

CLC 1023: Sex and Culture
Lecture Seven: The Goddess and the Bull

PLAY (while class is entering): “Private Dancer” performed by Tina Turner (1985); written by Mark Knopfler

Slide 1: Title Slide →Clay Plaque of Lovers + Cylinder Seal of Bull

Slide 2: Objects Identified

1. Sumerian goddess Inanna (= Ishtar) and her lover Dumuzi, clay plaque, c. 2000 BCE
2. Sacred Bull, Cylinder seal impression, Persia, Achaemenid period c. 550–330 BCE

Slide 3: Recommended Reading in the Pride Library

Recommended reading (for fun only → not required for the course)

1. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Full text of Andrew George’s 2003 translation of *Gilgamesh* [entire extant poem]

In Pride Library: call number PJ 3771.G5 E5 2003

There are eleven tablets of the poem in the Standard Babylonian Version

We are reading only THREE tablets – so there’s lots more of the poem to explore if you become interested.

2. *Sex & Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* by Gwendolyn Leick (1994)

In Pride Library: call number PJ 4047.L45 1994

Easy to read, good account of Mesopotamian sexualities from a social historian’s viewpoint. Provocative analysis of erotic hymns as well as longer works in relation to the development of Babylonian law.

Slide 4: Announcements

1. Breakout Group Info now posted on course website: instruct.uwo.ca/mod-lang/CLC023

How to Find your Breakout Group → See folder on WebCT OWL

2. First Meeting of Breakout Groups → NEXT Friday, October 2, 3:30pm – 4:20pm

Be there: Attendance will count for marks.

Slide 5: Breakout Group Information

Breakout Group Info also included in notes and powerpoint for lecture #6

Breakout Groups	Teaching Assistants	Rooms (University College)
Group 1: Almawy → Carreiro	TA: Mansoor	UC 137
Group 2: Carroll → Grant	TA: Echo	UC 201
Group 3: Gravelle → Maze	TA: Bruna	UC 202
Group 4: McFadden → Ruetz	TA: Lydia	UC 204
Group 5: Sajo → Zouki	TA: Rahel	UC 212

Slide 6: Topics Covered Last Class

1. Sexual Personas → Type / Antitype of an Erotic Icon
2. Diachronic Chart of The Wild Man = personas “across time”
3. Gilgamesh as morally ambiguous hero: in Tablets 1-2
4. Sexual Troping in Gilgamesh’s prophetic dreams (Meteorite, Axe)
5. Same-Sex bonding of Gilgamesh/Enkidu → clearly NOT transgressive

Slide 7: The Big Q

Is the sexual persona assumed by Tina Turner in “Private Dancer” a type or an antitype of The Great Whore?

Slide 8: Lyrics of “Private Dancer” → Cover of “Private Dancer” single

[Music/Lyrics by Mark Knopfler]

Well the men come in these places
And the men are all the same
You don't look at their faces
And you don't ask their names
You don't think of them as human
You don't think of them at all
You keep your mind on the money
Keeping your eyes on the wall

Chorus

I'm your private dancer
A dancer for money
I'll do what you want me to do
I'm your private dancer
A dancer for money
Any old music will do

wanna make a million dollars
I wanna live out by the sea
Have a husband and some children
Yeah I guess I want a family

Deutschmarks or dollars
American express will do nicely thank you
Let me loosen up your collar
Tell me do you wanna see me do the shimmy again
Repeat chorus

Slide 9: ANSWER

Tina's persona is morally ambiguous: she's neither a clear type nor a clear antitype of the Icon. Though she is a sex-trade worker like Shamhat (performing "the work of a woman" for men who are hardly "human"), her job is clearly not endowed with sacred prestige or charged up with magical Hi-Li. She seems world-weary and restless – clearly yearning to leave the dehumanized world of her dance-club where she doesn't think of the men as "human" – or even think of them at all – as she faces the "wall" of her booth. She has become so secularized – so worldly – that her economic activity as a prostitute is hardly even transgressive anymore (as the Whore of Babylon's role clearly is the Bible). Nevertheless, acknowledging society's moral disapproval of her reduction of sex to a financial transaction, she touchingly yearns to be a respectable wife with a family.

Slide 10: INTERTYPE

Instead of a TYPE or an ANTITYPE, let's call such morally ambiguous figures an INTERTYPE.

We'll be looking at another Intertype next week, when we consider the morally ambiguous persona of Helen of Troy in Homer's *Iliad*.

Slide 11: Two Questions from the end of last class

1. How does the Gender System operate in Uruk?
2. Why does Ishtar (in Tablet VI) become so angry at the King?

The answer to Question #1, as I'm going to argue today, will help us answer Question #2. So let's start by considering how the gender system operates in Uruk and see how that affects our understanding of the Goddess's actions in Tablet VI.

Since we know from Tablet I that Uruk has a large temple sector dedicated to the Goddess Ishtar, or "the Babylonian Venus" as she's sometimes called, I think the best way to proceed is (1) by considering the peculiar character of the Goddess; and (2) by considering the gender system as reflected in the ARCHITECTURE of the City.

Slide 12: The Goddess and the Bull

Images: Statue of Ishtar (2000 BCE) in the Louvre Museum, Paris.
Bas Relief of Bull (c. 575 BC) on the Ishtar Gate, Babylon

In the sixth tablet of the poem, the Goddess is associated with a giant bull → the Bull of Heaven, whom she fetches from the sky with the permission of her dad, the Sky Father Anu.

The Bull = a sexual metonymy → MALE POTENCY (physical strength + fertility)
But here in Tablet VI, the Bull also serves as an embodiment of DIVINE WRATH
(Anu's and Ishtar's anger at Gilgamesh)

The Babylonian Bull in the slide is a glazed tile bas-relief decorating the famous Ishtar Gate from sixth-century Babylon → created 2000 years after the supposed reign of Gilgamesh in Uruk but clearly still remembered as an important symbol associated with the goddess.

NOTE: Unlike the classical Aphrodite/Venus figures we're familiar with from the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome, Ishtar is the goddess not only of love, sex, fertility, and cosmic Hi-Li, but also of WAR. Hence her association with the Bull. She's pretty fierce when riled, and when she needs brute strength to get her way, she just has to ask Big Daddy Anu for some bull power.

Slide 13: Ishtar → Type or Antitype of the Icon?

QUESTION: In Tablet VI, does Ishtar function as a Type or Antitype of The Beauty Queen Icon?

Slide 14: Ishtar as Intertype

ANSWER: She's an ambiguous figure in the poem, stemming from her contradictory character (erotically civilizing and fertilizing/ ferociously destructive & ecologically frightening). Like the Private Dancer in the secular world of modern dance clubs, Ishtar functions in the poetic universe of *Gilgamesh* as a Sumerian/Babylonian INTERTYPE of The Beauty Queen.

Note: In other contexts she might be represented as wholly good (a "type" of the icon) or wholly evil (an "antitype" of the icon).

Slide 15: Map of Ancient Babylonia showing location of Babylon

Babylon was founded as a city many centuries after Uruk. Babylon lies to the northwest of Uruk closer to the modern (and much later) city of Baghdad.

Slide 16: Uruk today: Excavation of Brick Walls

Today Uruk is a ruin in the Iraqi desert near the town of Warka.

The CITY was invented in the late fourth millennium BCE in Mesopotamia

URUK → the prototypical Mesopotamian city:

- mud-brick walls, huge fortification dominated by Innana's temple/palace
- surrounding the temple/palace were the dwellings of the king's subjects
- surrounding these dwellings, beyond the fortified walls, were fertile fields
Sustained by elaborate irrigation ditches: grain and vegetable production supported the population

Slide 17: Uruk today: Temple sector "Eanna"

Slide 18: Artist's reconstruction of Temple/Palace at Uruk

Like Nature in the ancient Sumerian world, a realm charged up with Inanna's love-engendering "Hi-Li," the earliest cities were highly gendered spaces because of their central building: a temple/palace dedicated to Ishtar/ Inanna or some other fertility goddess

Slide 19: Cuneiform tablet: allocation of beer

WRITING developed to aid in City Administration: clay tablets with cuneiform (wedge-shaped) inscriptions: writing as an effective mode of social/sexual control through the articulation of lawcodes, religious texts, political documents

The City that could write its laws could invent “SEX” as a regulatory system (like writing itself): a system of representations, codes, myths, outcomes

Language regulating the Gender System of the Sumerians.

Slide 20: Person – Man–Woman

The Sumerian language was intriguingly gendered: note the sexual synecdoches in the very signs used to represent “person” (ambiguous human body); “man” (a penis); and “woman” (a vulva).

The Sumerian language had two distinctly gendered dialects:

“Women’s vernacular” distinct from “Men’s vernacular”

So it’s often possible to tell, just from the diction and grammar of this language, whether the singer of a poem is male or female, whether it’s Ishtar/Inanna or her shepherd lover Dumuzi who’s speaking

Slide 21: Grammar of SEX

At this very basic level of linguistic analysis, when we’re considering the gendering of vocabulary and even of word-endings in the gendered dialects of a language (here Sumerian), we’re beginning to explore another subject in our erotic curriculum → the Grammar of Sex, which underlies the Rhetoric of Sex we’ve hitherto been focusing on.

Slide 22: The Uruk Vase

Back to Uruk. A priceless relic of this ancient city is the tall slender “Uruk Vase” (between 4000-3000 BCE). It’s was stolen from the Baghdad archeological museum when the Americans invaded Iraq, but fortunately it was returned in June 2003.

– The vase shows a wedding ceremony (most likely) between a priest-king and the goddess Inanna-Ishtar (a so-called “sacred marriage”). The King of Uruk assumed the role of Dumuzi the shepherd, with his subjects as the “flock” in the “Big Sheepfold” of the City

Slide 23: Dumuzi the Shepherd → Lover of Ishtar / Inanna

Here’s Dumuzi embracing his immortal beloved in a clay plaque from ancient Sumeria (2000 BCE)

Slide 24: The Song of the Lettuce

Many erotic hymns have come down from ancient Sumer and Babylon in which the goddess Ishtar/Innana sings to her lover Dumuzi → persuading him (requiring him?) to have sex with her.

Here is one of them (dating from around 2300 BCE?). You can find it in the Babylon section of your Coursepack. Inanna praises her beloved:

He has sprouted, he has burgeoned, he is well-watered lettuce, my shaded garden of the desert, richly flourishing, his mother's favourite: he is well-watered lettuce; my grain lovely in beauty in its furrows, he is well-watered lettuce; my first-class fruitful apple tree, he is well-watered lettuce.

Slide 25: The Song of the Lettuce cont'd

The honey man, the honey man will make me sweet; my lord, the honey man of a goddess, his mother's favourite, whose hands are honey, whose feet are honey, will make me sweet, whose limbs are honey-sweet, will make me sweet.

Navel! My altogether immediately sweet, my favourite of his mother! Beautiful thighs, raised arms! My, he is well-watered lettuce

QUESTION: Can you detect any lexical set in the erotic discourse of this hymn?

ANSWER: Food, Agriculture → appropriate for a fertility goddess

Slide 26: QUESTION about the Song of the Lettuce

Is Dumuzi's body sexualized by synecdoche or metonymy?

Slide 27: Sexual Metaphor/Metonymy in the Song of the Lettuce

Most obviously by metonymy:

Sexually Desirable Boy ----->agricultural domain

His Body -----> the shaded garden

His Phallus -----> Romaine lettuce (not wilted, “stiff” with water)
Sprouting grain, tree trunk
His Sperm -----> honey (also water running in furrows?)

But an argument could also be made that Dumuzi (as represented agriculturally) is a sexual synecdoche for the fertile earth under Ishtar’s sexual dominance. He’s a part representing the whole of her agricultural domain.

Slide 28: Ishtar Gate, Babylon

Architecture as well as agriculture was sexualized in Mesopotamian culture. We saw this last day with the “gate” of the wedding chamber in Tablet 2 standing in (metonymically) for the Bride’s vagina → through which the transgressive King was attempting to force his way before he was distracted with his hot wrestling match with Enkidu.

Here is an artist’s reconstruction of the famous Ishtar Gate in Babylon. Ishtar’s “gate” = an architectural metonymy for the Goddess’s vaginal entrance, with the City enclosed behind its walls as a Giant Womb where the citizens were nourished, protected, enclosed.

To enter Babylon through the Ishtar gate would have been a kind of sexual act → entrance into a sexualized space.

Even though *Gilgamesh* the epic concerns the ancient Sumerian city of Uruk, we owe the preservation of the text largely to the scribes in the later city of Babylon and its domains. Babylon looked back to Uruk as a legendary model of urban culture (as the original prototypical city) and to its celebrated king Gilgamesh as a very human figure who, for all his faults, grew into an exemplar of royal virtues: physical strength, moral courage, heroic energy, and (most importantly for our purposes) male “Hi-Li” in harmonious collaborative balance with Ishtar-Inanna’s female power, resulting in orderly stable government for the City.

In other words, Uruk (and Babylon) were highly gendered cities in their architectural design.

Slide 29: Balance of Powers in The Gendered City

Ideally, in URUK and the cities that looked back to it as a model, like BABYLON, there was a balance struck between male and female powers.

Male powers → architecturally centred in the King’s Palace

Female powers —> architecturally centred in the Goddess's temple

Since the King (in his symbolic role as the Shepherd Dumuzi) was symbolically married to the Goddess (as her priestesses sang in their hymns), their powers were ritually united and stabilized.

Now that we have some idea of how the gender system operated in Uruk, we can proceed to answer the second question I posed at the beginning of the lecture:

Why does Ishtar become so angry at the King?

Slide 30: Ishtar proposes marriage to Gilgamesh

Attracted by his beauty at the beginning of Tablet 6, Ishtar immediately proposes marriage –

Come, Gilgamesh, be you my bridegroom!

Grant me your fruits, O grant me!

Be you my husband and I your wife!

This is hardly surprising because it's exactly what a Goddess should be doing to the King —> preserving the concord of the Gendered City by sustaining the "Sacred Marriage" ritual.

Slide 31: Gilgamesh rejects her proposal

But Gilgamesh rejects her proposal, saying

Who is there would take you in marriage?

You're a frost that congeals no ice...

Dumuzi, the lover of your youth,

year upon year, to lamenting you doomed him.

[Tablet 6, VI 32ff]

Slide 32: Ishtar's anger

The goddess Ishtar heard these words,

She went up to heaven in a furious rage,

Weeping she went to Anu, her father,

Before Antu, her mother, the tears did flow.

(Tablet 6, VI 80)

Ishtar's anger looks at first simply like a jealous rage. She's furious with Gilgamesh for preferring Enkidu to her. But her anger is really much bigger than that – it's COSMIC in its implications and it "embodies" itself in the figure of the Bull.

Slide 33: Gilgamesh and Enkidu slay the Bull of Heaven

But not even the Bull is a match for Gilgamesh, whose arrogant preference for Enkidu withstands the full assault of Divine Wrath. The two heroes (after an epic struggle) managed to slay the Bull. As a final insult, Enkidu tears off one of the Bull's haunches and hurls it at the goddess, crying out to her:

Had I caught you too, I'd have treated you likewise,
I'd have draped your arms in its guts.

This line would merely be funny if so much didn't hang on it – e.g. the peaceful order of the City, the restoration of balance between male and female powers.

Since the start of the poem, Gilgamesh's sexual acts have been upsetting the balance of gendered powers in Uruk

1. Ravishing the brides → a violent transgressive parody of the Sacred Marriage of Ishtar and Dumuzi
2. Rejecting Ishtar's marriage offer → a rejection of the Sacred Marriage itself, which is significantly recalled in the very words of the King's rejection

Though the gods have created Enkidu for Gilgamesh to solve ONE problem (the ravishing of the brides), the solution backfires because Gilgamesh now only wants to play with his chum and go on adventures with him (= transgressive neglect of his royal duties).

So Ishtar's anger is quite justified from the perspective of the City as whole.

She has tried to restore order through SEX and then through WAR (her two functions) but her attempts have failed.

Ishtar should not therefore be considered an altogether "evil" version (an antitype) of The Beauty Queen. She is behaving true to her divine character → the Goddess must defend the balance of powers in NATURE and in CULTURE.

The only effective strategy for restoring the King to the Goddess is to get rid of Enkidu → the Wild Man, in fact, dies in Tablet 7. Gilgamesh is so distressed by Enkidu's death that he abandons Uruk and sets out for most of the rest of the poem on a personal quest to rescue his boyfriend from the Realm of the Dead and (failing that) to gain immortality for himself.

Slide 34: Sexual Myth #2

A hero may prefer a guy to a goddess.

NOW, to sum up our week's work, I'd like to construct for you a general overview of the system of sex, gender, and desire in the pre-philosophical world of Uruk/Babylon.

Slide 35-36-37-38-39: The Magical/Pre-Philosophical Model of Sex, Gender and Desire

NATURE	----->pervades----->	CULTURE
Comic Hi-Li (Sex-Magic) divine energy without taboo		Fertility Cult City: Palace + Temple Human regime of taboo
SEX → Male Female		Ideal balance of Male and Female Powers Male Powers privileged in Palace Female Powers privileged in Temple
GENDER → Wild Masculinity tamed by Civilizing Femininity		Penetrator role dominant politically Penetrated role dominant religiously
DESIRE → Wild Sex-Drive shared by gods, beasts, and newly created human beings		Erotic Acculturation SEX transformed into SEXUALITY through Sacred Marriage ceremony