example, argues that the epic reflects a broader preference for same-sex bonds over conjugal and kinship relations among the power elite in first millennium Assyria (Assante, “Men Looking at Men,” 47). Ackerman attributes this sexual relationship to a liminal state of rite of passage, in which social norms were suspended or reversed (Ackerman, *When Heroes Love*, 47–87). See also Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 9–92, though he acknowledges the heroes’ erotic attachment is “never unambiguous” (62). Foster and Halperin, however, read the Epic’s use of conjugal and kinship imagery as a means of displaying the strength of the heroes’ nonsexual bond (Foster, “Gilgamesh,” 33; Halperin, “Heroes and Their Pals,” 85). For a dismissal of sexual allusions in Gilgamesh’s initial dreams of Enkidu, see Martin Worthington, *Principles of Akkadian Textual Criticism* (Boston: de Gruyter, 2012) 204–8.

¹⁰⁸ Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 70–71.

as “my flesh” (Gen 2:23) naturally becomes “one flesh” (Gen 2:24).¹⁰⁹ Despite the “very deep” emotional current that runs between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Stephen Greenblatt argues, “They do not possess this peculiar feeling, at once metaphor and literal description, of shared being.”¹¹⁰ And yet, the idealized presentation of marriage in Gen 2 will itself be subverted by the curse in Gen 3:16, which attempts to explain how disobedience of God introduces conflict that tears at this unity.

H. Shamhat and the Serpent

In Gen 3, of course, the woman does not come off quite so well. Even if this text does not describe a “fall” or use the word “sin,”¹¹¹ it at least communicates the disastrous effects of disobedience, and therefore the “idea of sin.”¹¹² The Eve-Shamhat framework highlights how the man tries to pass the blame on to the woman (3:12), just like Enkidu blames Shamhat for his defilement (VII 102–31, esp. 130–31), therefore supporting a sexual interpretation of the “knowledge of good and evil.”¹¹³ Conflating the two tales at this point, Aage Westenholz and Ulla Koch-Westenholz write that Enkidu “curses the harlot for robbing him of the Garden of Eden.”¹¹⁴ Connecting the serpent’s promise that the woman would become “like god” (Gen 3:5) with Shamhat’s observation that Enkidu has “become like a god” after their intercourse (I 207), interpreters frequently conclude that Eve originally played the serpent’s role in earlier versions of the tale.¹¹⁵

The Eve-Enkidu framework, however, does not require a hypothetical earlier tradition to be proposed but can instead maintain the parallel between Shamhat and the serpent.¹¹⁶ Indeed, this connection may be anticipated in the epic itself, as later in the epic a serpent steals from Gilgamesh the plant that would have given him immortality (XI 305–6). Thus, as Enkidu blames Shamhat for her role in initiating

¹⁰⁹ Hermann Spieckermann, “Ambivalenzen. Ermöglichte und verwirklichte Schöpfung in Genesis 2f,” in *Verbindungslinien. Festschrift für Werner H. Schmidt zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Axel Grauper, Holger Delkurt, and Alexander B. Ernst; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000) 363–76, at 368.

¹¹⁰ Greenblatt, *Rise and Fall*, 61.

¹¹¹ See Barr, *Garden of Eden*, 6; Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 63. Maier also rejects the idea of a “fall” in Enkidu’s story, since in the epic death has no ethical significance (Maier, “Gilgamesh,” 86–87).

¹¹² Day, *Creation to Babel*, 44–45. Though Mark Smith claims, “Genesis 3 never characterizes the eating of the fruit as evil or as sin, disobedience, or transgression,” he acknowledges that the tale involves “divine commands” and “the divine responses to the human couple not following them” (Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, 59, 49).

¹¹³ E.g., Veenker, “Forbidden Fruit,” 57. For surveys of the many interpretive proposals for this phrase, see Oden, “Divine Aspirations,” 213; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 250–51. After Shamash reminds Enkidu that Shamhat gave him food, wine, clothing, and his companion, Gilgamesh, Enkidu adds a blessing for Shamhat (VII 134–38, 148–61). By giving Enkidu these gifts of civilization, Shamhat plays a similar role to YHWH, who provides food, clothing, and companionship in the Eden Narrative.

¹¹⁴ Westenholz and Koch-Westenholz, “Enkidu,” 444.

¹¹⁵ See n. 23 above.

¹¹⁶ See Greenblatt, *Rise and Fall*, 63.

the process that leads to his death (see below), the epic's serpent guarantees that Gilgamesh will die, as well.

In Genesis, Eve, like Enkidu, encounters a third figure, not her match, who facilitates her becoming "like a god" and blames this figure for her downfall (Gen 3:5, 13). Given the ontological differences between Eve and Enkidu as matches, the Shamhat episode is unnecessary in Gen 2. It appears instead in Gen 3, transformed to accentuate the transgression that brings the downfall of both pairs: the hubristic attempt to defy the gods and break the human-divine barrier.¹¹⁷ In fact, Enkidu only curses Shamhat when facing the punishment for breaking that barrier, which suggests that he sees her as the "entscheidende Mediatorin" (decisive mediator) of his doomed development toward divine defiance (VII 130–31).¹¹⁸ Enkidu's movement across the animal-human barrier, which he understands to have set him on the road toward his punishment for attempting to transgress the human-divine barrier and "become like a god," is adapted in the Eden Narrative to underscore the humans' attempt to cross the human-divine barrier. Enkidu's attempt at blame-shifting is accentuated in Gen 3, as both humans blame the mediators of their barrier-defying disobedience (Gen 3:12–13), which emphasizes that this ontological violation, and not sex, is the issue.

I. Defiance and Death

Throughout the epic, the two heroes together repeatedly defy the gods, arguably so they can become like them, yet encounter suffering and death as a result. In tablet III, in the context of the coming battle with Humbaba, though the text is broken and difficult to interpret at this point, Ninsun speaks of Gilgamesh gaining divine status (III 101–10). Enkidu recognizes that killing Humbaba could earn the gods' ire and twice encourages Gilgamesh to dispose of the monster before Enlil finds out (V 184–87, 241–44). Immediately afterward, in both cases, Enkidu claims this act will establish something "eternal" (V 188, 244). The text is indecipherable at both points, and, though the context and the parallel in the Yale tablet point to eternal fame,¹¹⁹ the desire to transcend mortal limits is evident.¹²⁰ The pair's defiance of the gods is underscored in their encounter with Ishtar, in which Gilgamesh "manifests a stunning hubris" in rudely rejecting her offer of marriage,¹²¹ and the two kill the Bull of Heaven. After Ishtar declares, "Woe to Gilgamesh, who vilified me, (who) killed the Bull of Heaven" (VI 153), Enkidu, displaying "unprecedented heights of hubris," brazenly threatens to tear her apart, as well (IV 156).¹²² Enkidu's death, then, is not punishment for discovering sexual intercourse or civilization but is

¹¹⁷ See the next section and n. 123.

¹¹⁸ Hartenstein, "Menschwerdung im Gilgamesch-Epos," 110–11.

¹¹⁹ George, *Gilgamesh*, 469.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death*, 44. For his summary of various proposals for the significance of this rejection, see 34–44.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 60.

a divinely decreed punishment for the heroes' "hubris" in killing Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven.¹²³ The gods only demand Enkidu's death, sparing Gilgamesh, possibly due to the latter's semidivine status, though a textual gap leaves their reasoning unknown. And yet, the epic makes clear, even the great king Gilgamesh cannot escape "l'inexorable loi de la mort" (the inexorable law of death).¹²⁴

In Genesis, however, the ontologically equal and equally responsible human companions are both punished with the same fate of increased pain and eventual death together.¹²⁵ Though death now looms, with the tree of life denied them (cf. Gen 5), rather than immediately carry out the punishment, God clothes them in "skins" (עור),¹²⁶ like those Gilgamesh wears after Enkidu's death (VII 147). God then expels them from the paradisaical garden in the east (Gen 2:8; cf. IX 40–45), guarded not by persuadable scorpion-men (IX 48–135) but by cherubim and a flaming sword (Gen 3:21–24).

The similarities between the wider narratives suggest that the couple's disobedience did not involve sex, which is only an indirect cause of Enkidu's downfall, but their defiance of God, by grasping knowledge for themselves in their hubristic desire to be "like God" (3:4–5) and become "wise" (3:6) in their own "eyes" (Gen 3:5, 6, 7; cf. Prov 3:7), through disobeying God's command (2:16–17).¹²⁷ Thus, the fruit of the tree may be "neither precisely good nor evil" in itself, whether, as Robert Kawashima argues, it represents intellectual maturity and moral responsibility or something else, but, as he admits, its acquisition does involve immoral means.¹²⁸ The serpent's promise that she will be "like God" (Gen 3:5) leads the woman to "see" the fruit in a new, irresistible light (Gen 3:6), inspiring an act that is not mere "youthful curiosity"¹²⁹ or a desire simply to attain wisdom and knowledge.¹³⁰ Rather, the humans defy God to partially transgress the

¹²³ See George, *Gilgamesh*, 1:468, 478. Facing his fate, Enkidu curses the hunter before Shamhat (VII 94–99) as "the first link in the chain of events that led inexorably to his doom," and Shamash does not correct him for doing so (*ibid.*, 1:479). Additionally, these curses appear to be Enkidu's attempt to pass the blame for his own faults (cf. Gen 3:12).

¹²⁴ Dossin, "Enkidou," 588.

¹²⁵ Tribble, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 122.

¹²⁶ Carr argues that the couple are only fully distinguished from animals when they feel shame at their nakedness and are clothed, though he acknowledges the distinction is already evident in the creation of the woman from the man (Carr, "Competing Construals," 257–58, 260).

¹²⁷ For this interpretation, though without the support of comparison with the epic, see, e.g., Bailey, "Primal Woman," 144–47; Joines, "Serpent in Gen 3," 10; Oden, "Divine Aspirations," 213; Schüngel-Straumann, "On the Creation," 69–70; Mettinger, *Eden Narrative*, 56, 129–30; Day, *Creation to Babel*, 44.

¹²⁸ Kawashima, "Homo Faber," 489.

¹²⁹ Pace John Van Seters, "The Creation of Man and the Creation of the King," *ZAW* 101 (1989) 333–42, at 340. As Van Seters observes, in both Ezek 28:2–10 and Gen 3, the acquisition of god-like wisdom is associated with the judgment of death.

¹³⁰ Pace Konrad Schmid, "The Ambivalence of Human Wisdom: Genesis 2–3 as a Sapiential Text," in *When the Morning Stars Sang: Essays in Honor of Choon Leong Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* (ed. Scott C. Jones and Christine Roy Yoder; BZAW 500; 2018) 275–86, at 284.

human-divine boundary, becoming wise like God through a means that introduces ambivalence into human wisdom, a distinct feature of Gen 2–3 in comparison with extant Sumerian and Babylonian accounts of human creation.¹³¹ In the following chapter, humans will use their knowledge to produce not only “arts of civilization,” such as musical instruments (4:21), but also deadly violence (4:8, 23–24).¹³² And throughout the Hebrew Bible, wisdom is no guarantee of righteousness, as Solomon famously demonstrates (1 Kgs 11:1–8).

■ Conclusion

For more than a century, comparisons between Genesis and Gilgamesh have predominantly led interpreters to see Eve as a seductress, Adam as a semibestial “wild man,” and their “fall” as an ascent through sexual knowledge. The common emphasis on companionship in the two tales leads, however, to an alternative comparative framework, in which the woman is seen primarily as a suitably equal companion, created, like the man, distinct from the animals. Marriage is presented as the consummation of this companionship rather than being denigrated in favor of male friendship. Together their “fall” is a hubristic defiance of divine boundaries, which God enforces by barring immortality. More than one framework may create a suitable match between the texts. To the degree that they respond to actual features of both texts, each can offer interpretive insight, but neither should be allowed to shape the texts into its image, as the Eve-Shamhat framework has in the past. This includes: 1) distorting the text to fit the paradigm, for example, affiliating Adam with the animals to make him more like Enkidu; 2) creating a new hypothetical text that better fits the paradigm, for example, conforming Eve to Shamhat by suggesting she originally played the serpent’s role; or 3) intentionally overlooking elements that do not fit, such as the man’s failure to find a match among the animals.

The Eve-Enkidu framework, however, illuminates commonly overlooked features of both texts. It emphasizes how the epic approaches anthropology from the boundaries, as its two male heroes, the “animal-man” and the “man-god,” originate at the two borders that together define humanity,¹³³ while Gen 2–3 approaches anthropology from the center, along with the attendant crucial issues of gender, friendship, marriage, sex, wisdom, and death. The Eden Narrative “puts to use” the mythic material found in Gilgamesh with “a different goal,” as Lévi-Strauss put it. Its inversion, whether conscious or not, of crucial elements of the epic answers the question “what are human beings?” similarly to the psalmist in Ps 8 (vv. 6–9 [ET 5–8]; cf. Gen 1:26–28), placing them slightly below God and definitely above animals, while bestowing on all, male and female alike, a crown of “glory and honor,” though these humans, like the epic’s heroes, are still compelled to acknowledge their limitations.

¹³¹ See Albertz, “Gen 3, 1–7,” 89–111.

¹³² Newsom, “Gen 2–3 and 1 Enoch 6–16,” 13; see also Kawashima, “*Homo Faber*,” 499.

¹³³ Wolff, “Gilgamesh,” 394.