

Power-plays: types of lover and types of love-poetry in Akkadian from the third and second millennia BC\*

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(1) Love and love poetry: gender and convention, genre and reality.

There seems to be something self-contradictory about the very notion of love poetry. The poet Adrienne Rich comments on the inherent dissonance between the lived and the verbalized that is involved in writing love poetry at all in her 1978 collection of poems, *The Dream of a Common Language*:

What kind of beast would turn its life into words?  
What atonement is all this about?  
— and yet, writing words like these, I'm also living.  
Is all this close to the wolverine's howled signals  
that modulated cantata of the wild?  
or when away from you I try to create you in words,  
am I simply using you, like a river or a war?<sup>1</sup>

This dichotomy of the direct experience of intimacy between humans as against the practice of expressing it in words is expanded during the rest of the poem to encompass other examples of the relationship between verbal art and wordless action which form a direct chain to the most pressing questions of political existence. The love-relationship presents the focus where this thought is most immediately and clearly expressed. Rich's poem triumphantly and bitterly meshes the personal and the universal leaving us feeling emotionally decompressed. The worry is that to write about someone, a beloved, in the first place is to turn that person into an object, to deny ourselves the possibility of autonomy. When talking about love and what it means to write poetry about it, contrary to the intuitive and socially dominant view that it is a purely personal and private affair, we find ourselves very quickly in the realm of the social and political. This is not surprising: we are talking about relationships between human beings.

The cultural critic Roland Barthes in his work *A Lover's Discourse* felt that he was unable to offer an analysis of love as a form of cultural activity, he was only able to give his own personal examples of the discourse or discourses associated with it.<sup>2</sup> The resulting late night paranoias and internal monologues frequently revolve around the insecurities that are concomitant with making oneself vulnerable to another person. They are, I would imagine, recognizable to most adult humans at least in the western

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\* I am grateful to Andrew George and Martin Worthington for comments on a draft of this manuscript. Any errors or infelicities of interpretation remain my responsibility. Abbreviations used are as follows: AHW.: W. von Soden *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (1959-1981, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz); CAD: *Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* (1956-2011, Chicago: University of Chicago Press); ETCSL: Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/> (last accessed 27.09.2014); CDLI: Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, <http://cdli.ucla.edu/> (last accessed 12.05.2015); SEAL: M. P. Streck and N. Wasserman, Sources of Early Akkadian Literature, <http://www.seal.uni-leipzig.de/> (last accessed 27.09.2014).

<sup>1</sup> Rich 1978: 28 (Poem VII). I am grateful to my friend Noah Cohen for alerting me to this wonderful piece of poetry many years ago.

<sup>2</sup> Barthes 1978: 3.

world during the late 20<sup>th</sup> to early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries of the modern era at the same time as being disturbingly personal. Disturbing because the almost solipsistic nature of the discourse seems to be unassimilable, by definition inimitable, even catatonic. Yet it concurrently insists on claiming to possess universal comprehensibility.

Indeed, Barthes manages to situate even the most personal and self-affirming aspects of the discourse of love within the context of a series of patterns of behaviour, models for being in love, which condition and define our experience of the phenomenon, in his own case mainly constituted by the books he has read and the conversations he has had with his friends.<sup>3</sup> Similarly to his view of text as a tissue of previously spoken and written fragments defying a single authorial point of origin, so the experience of love itself becomes a re-living and repeat with variation of what others do or have done in the same situation, only identifiable as such due to its public cultural anatomy, which Barthes makes explicit and lays bare in agonizing detail.<sup>4</sup>

The introduction of the notion of “performativity” into the field of gender studies by Judith Butler, the idea backed by ethnographic research that our sexual identities consist of learned and repeatedly rehearsed roles rather than essential categories, appears to relate in an interesting way to Barthes' presentation of the discourse of the lover, whatever his or her sexuality.<sup>5</sup> Love may be inscribed and expressed in gender terms as much as by means of many other patterns or clusters of characteristics that can be used to describe human beings, but gender and its entanglement with power remain a crucial feature of love poetry. Lauren Berlant makes a certain type of heterosexual love into the affective correlate of the repeated rehearsal of gender roles, returning again and again to the same ritualized power-complexes, and suggests its function as an important aspect of social cohesion, the reproduction of a particular way of life entailing the exclusion of other sexual possibilities.<sup>6</sup> The pivotal role played by emotional life in society and politics that Berlant outlines has paved the way for a burgeoning field of studies in the relationship between love poetry and political culture.<sup>7</sup>

Between the claimed but patently self-negated immediacy of written love discourse and the ritualized cultural form that love practice takes in society, love poetry forms a fascinating lens through which to reflect on the values and hierarchies that cultural identity is constructed around, despite itself being the verbal art-form perhaps most enmeshed in apparently artificial, traditional convention. Modern scholarship on republican and early imperial Roman love poetry, for example, has addressed the degree of “reality” that can be accorded to the world of experience depicted in the poems, without a definitive decision on the issue being likely to be achieved, or even being desirable.<sup>8</sup> The discussion has been concerned with the extent to which particular poetic tropes and figures, for example the lover dominated and enslaved by his beloved, can be ascribed to modes of living of the period, or to participation in the type of discourse that is love poetry. The particular relationship of subservience to the beloved which was cultivated by the Roman authors Propertius and Tibullus in their

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<sup>3</sup> Barthes 1978: 9.

<sup>4</sup> Barthes 1977: 142-148. Kennedy 1993: 80.

<sup>5</sup> Butler 2006 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Berlant 2001.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Sanchez 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Griffin 1985; Wyke 1989; Kennedy 1993: 1-12; Ormand 2009.

poems, for example, not only had resonance within and was defined by the world of poetry, it marked a clear area of social space in their material lives, which were themselves informed by their literary experience. The question of power and its negotiation, whether interpersonal or social, in a literary fantasy or a political reality, was and is of significance in discussing the literary form that is love-poetry.

The above considerations are of importance in my view when considering some of the love poetry of the third and second millennia BC from Mesopotamia. Love poems, thus the thesis behind my approach, present the lover as participating in and helping to form a literary role that is framed as part of a hierarchical social, religious and political system. The lover is cast in an archetypal role, which he or she shares with divine figures who have typified it, whose worship is constituted by rituals celebrating it, and figures of authority, who similarly play or inhabit that role. Royal figures are mentioned relatively frequently in the transmitted love literature we have, acting as an index, thus this interpretation, for the social performative context of the poetry. Lovers play roles throughout Akkadian love poetry, and those roles involve positioning the lover in various relations of power, whether aggressive, submissive or mutual, to the beloved, to the social order, and to the divine world.

## (2) Defining Genre Then and Now

Akkadian love poetry is so rare a literary form that specimens of it have occasionally been heralded as new genres in and of themselves.<sup>9</sup> For this reason we should pause to think a little about what we mean when we talk of genre. Literary genre is a concept defining the range of expectations that the consumer of literature might form of a piece of work due to its subject-matter, linguistic register or formal criteria such as metre or verse structure. Literary theory has reserved some criticism for this concept.<sup>10</sup> Certainly literary genres are not hermetically sealed boxes of characteristics, but it is difficult to imagine approaching literature without making some generic classifications on the basis of what one has already experienced of text.<sup>11</sup> Nowadays, there are mainly formal categories such as tragedy, comedy, epic, lyric, novel; mainly content-related ones such as fiction, fantasy, romance, horror, science-fiction; mainly situational ones such as place or purpose of performance, the places and times where one would expect to encounter certain types of art, related to the function for which verbal art was used in a society. Furthermore, genre is intimately bound up with the notion of character and stereotype, again to be understood as little more than a set of expectations that are associated with a particular type of literary figure in a specific genre: the hero in an epic, the fool in a farce, the lover in a lyric poem, for some obvious examples.

Often it might appear that genres, their sub-genres and indeed super-ordinate categories or “super-genres” only exist as imaginary models to be broken and subverted, a standard which is most clearly defined in the negative.<sup>12</sup> Any account of genre has to be able to encompass its flexibility, to take account of aspects such as genre-subversion, genre-bending and genre-enrichment, to use some recent and not so

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<sup>9</sup> Black 1983; Groneberg 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Frow 2006: 26-27.

<sup>11</sup> Ouyang 2004: 128.

<sup>12</sup> For the term “super-genre” see Hutchinson 2013.

recent terminology.<sup>13</sup> There is also a distinction between the genre rules that are adopted or broken by the author of a work and those that are projected onto it during its reception and consumption, which may in different periods be entirely varied.<sup>14</sup> The main prerequisite for identifying the expectations which the use of a particular genre element might be expected to awake in a recipient, sometimes referred to as the text's "genre ideology", is that we have access to enough samples of literary works that belong to the same category as well as to information about the cultural context in which they were produced or consumed. In the case of modern poetry this is not such a problem because we assume, often wrongly and arrogantly, that we inhabit what is basically [the same world of experience as the author]. When discussing pre-modern poetry we are confronted at first sight by a more alien world, one that needs to be carefully explored before we can pretend to feel at home in it.

There are a number of methods for identifying genre in pre-modern literature. First we can research the specific cultural context in which the literary work was supposed to be consumed. This does not have to be a historical task requiring a large amount of reconstruction, although this process is of course important. Often we can obtain a basic orientation by examining the material conditions of use and transmission, particularly if the works are attached to archaeological artefacts, be they inscriptions or manuscripts, which have their own history and context. We can pay attention to the terminological divisions and categories made by other ancient texts, which frequently themselves need to be decoded and interpreted through careful analysis of use-context. Then we can observe regularities in structure, lexicon, style or themes that seem to occur in a particular type of literature. Clearly, however, the cognitive process of dividing pre-modern literary data into types in the first place is ultimately rooted in our own modern experience of literature, however much we may try to impose controls and limit the variables on our judgments.

This is at the same time an important caveat to be remembered when we try to approach or understand pre-modern literature: investigating the contemporary meaning of a work is inherently connected with the attempt to understand ourselves, whoever we may be. With pre-modern love poetry we are dealing with a literary genre or set of related genres to which we have no direct access. Yet studies of genre and convention in pre-modern love poetry have thrived due to the fact that they have proven relatively easy to identify. In the case of Roman, ancient Greek or medieval Arabic, Persian or Turkish love poetry this is mainly because we have reasonably large numbers of samples with which to work as well as native and contemporary traditions if not of literary criticism then at least of associated disciplines such as rhetoric and grammar.<sup>15</sup>

The poets themselves in these later traditions are also sometimes explicit about the genre definitions they use, such as the Roman poet Ovid who tells us he was preparing to write a military epic in hexameters when Cupid removed a metrical foot from his second line and turned it into an elegiac couplet, the metre of love poetry.<sup>16</sup> Closer to Mesopotamia geographically, in early Arabic poetry the strict application of

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<sup>13</sup> For discussion relating to the world of Roman poetry see Harrison 2007: 10-18.

<sup>14</sup> For paradigmatic examples of the varying reception of Homer depending on time and place see the works reviewed in Burgess 2008.

<sup>15</sup> For early Arabic literary theory see Ouyang 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Ovid *Amores* 1.1, 1-4; Harrison 2007: 7.

formal rules of language, metre and accompanying themes from the earliest attested examples indicates awareness of genre-categories.<sup>17</sup> This was borne out when medieval Arab theoreticians in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century AD/ third century AH started to classify poems according to [the intentions of their poets], as being part of a concrete communicative context. The term used is *ḡaraḍ*, plural *aḡrāḍ*, “aim, purpose”, one of the most usual equivalents to the western category of “genre” in Arabic literary theory, with a focus on dynamic intention in a concrete situation rather than classifying an item as belonging to a category.<sup>18</sup> One of the basic genres from the beginning of Arabic poetry is the *nasīb*, the love poem, frequently lamenting a lost love and emphasising separation from the beloved. For Akkadian love poetry the situation is quite different. Not only do we have very little in the way of explicitly theoretical works that write about literature, which [does not mean that they did not exist] orally, we also have very little poetry that can be assembled under the heading of the love poem.<sup>19</sup>

### (3) Akkadian and Akkadian love poetry: Problems of definition.

The Akkadian language was written in the cuneiform script in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) and Syria between around 2,500 BC as far as the first century AD. At first it was written largely logographically using Sumerian word-signs at sites such as Tell Abu Šalābīkh in Mesopotamia and similarly but more phonetically at Ebla in northern Syria. The use of cuneiform to write Akkadian is thus attested almost over the whole history of the script, which was developed in the late fourth millennium BC probably in order to write Sumerian and other local languages. Akkadian had likely died out some time before the last cuneiform document was written, although precisely how long before is unclear. The persistence of diachronic syntactic change in everyday documents has been held to be evidence that the language was still in use until the second century BC.<sup>20</sup> Certainly from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards it is clear that Aramaic was being used as a lingua franca across Mesopotamia and beyond and that Akkadian was becoming a more learned idiom with prestige associations.<sup>21</sup>

Sumerian on the other hand appears to have died out towards the beginning of the second millennium BC, although it continued in use as the language of learning for

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<sup>17</sup> Eksell 2006: 163.

<sup>18</sup> Eksell 2006: 165. Eksell further comments (ibid. 166) that the focus on the *ḡaraḍ* “aim, intention” of the poet, although this is not the only Arabic concept she discusses in this context, keeps the medieval Arabic notion of genre firmly in the realm of the concrete, contextually based speech act, as opposed to the term “genre” itself, which is regarded by her as being “neutral” in this regard. One should note that this dynamic approach seems superficially different from the critical standpoint which tries to minimise the role of the author's intention, which can never really be known, in the reading process. For texts which typically have no authors, as is the case with the vast majority of Akkadian literature, this is not such a paradox.

<sup>19</sup> Theoretical works of hermeneutics begin to appear in the first millennium BC in the form of commentaries, mainly on omen texts. See Frahm 2011. It is likely that these existed in oral form earlier. The second millennium BC clearly also had a tradition of scholarly hermeneutics based around experimentation with Sumerian poetry as evidenced in productions such as the *Scholars of Uruk* (George 2009: 78-112) and parts of the lexical series *Erimḫuš* which may itself have its origins in commentaries on obscure Sumerian literature (Veldhuis 2014: 27). A reasonably standardized terminology for the generic designation of literary types found in colophons may indicate awareness of genre categories (see below).

<sup>20</sup> Hackl 2011.

<sup>21</sup> For a brief history of the Akkadian language see George 2007. For Aramaic see Gzella 2015.

the rest of the history of cuneiform. If you learned to write, you learned Sumerian in some form or other. The interaction of the Akkadian language with Sumerian ranges from aspects of shared grammar and syntax likely to have been due to prolonged bilingualism in southern Mesopotamia during the third millennium BC to a sharing of cultural material indicative of a lack of distinct cultural barriers and absence of exclusivity in the implementation of different forms of cultural activity and institutions: mixed Sumerian-Akkadian onomastics within families, similar gods housed in the same temples, the use of Sumerian to write Akkadian, similar phraseology for everyday activities in different languages are some of the markers of this multilingual situation. The fascinating amalgam that is Sumero-Akkadian culture has yet to be meaningfully comprehended as a cultural form. It is not to be assumed that Akkadian poetic forms are always based on Sumerian models, although this often seems to be the easiest interpretation of the data. From a methodological perspective Akkadian poetic forms need to be investigated on their own, before any comparison with Sumerian should be made.

Another distinction which one needs to bear in mind when approaching Akkadian poetry is the division into the dialects of Babylonian in southern Iraq and Assyrian in the north. Babylonian seems to have the main linguistic affinity with the dialect of the language spoken in the south also during the third millennium BC, but it is during the earlier part of the second millennium BC that Babylonian emerges as the main literary vehicle of the Akkadian language, along with the territorial ascendancy of dynasties rooted in the city-states of southern and central Iraq.<sup>22</sup> The Assyrian dialect, in which "literary" productions are initially limited to popular incantations or spells but also royal inscriptions with some Babylonian influence, became the language of the administration of Empire with the rise of Assyrian imperial ambition after the first half of the second millennium BC, but to an extent always remained a slightly parochial dialect, even if the great Assyrian cities of Assur, Nimrud and Nineveh were centres of learning where literary texts, frequently from Babylonia, were collected and studied.

It is not clear whether there was a genre of love poetry as such in Akkadian or whether other generic categories had priority within which songs to do with love can be isolated as a particular sub-category that may or may not have meant anything in ancient times.<sup>23</sup> A Middle Assyrian tablet dating from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC excavated at Assur (modern Qalat Šerqat) in northern Mesopotamia preserves a list of the first lines (*incipits*) of numerous songs or poetic compositions (some 152 preserved) in the Akkadian language, some of which, but by no means all, are associated with love themes.<sup>24</sup> This tablet has subscripts classifying groups of these

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<sup>22</sup> For the linguistic affinities of third millennium BC Akkadian see Hilgert 2002; Hasselbach 2007.

<sup>23</sup> General overviews of Akkadian love poetry can be found at Westenholz 1995; Musche 1999; Klein and Sefati 2008. Recent editions of Akkadian love poems can be found on the website SEAL ("Sources of Early Akkadian Literature") maintained by M.P. Streck (Leipzig) and N. Wasserman (Jerusalem). See now Wasserman 2016 for an accessible monograph collecting, editing and translating 34 Akkadian love poems from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC.

<sup>24</sup> Ebeling 1919: 269-276, no. 158 (German translation: Hecker 2013: 54-63, reference to translation courtesy M. Worthington; Wasserman 2016: 195-234). The reason for compiling this list is unknown. It might be a library register, although there is a strong emphasis on the musical accompaniment of the poems. B. Groneberg supposes it might even have been a list of songs to be performed in a ritual (2003: 58). N. Wasserman (2016: 21) sees a public compositional and perhaps performative context for many of the poems catalogued, but also characterises the list as in some sense belonging to the official

song-titles under certain categories, and is thus of fundamental importance for research into the native understanding of poetic genre.<sup>25</sup> One section, containing 55 titles, deals according to its subscript with so-called “Breast(-songs)”, Akkadian *irātu* (plural of *irtu* “breast, chest”), which are again divided into further sub-sections according to criteria which clearly have to do with their musical accompaniment or performance, with both string and reed instruments being mentioned.<sup>26</sup> Could *irtu* have been an ancient genre term for love poetry?<sup>27</sup> The term is currently restricted to the second millennium, seemingly having dropped out of use in the first millennium BC, and its usage, summarised below, does not seem to indicate that it would have encompassed all types of poetry that we might associate with love.

These *incipits* listed on the tablet from Assur give a good overview of the types of themes, language and lexicon that characterize Akkadian love poetry, even if they are all that remain of the poems. Typical topics are the laughter of lover or beloved, a garden (of desire), night-time, play, love-making, the wilderness; typical poetic figures include the comparison of love to precious metals, stones, honey or aromatics, the comparison of genitalia to fruits; typical lexical items beyond those associated with the above topics and figures include voluptuousness, lustiness, shining and blooming.<sup>28</sup> The mention of a king and deities in some of the first lines may or may not indicate a more formal or ceremonial setting for some of the songs (see below on the “Divine Love Lyrics”), but on the whole it is difficult to imagine what the context for these songs was supposed to have been, whether courtly, cultic, or popular, as it is also difficult to fathom the function of the larger list of song-titles preserved in the tablet.<sup>29</sup>

Other songs listed on the same tablet by first line, but not called *irtum*, are also connected with love. The whole poem of one of them appears on a Middle Babylonian (ca. 1500-1100 BC) tablet in the British Museum, which is probably from southern Iraq and has a colophon indicating the name of the series of which the song formed a part and a catch-line indicating the next song in the series.<sup>30</sup> This series is called *mārumma rā'imni* “the boy who loves me (lit. us)”. The two songs belonging to it appear in the same order on the catalogue of song-titles from Assur, and all have to do with the love between the goddess Ištar and the shepherd Dumuzi.<sup>31</sup> These are

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sphere as opposed to more popular compositions that have survived but are not listed in this catalogue, as well as by comparison to other catalogues of first-lines which have a more “private” character (ibid. 205). See further Limet 1996.

<sup>25</sup> Shehata 2009: 10, 308.

<sup>26</sup> Shehata 2009: 328-330.

<sup>27</sup> Thus the central contention of Groneberg 1999, although other Akkadian terms are preserved that are used to characterise love-related compositions (Wasserman 2016: 20).

<sup>28</sup> Groneberg 2003: 68-69.

<sup>29</sup> The tablet containing this list was allegedly excavated in a secondary layer (Neo-Assyrian, first millennium BC) in the south-west court of the Assur temple along with a number of other tablets according to B. Groneberg (2003: 58 with fn. 45). For this archive see Pedersén 1985: 31-42. However, note the cautious comments of J.A. Black (1983: 25 fn. 3) regarding the tablet’s missing excavation number. The notion of a “Library of Tiglath-Pileser I” (1114-1076 BC) referred to in Black 1983 and Groneberg 2003 has now been given up as an illusion of modern scholarship (see Freydank 1991: 94-97).

<sup>30</sup> Black 1983; Wasserman 2016: 110-114, dated to the Late Old Babylonian period ibid. 110.

<sup>31</sup> The tablet is numbered BM 47507 (Black 1983). The Poem title is on obv. 1 *eramma rē'ū* [*ħarmi Ištarma*] “come in to me shepherd, lover of Ištar” (= Ebeling 1919, no. 158 i 6); the catchline indicating the next song in the series is found ibid. rev. 40: *uršānam rē'ā azammurma* “I will sing of the brave

given the generic category *zamārū* “songs” on the tablet from Assur rather than being any particular type of song such as an *irtu*.<sup>32</sup> It would thus seem that the *irtu* is not necessarily just a category denoting love-poetry according to content, as these songs are also love-songs, but are not called *irtu*.

The term *irtum*, with final –m, is further used on another list of 5 poem *incipits* on another tablet written in Middle Babylonian (ca 1500-1100 BC) script kept in the British Museum, one of which at least must date from or before the reign of the Late Old Babylonian king Ammišaduqa (1646-1626 BC) due to his being mentioned.<sup>33</sup> B. Groneberg thinks that the subscript “5 *ir-túm*” on this tablet means that this is one *irtum*-song of five lines, however, rather than what might seem a more natural interpretation that the tablet contains five *irtum*-songs.<sup>34</sup> The following two lines, which are also concerned with love, have the subscript *meḥrum*, “antiphony, (choral) response”, which may refer to a refrain to the lines that went before. This might support Groneberg’s interpretation that this tablet contains one extended song, but does not have to, and it seems a stronger contention that the *meḥrum* is the antiphony to all the songs listed previously on the tablet by their first lines.<sup>35</sup> In this case the particular *irtum*-song, which specifically mentions Ištar and an Old Babylonian king, may have had a ceremonial context within the wider field of the so-called “sacred marriage”, although it is entirely unclear what that entailed (see below).

A further four-columned tablet from the late Old Babylonian period, now held in Geneva, also contains a colophon at the end of the tablet mentioning “4 *irātum* of the series [where has my beloved (gone)? He is precious]”.<sup>36</sup> The first line of the first poem on column one is identical to the name of the “series” mentioned in the colophon, *ēš rāmī šūqur*. The tablet is badly broken, but one can tell that the individual *irātum* are likely to have consisted of more than one stanza each. The first column contains 5 stanzas over 26 preserved lines, although the tablet is likely to have contained a few more lines in each column. The tablet’s first editor, B. Groneberg, makes the caveat that the term *irātum* might only apply to the poems on the obverse, but it would be usual for the colophon to refer to all the text on the tablet.<sup>37</sup> The preserved text is spoken by a woman and mentions a location in the wilderness, the land beyond human civilization, where the lover has been made to go out to, enveloping the beloved in laughter and catching a dove, apparently a figure for sexual relations. Preserved on the reverse is a dedication to the king Ammiditana (1683-1640 BC), with a prayer to Ištar to grant him life and an interesting address to a presumed audience finishes the last poem, if not the whole collection:

*limdā limdā šitālā*

Learn! learn! Ask each other

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shepherd” (= Ebeling 1919, no. 158 i 7); series title *mārumma rā'imni* “the boy who loves me” *ibid.* rev. 42 (= Ebeling 1919, no. 158 i 43). Black 1983: 28. E. Frahm (2009: 144) has cautiously suggested a further fragmentary poem on a Middle Assyrian tablet from Assur as a candidate for a whole song corresponding to an unknown song-title from this catalogue. The poem seems to be a duet between a king and a woman and is characterised by floral imagery.

<sup>32</sup> Ebeling 1919, no. 158 ii 43.

<sup>33</sup> Finkel 1988.

<sup>34</sup> Groneberg 2003: 66.

<sup>35</sup> Shehata 2009: 329.

<sup>36</sup> iv 16': 4 *irātum* (17') *iškar ēš rāmī* (18') *šūqur*. Groneberg 1999: 181. Shehata 2009: 328. Wasserman 2016: 104-109 with further literature.

<sup>37</sup> Groneberg 1999: 177.



*mā šurrâs|su| inhē| uya*  
*u šeher râmī*

"Are sighs of woe its beginning|  
And is my loving small?"<sup>38</sup> |

The plural imperatives may but do not have to suggest a context of public performance.<sup>39</sup> A subscript immediately after this and before the main colophon uses a Sumerian technical term (*ĝiš.gi<sub>4</sub>.ĝál.bi*) which is usually interpreted as meaning “its antiphon”, as in the Akkadian *meḥrum* we saw above, probably referring to a refrain possibly even spoken by a chorus.<sup>40</sup> Groneberg wonders whether it might be a feature of this type of song that it contains some kind of dialogue, in which case a number of other Old Babylonian love poems could belong to this category.<sup>41</sup> It may well be that it is simply the primary topic of love that qualifies a song as an *irtum*, although it is suggestive that both of these Old Babylonian examples contain mention of the king and of the goddess Ištar. A solely cultic or ceremonial application of songs called *irtum* cannot be ruled out, but even in this case, the king and the goddess or the goddess and her divine lover may serve as models or archetypes for human love generally.<sup>42</sup>

D. Shehata has argued that the label *irtum* may have something to do with the manner of performance.<sup>43</sup> The various sub-categories of *irtum* referred to on the tablet from Assur certainly seem to denote different musical instruments, so it is possible that *irtum* in fact refers to the manner of singing, or accompaniment by particular wind or string-instruments.<sup>44</sup> This is an attractive idea, but does not necessarily negate the premise that the *irtum* was a category particularly associated with love poetry, as all of the songs known so far which are given the title *irtum* appear to be love poems.

As we shall see, the topics and words of love seem to be consistent across different sub-types of love poetry and across Akkadian literature in general when love is the theme. In this case it may be legitimate to bracket various different types of poetry under the term *irtum*, but we should bear in mind that this is a terminology that we do not understand and which may be related to musical aspects of the performance context that we are not usually informed about. Content, structure, musical accompaniment and performative situation may all have played a role in defining the applicability of the term.

Looking at those poems which are primarily concerned with love from a modern analytical perspective, rather than trying to understand the ancient terminology on its own terms, it seems useful to distinguish three basic types, according to the alleged purpose for which the poem was written, thus in the sense of the primary word used to

<sup>38</sup> As M. Worthington points out to me, these lines do not formally have to be translated as questions. I would find it unusual if *šeher râmī* “my loving is small” were not a rhetorical question to be answered in the negative. Possibly understand: “my sighs are its beginning, but is my loving small?” N. Wasserman (2016: 107) translates “(though) its beginning is sighs of woe, still young is my love.”

<sup>39</sup> Groneberg 1999: 90; Wasserman 2016: 109 (more cautiously).

<sup>40</sup> For discussion of this term see Shehata 2009: 344-347.

<sup>41</sup> Groneberg 1999: 190, mentioning the texts in Held 1961 “The Faithful Lover”; Lambert 1966-67 the “Divine Love-Lyrics of Abi-ešuh”; Sigrist and Westenholz 2008 “The Love-Lyrics of Rim-Sin”. However, the love-lyrics of Abi-ešuh and Rim-Sin seem to belong more to the state cult than does the Dialogue of the Faithful Lover.

<sup>42</sup> Groneberg 2003: 69.

<sup>43</sup> Shehata 2009: 237-238.

<sup>44</sup> Shehata 2009: 344-347.

describe a poem's genre in Arabic literary theory, the assumed *ḡaraḍ* "aim, intention" of its poet: (1) poetic spells of love magic, which are designed to have an effect on a beloved as an object of desire; (2) cultic poems, belonging to the type of so-called "divine love lyrics" which appear to be articulated by divine beings or their human representatives as part of state ritual; (3) personal or so-called "secular" love-poetry, which appears to have none of the above magical or divine aspects, and is thus a negatively defined category.<sup>45</sup> In the following we shall look at some of the poems from these categories to see if it makes any sense to maintain them, and whether they are bound together by any superordinate features of language or context. We will try to explore the extent to which the modern notion of role-play within social power-relationships, whether they be gender or politically based, can be of use in understanding the ancient social institutions in which these compositions had functional roles. Thus we will ask what characters, or stereotypes, are to be found in poems associated with love in Akkadian literature, and what are our expectations of them.

### (3) Love Magic:

The earliest poem related to love in the Akkadian language is an incantation from Kiš (modern Tell Uhaimir), about 18km to the north-east of Babylon dating to the 23<sup>rd</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC. This almost completely preserved clay tablet was excavated in 1930 by a British archaeological expedition, and is now kept in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Due to a lack of precision in excavation technique and recording methods, the archaeological context in which the tablet was excavated is not known sufficiently well to be able to make any inferences about its function. Considerations based partially on the allegedly poor quality of the script have suggested to some scholars that it might be an exercise tablet for someone learning to write.<sup>46</sup> The function of the text, rather than the tablet on which it was found, is almost certainly as a spell designed to attract the amorous attention of a beloved. In parts it even appears to involve the verbalization of a ritual designed for that effect. The ritual may have been performed and the incantation uttered by a third party, depending on one's interpretation of the speaker's perspective.

There have been numerous editions and translations of this poem, which has some claim to being the oldest attested love-poem in the world.<sup>47</sup> It is, however, an incantation or spell connected with love and should be grouped under that rubric. The most recent version, excluding that contained in Lambert 2013 which was completed

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<sup>45</sup> Compare the typology of Sigris and Westenholz (2008: 667-668) "(1) poems with deities personifying the role of lovers, (2) poems with kings acting as lovers of the goddess Inana, or less frequently their consorts, (3) poems with ordinary mortals performing the roles of lovers". This grouping pays less attention to the use-context of the poems, more attention to the identities of the participants in the discourse, and may ignore or group elsewhere the category of love-magic incantations. For further comments on genre, particularly the difficulties of sustaining generic boundaries across Akkadian literature and distinguishing between "secular" and "religious" contexts see Wasserman 2016: 20-21.

<sup>46</sup> Westenholz and Westenholz 1977: 198-199, where the presence of a small vertical wedge after certain signs is also held to be indicative of a school tablet, on the basis of a comparandum from Ešnunna. The poor writing on its own may just as well be an indication of a writer who does not write very often, but it is difficult to say. Contrast the remarks of Wasserman 2016: 242.

<sup>47</sup> Gelb 1970: 7-12; Westenholz and Westenholz 1977: 198-219; Groneberg 2001: 103-105; Lambert 2013: 31-32.

in the 1980s, is the online edition by N. Wassermann for the project “Sources of Early Akkadian Literature”, which has now appeared in print.<sup>48</sup> The text is presented here in transliteration (sign by sign) and transcription, in which an attempt is made to indicate the grammatical forms, which are very much a matter of interpretation.<sup>49</sup> References to some of the main differences in previous renditions are given in footnotes:

1	<sup>d</sup> EN.KI <i>ir-e-ma-am</i>	(1)	<i>Ḫayya ir'emam yira'am</i>
2	<i>è-ra-[?]-am</i>		<i>ir'emum mara' 'Ištar</i>
3	<i>ir-e-mu-um</i> DUMU <sup>d</sup> INANA		<i>in sāqēsa yuθθab</i>
4	<i>in za-ge-[sa' u'-ša'-a]b</i>		
5	<i>in ru-úḫ-t[i ga-na]-ak-tim</i>	(2)	<i>in ruḡti kanaktim</i>
6	<i>ú-da-ra wa-a[r-d]a-da</i>		<i>yūtarrā wardatā</i>
7	<i>da-me-iq-da tu-úḫ-da-na-ma</i>		<i>damiqtā tuḫtannamā</i>
8	<i>ki-ri-súm tu-ur<sub>4</sub>-da</i>	(3)	<i>kirīsum turdā</i>
9	<i>tu-ur<sub>4</sub>-da-ma a-na</i> <sup>giš</sup> KIRI <sub>6</sub>		<i>turdāma ana kirīm</i>
10	<i>ru-úḫ-ti ga-na-ak-tim</i>		<i>ruḡti kanaktim tiptatqā</i>
11	<i>ti-ip-da-ad-ga</i>		
12	<i>a-ḫu-uz<sub>7</sub>(EŠ) ba-ki ša ru-ga-tim</i>	(4)	<i>āḫuz pāki θa ruḡātīm</i>
13	<i>a-ḫu-uz<sub>7</sub> bu-ra-ma-ti</i>		<i>āḫuz burramāti 'ēniḫki</i>
14	<i>e-ni-ki</i>		<i>āḫuz ūrki θa θīnātīm</i>
15	<i>a-ḫu-uz<sub>7</sub> ur<sub>4</sub>-ki</i>		<i>ašḫiḫ kirīs Su'en</i>
16	<i>ša ši-na-tim</i>		<i>abtuq šarbātam yūmissa</i>
17	<i>a-ás-ḫi-iḫ ki-ri-ís</i>		
18	<sup>d</sup> EN.ZU		
19	<i>ab-tùq</i> <sup>giš</sup> ÁSAL		
Rev.			
20	<i>u-me-ís-sa</i>		
21	<i>du-ri-ni i-da-as-ga-ri-ni</i>	(5)	<i>dūrinni ittaskarinnī</i>
22	<i>ki</i> SIPA <i>ì-du-ru ša-nam</i>		<i>kī rā'ium idurru šānam</i>
23	<i>ÙZ ga-lu-ma-sa</i> U <sub>8</sub> SILA <sub>4</sub> -[za]		<i>enzum kalūmazza</i>
24	<i>a-da-núm mu-ra-as</i>		<i>laḫrum puḫāzza</i>
			<i>atānum mūras</i>
25	<i>se-er-gu-a i-da-su</i>		
26	<i>Ì ù ti-bu-ut-tum</i>	(6)	<i>sergu 'ā idāsu</i>

<sup>48</sup> SEAL 5.0.5.1; Wassermann 2016: 150-155. See also CDLI (P285640) (credit Englund, Wagensooner, Brumfield, CDLI Staff).

<sup>49</sup> Assyriologists may note that this transliteration attempts to represent the tripartite phonology of the sibilants in Old Akkadian and does not use the convention which deploys [š] for a sibilant represented by signs using S which corresponds to a later Old Babylonian /š/. This is both transliterated and normalized as /s/. The transliteration and normalization [z] = phonetic /tʰ/ is used where the signs using Z are deployed, even when they correspond to a later /s/, and the transliteration [š] is used when Š-signs are used to write the interdental affricate /tʰ/ (= θ). Logographically written words containing sibilants are reconstructed etymologically where possible. On the other hand, no attempt has been made at a fully phonetic representation of the approximate sounds, for example of probably glottalised sibilants such as /tʰʰ/, corresponding to the usual transliteration [š] written with signs using Z. See Hasselbach 2005: 95-97.

27	<i>sa-ap-da-su</i>		<i>samnum u tibuttum saptāsu</i>
28	<i>a-za-am Ḫ in ga-ti-su</i>		<i>azzam samnim in qātīsu</i>
29	<i>a-za-am i-ri-nim in bu-ti-su</i>		<i>azzam erēnim in būdīsu</i>
30	<i>ir-e-mu ú-da-bi-bu-si-ma</i>	(7)	<i>ir'emū yudabbibūsīma</i>
31	<i>ù is-ku-nu-si a-na mu-ḫu-tim</i>		<i>u yiskunūsi ana muḫḫūtīm</i>
32	<i>a-ḫu-uz<sub>7</sub> ba-ki ša da-ti</i>		<i>āḫuz pāki ša dādī</i>
33	<sup>d</sup> INANA <i>ù<sup>d</sup> iš-ḫa-ra</i>	(8)	<i>Iṯtar u Išḫara utammēki</i>
34	<i>ù-dam-me-ki</i>		<i>adi šawārsu u šawārki</i>
35	<i>a-ti ša-wa-ar-su</i>		<i>lā  <sup>ḫ</sup>etamdā lā tapaššahīni</i>
36	<i>ù ša-wa-ar-ki</i>		
37	<i>la e-dam-da</i>		
38	<i>la da-ba-ša-ḫi-ni</i>		

- (1) Ea Loves the **|Ir'emū|**  
The Ir'emū, son of Iṯtar  
Sits<sup>?</sup> between her<sup>?</sup> thighs<sup>50</sup>
- (2) *In/by means of the sap* (lit. “spit”) of the *kanaktum*-tree  
The two girls *are being woken up*<sup>51</sup>  
“Beautiful (girls),<sup>52</sup> you are both blooming
- (3) To the garden you both descended  
You both descended to the garden”  
They both *drank* the sap (lit. “spit”) of the *kanaktum*-tree<sup>53</sup>
- (4) **|I (hereby) grasp your mouth|** of spit<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> “Her” is restored, as is most of the verb. Groneberg (2001: 103) restores the verb as *uṭāb*, “makes pleasant, happy”, and the prepositional phrase as *in sagīsa* “in her shrine”, giving the translation: “erfreut in ihrem Heiligtum”. One might have expected *uṭābši* “makes her happy” in that case. *sagū* “shrine” is attested at least once in Old Babylonian (CAD S 27). *sāqu* “thigh” is not attested so early, except in this instance (CAD S 169). The choice of image obviously makes a difference to the tenor of the poem.

<sup>51</sup> Understanding *ú-da-ra* as 3rd dual present Dt-stem of \**êrum* “to be awake” (*yūtarrā*). Admittedly the Dt-stem is not attested for this verb, although the D-stem may be (AHw 247; CAD E 326). Groneberg (2001: 104 fn. 41) understands the verb to be from *turru* “turn (transitive)”, but translates as a passive “ist geleitet”, with the subject being the Ir'emū, which is an unusual sense for the D-stem of this verb, in addition to the fact that the verb would have to be ventive (*yutarram*), whereas final *-m* is mostly signaled in this text. The D-stems of *warū* “lead” *tarū* “to fetch, lead away” are not attested. Wasserman similarly (SEAL 5.05.1; 2016: 244) has “turning”, but again apparently intransitively with a ventive. Derivation from *watārum* “to increase” has also been proposed (Lambert 1992: 53). A secure solution is not in sight.

<sup>52</sup> Groneberg (2001: 104 fn. 42) interprets *damīqtā* as a P3f stative “they are beautiful”, usually *damqā*. Here the form is understood as vocative, with Wasserman (SEAL 5.05.1; 2016: 244) and CDLI.

<sup>53</sup> Verb highly suspect, here understood as 3<sup>rd</sup> f. dual perf. Gt stem of *patāqu* B “to drink” (with CDLI “you are drinking”, Wasserman “you *have drunk*(?)”), although understood as 2<sup>nd</sup> dual), which is only otherwise attested in the first millennium BC, albeit in two literary texts (CAD P 275) where it could conceivably belong to an archaic linguistic register. The 3<sup>rd</sup> (or 2<sup>nd</sup>?) dual verbal prefix *ti-* is possibly archaic here. Other translations have used *batāqu* “to chop off”, or *patāqu* A “to cast, to mould”. Wasserman (2016: 243) and CDLI translate the previous verb “descend” as an imperative addressed to the two women.

- I (hereby) grasp your speckled eyes  
 I (hereby) grasp your vulva of urine<sup>55</sup>  
 I (hereby) jump into the garden of Sîn (the moon-god)  
 I (hereby) cut down the poplar at its time<sup>56</sup>
- (5) *Encircle* me among the boxwood trees<sup>57</sup>  
 Like the shepherd *encircles* the flock  
 Like the goat her kid  
 Like the ewe her lamb  
 Like the donkey mare her foal
- (6) *Bejewelled* are his arms<sup>58</sup>  
 Oil and a harp are his lips  
 A cruse of oil is in his hand  
 A cruse of cedar(-oil) is on his shoulder
- (7) The Ir’emus have been talking to her  
 They have made her go wild  
 I (hereby) grasp your mouth (full) of caresses
- (8) (By) Ištar and Išhara I conjure you  
 As long as his neck and your neck  
 Are not entwined, you will not rest.

The literary structure of this poem has been well analyzed by B. Groneberg, so remarks here will be kept to a minimum. The verse structure of the poem is fairly consistent, with short lines of verse, which largely do not correspond to the lines on

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<sup>54</sup> This and the following verbs are perhaps to be understood as performative preterites (suggestion A.R. George, also Wasserman 2016: 245), which would support the notion that the speaker is manipulating a figurine of some kind representing the beloved. Westenholz and Westenholz (1977: 208) understand *ša rûqâtîm* “which is far away”. To be understood as a writing of the old Semitic phoneme \*/ġ/ before a back-vowel, later amalgamated with /ħ/ and /ʕ/ (thus from *ruʕtu* “spit”). For the fate of \*/ġ/ in Akkadian see Kogan 2001; 2002.

<sup>55</sup> There is no reason to think this phrase represents a “change of sentiment” with Lambert (1987: 34), as the urine is simply mentioned as something that characterizes the vulva.

<sup>56</sup> For the suggestion of this understanding of *yūmissa* see Groneberg (2001: 104 fn. 47). Westenholz and Westenholz 1977: 209, followed by Wasserman 2016: 245, suggest “for her day”, i.e. the lover’s day, which is attested in one other love poem. The poplar tree is something the lover wants to reach in the Sumerian Dumuzi-Inana poem R (A) 24, (C) 12’ (Sefati 1998: 237), which was written down some 400 years later than this poem.

<sup>57</sup> Understanding this and *i-du-ru* in line 22 as a form of an otherwise unattested verb \**dwr* “to go around, encircle, protect”, the root of which is preserved in *dūru* “wall” (Westenholz and Westenholz 1977: 208; Wasserman 2016: 245-246 with further literature). Alternatively to be understood as *tūrinni* from \**tʕr* “to turn (intransitive)”. However, the intransitive sense “turn to me” is difficult to accommodate to the transitive meaning needed for *iturru* in the next sentence, which would have to be the same verb, but which has the intransitive form. See Lambert 1987: 35. *i-da-az-ga-ri-ni* has also been interpreted as a verbal form, S2f Ntn-stem of \**zkr*, meaning “keep talking to me” (Groneberg 2001: 105 fn. 49; Wassermann 2016: 246).

<sup>58</sup> Foster 2005: 68 translates as “his arms are two round bundles of fruit”, using *šerkum* “clump of fruit”, although it is difficult to understand the origin of the weak consonantal ending in this case. The word *serg/kū* is only attested here in Akkadian, and its meaning “adorned” is reconstructed etymologically from Ethiopic *tasargawa* “to be adorned” (AHw 1216a, CAD Š/3, 102b). This is not the most secure method for elucidating meaning, it must be admitted.

the tablet, using two or three stress beats and a weak caesura in the middle of each. The grouping of the lines into stanzas varies according to the section of the poem. As divided here the poem starts with three three-line stanzas (verses 1-3), which appear to set the scene with a mythological introduction mentioning the god Ea (*Hayya*), the Ir'emu (sometimes translated as "love-charm" or "cupid"), two women and a garden, presumably spoken by a ritualist; two five-line stanzas in which an incantation is recited possibly over a substitute, maybe a doll or even a dog,<sup>59</sup> and an address is made directly to the woman, possibly spoken by the ritual client and evoking the garden along with floral and faunal imagery (verses 4-5); one four-line stanza setting out the beauty of the ritual client, possibly spoken by the ritualist (6); and it returns at the end to two three-line stanzas (7-8), in which the ritualist addresses the woman directly, observes the effect of the Ir'emu mentioned above, reprises the words of the incantation turning the mouth of spit into a mouth of caresses, invokes the two love-goddesses Ištar (Aθtar) and Išhara, who may also be the two women mentioned earlier on, and possibly manipulates figurines of the lovers-to-be, entwining their necks. Despite falling into sections possibly spoken by different actors but certainly projected from differently focalized perspectives, the composition shows a remarkable degree of poetic unity.

A specific framework of associations is evoked by beginning the poem with the god Ea. This is the realm of problems that need to be solved. Ea is, at least in later incantation literature, specifically the god who finds solutions. There is some debate as to the precise nature of the next figure to be introduced, the Ir'emum, who, as part of a group of such entities, is going to play a role in solving the problem at hand, namely that the attentions of a woman need to be won by a man. The Ir'emu-beings, the word is a proper noun derived from the Semitic root \*r'm "to love", are attested in other love incantations, and the contexts have been reviewed by B. Groneberg. She comes to the conclusion that they are jewels special to Ištar, goddess of sex and war, which have magic qualities as love-charms.<sup>60</sup> Other interpretations focus more on the agency attributed to these beings, seeing them as cupids or personifications of sexual attraction.<sup>61</sup> The two interpretations do not need to be mutually exclusive, with the cupid sometimes appearing as or lending its allure to the objects associated with the goddess of love.

Although designed as a spell to assert control over another, to subject that person to the will of the suitor, the poem contains a number of features that recur in Akkadian love poetry: The dripping liquids of oil, sap and spit, the garden with the fragrances and aromas of its trees.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, it might well be asked how much other types of Akkadian poetry concerned with love were also designed to serve the functional context of domination. Furthermore this is a theme or sub-text to love-poetry more generally, thinking for example of the struggle not to *objectify the other* in words, as expressed by Adrienne Rich's poem we cited earlier. From objectification it is only a small step to control and under the wrong circumstances to abuse. The darker shades of common cultural discourses of love are all too easy to identify. The perspective of the suitor seeking possession of his beloved woman in this earliest of love poems is

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<sup>59</sup> Groneberg 2007: 101.

<sup>60</sup> Groneberg 2001: 110-112. For jewelry as a metaphor for sexual organs in ancient Near Eastern literature more generally see Westenholz 1992: 383-386.

<sup>61</sup> Lambert 2013: 32; George 2009: 53.

<sup>62</sup> Westenholz 1992: 382-383.

quite clearly male, given that the pronouns used in Akkadian for the person who is object of the actions of the ritualist or the ritual client are consistently female. The ritual client is described as emanating attractiveness, he is not acted upon by another in the poem. The language used is specifically dominating.<sup>63</sup> However, some subsequent Akkadian love incantations are projected specifically from a female perspective, in fact using language that appears to be asymmetrically reciprocal with the language used here.

A tablet with a series of incantations some of which are related to love was excavated at Isin (modern Iṣan Baḥrīyat in southern Iraq) in 1984, probably to be dated to the reign of the Old Babylonian king Samsuiluna (1750-1712 BC), some 400 years later than the tablet from Kiš we have just looked at.<sup>64</sup> It was found broken in half in a closed vessel filled with sand, built into the wall of the house of a professional lamentation-singer (*gala-maḥ*). This immediate archaeological context strongly suggests that there was something special about the tablet. Consideration of the contents, a series of incantations designed to gain power over other individuals sometimes by winning their love, suggests that the tablet had been disposed of in this way either in order to disarm its magic in some way, or to hide evidence for the use of aggressive magic.<sup>65</sup> The first Akkadian language incantation of the group appears to be addressed by a woman to a man and contains language that is strikingly similar to that of the love-incantation from Kiš.

IB 1554, 9-22

*elli'at kalbim šūmi... emšūtim*  
*mīḥiṣ pānim šipir tūrti īnim*  
*amtaḥaṣ muḥḥaka uštanni tēmka*  
*šuknam tēmka ana tēmīya*  
*šuknam milikka ana milkīya*  
*akallāka kīma Ištar iklū Dumuzi*  
*Siraš ukassū šātīša*

the spittle of the dog, of thirst<sup>?</sup>, hunger  
 a blow in the face, the work of turning the eye  
 I struck your head, I changed your mind  
 Add your mind to my mind  
 Add your thought to my thought  
 I am restraining||you like Ištar restrained|Dumuzi  
 (Like) Siraš (beer-deity) binds her drinkers

*uktassīka ina pīya ša šarātim*  
*ina ūrīya ša šīnātim*  
*ina pīya ša ru'ātīm*  
*ina ūrīya ša šīnātim*

I have bound you with my hairy<sup>?</sup> mouth<sup>66</sup>  
 with my vulva of urine  
 with my mouth of spit  
 with my vulva of urine

*āy illik nakratum ina šērīka*  
*rabiṣ kalbum rabiṣ šaḥium*  
*atta ritabbiṣ ina ḥallīya*

May a female enemy not approach you  
 the dog is lying down, the pig is lying down  
 You (too), keep lying down in my thighs!

<sup>63</sup> Wasserman (2016: 52) comments that the scene "is not far from rape".

<sup>64</sup> IB 1554, Wilcke 1985. Wasserman 2016: 257-260.

<sup>65</sup> See the analysis of J.A. Scurlock (1989-90), who sees the tablet as collection of different incantations. Groneberg (2007: 100-106) sees all of the 9 incantations with subscripts on the tablet as combining to form a single larger ritual procedure designed to ward off the magic of a love-rival and at the same time assure oneself of the potency of the beloved. However, the characterization of the whole group in the final colophon as "incantation(s) of a potsherd at the crossroads" (Wilcke 1985: 191, 204, 205, l. 124) might indicate the sort of use context that the spells of this collection might have had: short (aggressive love-)magic spells for practical purposes.

<sup>66</sup> Lambert 1987: 35 prefers it to be a "mouth of winds", using a rare fem. pl. of *šāru* "wind". However, this is in my view the vulva, again.

Despite being punctuated by minimal ritual instructions, the incantation continues until it reaches a subscript in line 37, which identifies the foregoing lines as a love incantation, and thus most likely a single unified composition. Here there are no mythological niceties in the manner of trips to the garden or aromatic incense-trees, this is a straightforward spell as part of a ritual to gain power over a beloved. The same images are used in lines 17-20 to demonstrate this taking of possession as are used in lines 12-16 of the Old Akkadian incantation from Kiš, but in this poem they are directed from woman to man. The usage is not symmetrically reciprocal, however: the woman uses her vulva to take hold of the man, she does not bind him by taking hold of his genitals, as the man “took hold” of the woman’s genitals in the love incantation from Kiš. We may ask if this is the voice of a lusty, self-confident woman using magic, particularly the power residing in her genitalia, to gain the attentions of a man.<sup>67</sup> This may be, but the final four lines before the subscript are clearly addressed to a woman, as identified by the gender of the enclitic pronoun, presumably by a man, possibly even the specific man who is directly addressed by name in line 30.<sup>68</sup>

IB 1554, 30-36

*lū ālikā purīdāka Erra-bāni*  
*qablāka limmušā*  
*lū rēdū šerḫānūka*

let your (m.) legs get walking, Erra-bani,  
 let your (m.) hips move  
 let your (m.) sinews follow on

*liḫdū libbūki*  
*liḫšuša kabtattaki*  
*lūbi kīma kalbim*  
*kīma šumunnim ḫubbušāki ē tatbukīm*

may your (f.) insides rejoice  
 may your (f.) liver be joyful  
 may I swell up like a dog  
 like a halter-rope (are) your (f.) two  
 humps, don’t waste (them), please.<sup>69</sup>

It is uncertain whether we should imagine some sort of dialogue going on with male and female actors within the framework of the ritual. Another possibility is that the

<sup>67</sup> Groneberg (2007: 110) thinks that this passage is to be understood in the context of incantations against dog-bites, which sometimes show a similar language and imagery to parts of this text. The addressee would be a substitute for the man, which she tentatively assumes to be a fish referred to in a ritual interjection (l. 23, Groneberg 2007: 107 fn. 55). The speaker would be speaking through the medium of a dog (Groneberg 2007: 101), using the imagery of the dog’s vulva to bewitch the object of her desire. The potency of intercourse between dog and bitch is, according to Groneberg, a central analogy of love-magic, and the image of the male dog’s penis being held fast by the bitch’s vulva does indeed recur in cultic love poetry from the first millennium BC (“divine love lyrics” Lambert 1975: 104, iii 7; Groneberg 2007: 91) and in potency incantations (Biggs 1967: 33).

<sup>68</sup> It is possible that each of the sections punctuated by the ritual instructions is a self-contained incantation, as interpreted by Scurlock, but even this analysis does not obviate the problem of the switch in gender between the speakers in lines 30-36.

<sup>69</sup> *ḫu-bu-ú-ša-ki* = *ḫubbušāki* (nom. dual), with unexplained plene-spelling in the second syllable: Wilcke (1985: 201, 207) “Wölbungen”; Wassermann (SEAL 5.1.14.6; 2016: 260) “your two curves” from an otherwise unattested word \**ḫubūšu*. The form *ḫubbušā* would be substantivised a D-stem verbal adjective in the dual, allegedly meaning “swollen up”. The root is otherwise attested as a description of a still-born foetus, of a man, of a horse and as a male and female personal name. AHW. 351; CAD H 214-215. Scurlock (1989-90: 111 fn. 38) thinks the line refers to the man’s fear that a discharge of fluids (*tabāku* lit. “pour out”) on the part of the woman during intercourse will bring a premature end to the sexual act. She leaves the noun spelled *ḫu-BU-ú-ša-ki* untranslated. Groneberg (2007: 107 fn. 68) has the form as a verb (S3 m stative + dat. f. pron., *ḫubbušakki*) referring to the man’s penis: “wie ein Halteseil ist es stark geschwollen für dich, verschütete es mir nicht”. One would expect —*kim* for the dat. of the S2f. pronoun on *ḫubbušāki* in this case. “Please” in my translation is an attempt to reproduce the sense of the S1 dat. pron. on *ē tatbukīm*.



speaker of the last few lines is in fact the same as that of the rest of the incantation, a man who uses male projections of female sexuality to imagine his female beloved trying to conjure him into sex? The change in gender would then be a change in focalization, of the perspective from which the words are spoken, in this case the man taking on the role of the woman saying what he wants to hear.<sup>70</sup> In reverse, the final lines could of course also be an impersonation of the male performed from the perspective of the female, in order to ensure his potency. Either way, we are in the realm of love poetry as a form of control, and the context is securely magical.<sup>71</sup> The desired end seems to be achieved by imagining the response of the beloved as part of the utterance of the spell.

There are not a great many more of this type of composition attested in Akkadian. One tablet held in Yale begins with an address to the *ir'emu*, whom we encountered earlier, and attempts to attract the attention of a beloved woman who has not yet noticed the lover.<sup>72</sup> It contains some verbal overlap with the love-incantations from Isin, and shares further phrases with an incantation on a tablet from the Schøyen collection which contains a historiola explaining that love originated when the daughters of the sky-god (visualized as stars or sun-beams, lit. "lights of the sky") were cleaning the highest heavens.<sup>73</sup> The knowledge of this primordial genesis of love is used by the speaker to conjure a similar love in the recalcitrant female object of his desires.

A number of shorter spells are found on tablets collecting various examples of magical utterance. One poetic example directed by a young woman at a man is edited in this volume by A.R. George. It was found on a tablet with other incantations in Sumerian. A Sumerian incantation with an accompanying Akkadian ritual indicating that its purpose was to attract an estranged wife, also on a tablet collecting several compositions, is found on a late Old Babylonian tablet currently in the British Museum.<sup>74</sup> Another tablet with collected spells held in Yale has one in which a woman describes her desired effect on the man as being like that of beer and casts a spell of vertigo on him.<sup>75</sup> A short Old Babylonian incantation on a single small tablet currently held in Berlin attempts to attract the attention of a beloved but hostile woman by conjuring with the ingredients of make-up, according to a recent interpretation by N. Wasserman.<sup>76</sup> A subscript describes it as an "incantation for the fire of the heart".<sup>77</sup>

A further short incantation associated with a detailed ritual description designed to cure sexual impotence is preserved on a 14<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century BC tablet from the royal archives on the citadel at the Hittite capital of Hattusa (modern Boğazköy/Boğazkale

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<sup>70</sup> The literary device of "focalization", which identifies the character through whose perspective a narrative has been filtered, is discussed at Worthington 2011: 407-09 with regard to the Epic of Gilgameš.

<sup>71</sup> On Mesopotamian magic ("an unavoidable misnomer") in general see Schwemer 2011.

<sup>72</sup> Goetze, Hussey and van Dijk 1985 no. 87; SEAL 5.1.14.5; Wasserman 2016: 252-256.

<sup>73</sup> MS 2920; George 2009: 67-70; Wasserman 2016: 236-238.

<sup>74</sup> BM 79022; Wassermann 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Goetze, Hussey and van Dijk 1985 no. 21c; Wilcke 1985: 209. Wasserman SEAL 5.1.14.4; 2016: 250-251.

<sup>76</sup> VAT 8354; van Dijk 1971 no. 23. Wassermann SEAL 5.1.14.3; 2015; 2016: 249-250.

<sup>77</sup> van Dijk 1971 no. 23, l. 8; interpreted specifically as jealousy at Wasserman 2015: 607-608.

in Turkey).<sup>78</sup> As a ritual against sexual impotence it thus has much in common with the series of so-called šà--zi--ga incantations and rituals from the first millennium BC, which have the same goal.<sup>79</sup> The incantation addresses the love-goddess Nanaya, here equated with another love-goddess Kilili, and expresses the desire of the speaker to have sex with the goddess.<sup>80</sup> This kind of impersonation of the lover of a love-goddess is found in some Akkadian texts associated with the cult of the so-called “sacred marriage” rite, where the king is projected as her lover. The very unusual use of this motif in the ritual tablet from Boğazköy may show its application to more everyday amorous situations, although the tablet was found in a royal archive.<sup>81</sup> There is to my knowledge no further evidence for such a literary topos in the texts from Boğazköy, although Hittite goddesses did have mortal lovers in Hittite mythology.

We should remember that the words of these incantations are unlikely to be associated with one single person's yearning for another, although they may possibly have originated in that form. They are the words that ritualists put into their clients' mouths while performing rites that would help them achieve their goals. They thus represent types of lover, roles that a particular client might have been supposed to be inhabiting and are likely to have been tailored or chosen according to the individual circumstances of the particular lovesick individual.

#### (4) Cultic Love Poetry: Inana-Dumuzi songs and The “Divine Love Lyrics”.

Sumerian has a particular genre of love-songs specifically related to the cult of the goddess Inana (Akkadian Ištar), the deity responsible for sex and war, and her lover, the shepherd Dumuzi. A Sumerian narrative poem and a much later one in Akkadian, tell how she allowed him to be sent down to the underworld for half the year as a substitute for herself, after she had been trapped there by her sister, the queen of the underworld.<sup>82</sup> The same rich fertility imagery of this story of the ‘Descent of Inana’ is not apparent in the highly erotic love-songs, although these too have their own fertility-themes. The love-songs may have been composed sometime near the end of the third and beginning of the second millennium BC, more likely the latter. Certainly the clay tablets on which they are written date from the first half of the second millennium, the so-called Old Babylonian period. They are supposed to be connected with a controversial type of ritual commonly but vaguely referred to by modern scholars as the “sacred marriage” ceremony, a union between king and goddess to which one has references particularly in a Hymn of Šulgi king of Ur (2094-2047 BC) and in one to Iddin-Dagan (1910-1890 BC) third king of the dynasty of Isin.<sup>83</sup>

What modern scholars have understood by “sacred marriage”, a term which is not translated from any ancient Mesopotamian phrase but which is transferred wholesale

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<sup>78</sup> Schwemer 2004.

<sup>79</sup> Biggs 1967. George 2009: 67.

<sup>80</sup> KBo 36.27 obv. 15'-20'; Schwemer 2004: 62-64. This sentiment is very unusual, but the interpretation is unavoidable from the formulation. Wasserman 2016: 240.

<sup>81</sup> The fact that this tablet was found in a royal archive is to be explained by its status as carrier of a learned text in the context of the archives at Hattusa, on the very outskirts of the cuneiform world, where Akkadian was a language of scholarship. It is unclear what the tablet's use-value might have been at Hattusa beyond research and learning.

<sup>82</sup> Descent of Inana (Sumerian): ETCSL t.1.4.1; Descent of Ištar (Akkadian): Lapinkivi 2010. Sumerian Love Songs: Alster 1993; Sefati 1998.

<sup>83</sup> Šulgi X, 14-35 (ETCSL t.2.4.2.24) Iddin-Dagan A, 187-194 (ETCSL c.2.5.3.1);

from Classical Studies, has varied from a ritual copulation between a king and a priestess as manifestations of Inana and Dumuzi to a metaphorical discourse concerning the role of the king as link to the world of the divine.<sup>84</sup> A ritual from Mari on the Syrian Middle Euphrates (early 18<sup>th</sup> century BC) has also been called a “sacred marriage”, as it is related to the New Year’s festival, similarly to the hymn to Iddin-Dagan, and seems to involve a union of the king with the goddess Ištar, also citing *incipits* of Sumerian songs.<sup>85</sup> Further evidence for a “sacred marriage” rite of some kind, this time associated with Akkadian poems regarding the gods Nabû with his wife Tašmetu and Marduk with his wife Zarpanitum is to be found in the first millennium BC, this time also in non-literary contexts such as letters.<sup>86</sup> On the evidence of the letters the rites clearly involve the manipulation of statues of gods. There are also two fragmentary first millennium tablets of ritual instructions associated with “Love Lyrics” detailing a rite extending over three days in Babylon involving the city-god Marduk, his wife Zarpanitum, and Ištar of Babylon.<sup>87</sup>

It is unlikely that we will ever know precisely what was going on in these rites in the early second millennium BC in southern Mesopotamia, but it does appear that the preserved Sumerian love-songs were directly connected with them and thus largely to be understood in a cultic context.<sup>88</sup> Apart from these there is little other Sumerian love poetry, other than that which occurs incidentally in narrative poems or hymns, which occasionally contain highly erotic language. To what extent the “divine” cultic love-songs of Inana and Dumuzi were supposed to be modeled on the discourse of contemporary love, or even the other way round served as archetypes for “secular” love experience, is a very difficult question, the evidence for which can ultimately only be assessed subjectively.<sup>89</sup> However, the reference to restraining the beloved like Ištar restrained Dumuzi (IB 1554, 14) cited above in connection with the love-incantations from Isin, is suggestive in this regard, as is the evidence from the incantation preserved at Boğazköy, where the sufferer from impotence declares his intention to have sex with the love-goddess Nanaya.<sup>90</sup> As W.G. Lambert pointed out, it is possible that every pair of lovers saw themselves as Inana and Dumuzi, i.e. as re-enacting a central myth of divine courtship and love, possibly without countenancing

<sup>84</sup> For a synopsis of views taken on this rite in modern scholarship see for example Cooper 1993; Sefati 1998: 30-48; Lapinkivi 2004: 2-13; Pongratz-Leisten 2008: 47-58; Cooper 2013. While it is clear that the king may be representing Dumuzi in the rite, it is entirely unclear who, if anyone, is supposed to be representing Inana. F.R. Kraus’ proposal that the copulation scenes of Šulgi X and Iddin-Dagan A are a literary fiction, rather than a concrete ritual enactment, needs to be taken more seriously in my view than allowed for at Cooper 1993: 88-89, even if one does not agree with all the details (Kraus 1974: 249-250, Lapinkivi 2004: 243, now Cooper 2013: 55). The rite is presented in Lapinkivi 2004 as an allegory for the union of the human soul with the divine, on the basis of comparative evidence, particularly the Gnostic gospels and Jewish mysticism. It is not apparent that these are appropriate comparanda. See George 2006: 315-17.

<sup>85</sup> Durand and Guichard 1997: 46, no. 2. Sigrist and Westenholz 2008: 670.

<sup>86</sup> Nissinen 1998: 592-597.

<sup>87</sup> Lambert 1959; 1975; Edzard 1987; George 2000: 260 fn. 6, 270-280.

<sup>88</sup> Three love-songs associated with the late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC king Šu-Sin may present an exception to what is perceived to be the regular cultic context of Sumerian love-poetry by being regular wedding songs depicting the king’s union with a mortal woman. See Klein and Sefati 2008: 615-616; Sefati 1998: 344-364. It is not clear that a distinction between “cultic”, in the sense of performed in a temple context, and “secular”, as in performed in a palace or domestic context, would have been comprehensible to contemporary scribes, who gave these songs the same subscripts as other love-poems of the Dumuzi-Inana type.

<sup>89</sup> See particularly Lambert 1987; Klein and Sefati 2008: 614-618.

<sup>90</sup> Schwemer 2004.



The preceding text, if it is all one poem, is thus part of a prayer offered by king Shalmaneser I (1265-1235 BC) for well-being. It is questionable whether a poem with this ending can be labeled a love-poem, despite its explicit mythological content involving Ištar and the shepherd, which is comparable to the theme of Ištar and Dumuzi. However, there are further examples of love-poems offered as prayers.<sup>98</sup>

The earliest “divine love-lyric” attested in Akkadian is that from the reign of Rim-Sin (1822-1763 BC) of Larsa (modern Tell as-Senkereh).<sup>99</sup> The tablet containing it allegedly forms part of a group of texts from the temple of Enki/Ea excavated at Larsa, and is now held in the Yale Babylonian Collection.<sup>100</sup> The abrupt break-off in the poem at the end of the text and the doodles and dislocated signs on the blank part of the reverse indicate that this might have been a practice tablet. The poem is difficult, with an irregular verse division. It has been suggested that the poem is itself not a coherent whole but another list of *incipits*, a caveat which should certainly be kept in mind when reading it.<sup>101</sup> However, irregular verse division is on the whole a feature of Akkadian love poetry in the third and second millennia BC. M. Sigrist and J.G. Westenholz divide the words between a chorus, the love-goddess Nanaya and the king Rim-Sin.<sup>102</sup> Frequently the person, as indicated by the gender of the pronouns, verbs and adjectives, changes in the middle of a line. The goddess explains to the chorus her love for the king, who we later learn is Rim-Sin. Her love is expressed as joyous laughter rising like a prayer (i 4). The context appears to be the New Year (i 18). When Rim-Sin appears he addresses the goddess asking her to be his “one and only” (i 7a), and she replies that he must have heard her prayers (i 7b-8).

A number of parallels between the language of prayer and that of love in Akkadian have been noted by W.G. Lambert and more recently by A. Cavigneaux, who points to the essential semantic overlap between verbs of praying and verbs of seducing, which is to be explained in terms of the intention to overpower either a god, in order to obtain one’s desires, or a beloved.<sup>103</sup> In the case of the “divine love lyric” from Larsa it is the goddess who has been offering her prayers to the king as if to a god. The poem continues with an explicit invitation to the king on the part of the goddess to a night of love-making (l. 20-25a). Towards its end (ii. 6) the goddess addresses the king’s offering a prayer to her, although there are numerous problems with the exact interpretation.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> The poem presented in Groneberg 1999, for example, referred to above section (3) and below section (7).

<sup>99</sup> Goetze, Hussey and van Dijk 1985: no. 24. Sigrist and Westenholz 2008. SEAL 4.1.2.2; Wasserman 2016: 169-174.

<sup>100</sup> Sigrist and Westenholz 2008: 672, referring to the unpublished dissertation Dyckhoff 1999.

<sup>101</sup> A. Westenholz apud Sigrist and Westenholz 2008: 671 fn. 12. See also the difficulties in assessing the status of the list-like collection of typical phrases or lines from love-poetry found on a tablet published at George 2009: 71-75 (MS 3391).

<sup>102</sup> Sigrist and Westenholz 2008.

<sup>103</sup> Lambert 1987; Cavigneaux 2011.

<sup>104</sup> l. 6: *tu-ša’ iṣ-še-ri-ia sū-up-pa-am te-le-e’* (text IA), “perhaps you could pray in my presence” Sigrist and Westenholz 2008: 679, 683. Wassermann (SEAL 4.1.2.2) translates ii 5-6: “(You fought against an opponent for ...) // assuming (wrongly) that you could pray in my presence”. Possibly the form is to be understood as present *teleyyi* < *tele’i*, in which case no mistake in the cuneiform need be assumed (suggestion courtesy A.R. George). This would give us: “Will you be able to pray in my presence?” If the first word is *tuša* this may be a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer.

A tablet from the reign of king Abiešuḥ (1712-1684 BC) excavated in Babylon and now kept in Berlin offers a variation on the theme.<sup>105</sup> The “divine lovers”, in this case Nanaya and Muati, a divine partner of Nanaya who later became merged with the god Nabû, engage in a lover’s dialogue that is punctuated by narrative sections in the third person. Instead of the king being projected into the role of the divine lover, here it appears that a third person promises to intercede with Muati on behalf of Abi-ešuḥ, for whom eternal shepherding of his people (obv. 5-6), long life (obv. 14) are requested. These wishes appear to be granted in rev. 6, where Nanaya looks kindly on Babylon and causes Abi-ešuḥ to dwell “in a dwelling of peace”.<sup>106</sup> Later it is clear that Abi-ešuḥ is at least being compared to Muati, for just as Nanaya has caused Abi-ešuḥ “to dwell in a dwelling of peace” (*tušūšibšu*), so too she has seated Muati (*tušēšibšu*), and the “love-charm (*Ir'emu*) is raining down (on him) like dew” (rev. 11).<sup>107</sup>

Although it is possible to see an identification of the king and the god as the direct lover of the goddess, in my view the text remains here at the level of a comparison, rather than identification. It may be possible to use this notion, comparing the king to the divine lover rather than assuming that he is the divine lover, to understand the prayer of Shalmaneser I from Assur that was referred to above. The poetic understanding of the king in the role of the divine lover acts as a motif of prayer in order to obtain health and well-being for the land. Of course, it would not be legitimate to infer back from this interpretation of the Late Old Babylonian and the Middle Assyrian poems an identical literary function for the idea of the king’s sexual union with the goddess in the so-called “sacred marriage” rite from the earlier Old Babylonian period, but such a metaphorical interpretation of the literary evidence should not be excluded. The king is figured in a role that is recognised in a genre of love poetry where his union with the goddess was an expected element. To celebrate his playing that role was one way of celebrating him.

##### (5) Non-cultic dialogues: man vs woman

In their review of Akkadian love poetry published in 2008, J. Klein and Y. Sefati decided that there was only one work in the whole of Akkadian literature that could possibly be understood as a “secular” love poem.<sup>108</sup> This is the text now known as the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover” which has been translated and edited many times.<sup>109</sup> The situation has now changed somewhat given the 2009 publication by A.R. George of a number of love poems from a private collection in Norway (Schøyen). It will be useful briefly to reconsider the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover” in the light of these new additions to the corpus of Babylonian poetry. Two of the new poems, especially,

<sup>105</sup> Lambert 1966/67; SEAL 4.3.2.1; Wasserman 2016: 124-129.

<sup>106</sup> obv. 7 *ātawwu rā'imīšša* “I will speak to her lover”. Thus following Lambert’s interpretation (1966/67: 42) as against SEAL 4.3.2.1, where “her lover” is equated with Abi-ešuḥ who is himself equated with the god Muati, although in rev. 10 this equation, or at least a comparison, does appear to hold. Possibly *rā'imīšša* is supposed to be adverbial “in the manner of her lover”.

<sup>107</sup> Rev. 7: *tušūšibšu ina šubat nēḫti* “she made him dwell in a dwelling of peace”. Both the causative form *tušūšib* (cf. regular *tušēšib* in rev. 10) and the spelling *šu-pa-at* for *šubat* are archaizing elements of language and spelling that were used in highly literary contexts as well as omens.

<sup>108</sup> Klein and Sefati 2008: 623. The use of the term “secular” is quite problematic for the ancient world, where it is difficult to conceive of most activities not having a religious dimension. See Wasserman 2016: 20-21.

<sup>109</sup> von Soden 1950; Held 1961; Hecker 1989: 743-747; Ponchia 1996: 115-119; Groneberg 2002; Foster 2005: 155-159; SEAL 4.1.2.1; Wasserman 2016: 175-185.

appear to belong to a similar genre and show a close connection with each other in terms of phraseology, while at the same time showing strong thematic and structural similarities to the individual monologues contained in the Dialogue. It will therefore be useful to present parts of all three poems both in sequential and parallel comparisons.

The “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover” poem is contained on a tablet that was excavated at Sippar (modern Tell Abu Habbah) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and is now held in Istanbul. It contains 18 verses of varying length in pairs of identical length. Each verse spoken by a male persona is answered by a verse of identical length spoken by a female persona. The word “answered” is perhaps too strong to illustrate the connection between all the verses of the male and female interlocutors, as they rarely seem to address the same topic, although they are frequently linked by phraseological echoes and puns, as B. Groneberg has demonstrated.<sup>110</sup> The poem thus falls into the well-known Mesopotamian genre-category of the dialogue or dispute poem, in which two characters, usually personifications of animals, trees or agricultural implements, argue about which of them has the more virtue.<sup>111</sup> The difference here is that the content of the argument is more psychologically nuanced, the two opponents in the dialogue being a man and a woman figured as lovers, possibly even lovers who have reached a somewhat advanced and jaded stage in their relationship.

The gender characterization is very clear.<sup>112</sup> The male participant presents himself as an arrogant misogynist, not interested in what the woman has to say, and speaking in general terms about his opinion of the way women are and the way men should behave towards them. The woman appears at first sight to be meek, presenting her devotion to his love (“*being true*, respectful, enticing” i 13) in the face of his callousness, but at the same time affirming that her supporters are the love-goddesses Ištar and Nanaya. She prays to these goddesses to obtain his favour, and the effect of that prayer is expressed by “grasping” or “taking hold” of him (*uṣabbatka* i 22), precisely the language of control that we encountered in the love incantations reviewed above. The first four stanzas are reproduced below in transcription and translation:

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<sup>110</sup> Groneberg 2002: 174-175. See particularly the male assertion in iii 9-10: *uttessi ina zumrīki // kīma šar bīri inbīya urtiq* “I have removed (my love) from your body // I have placed my fruits as far away as thousands of miles”. To which the woman replies in iii 11-12: *asaḥḥur inbī[ka] // bēlī ṣummāku rāmka* “I am prowling around [your] fruits // My lord, I thirst for your love”. “Fruits” are a common image for genitalia, apparently both male and female (Lambert 1987: 23-27), so their mention is to be expected in love contexts. The contradiction between the male voice's assertion that he has removed the fruits and the response of the female voice, which seem to exclude each other, is to be explained through the psychological tension that characterises this piece, with both voices presenting highly complex and even contradictory personality traits. The male overstates the case aggressively, while the female presents a more self-controlled rhetorical strategy.

<sup>111</sup> An apparent subscript to the whole composition is contained at col. iv lower edge. It is mostly broken but contains at least the verbal form [x]-x [*t*]a-ap-pa-al “you shall answer”, which may refer in some way to the responsive structure of the piece. Von Soden (1950: 172) and Held (1961: 2 fn. 17) saw two lines of erasure followed by {...}-bi-im, which presumably refers to the number of lines spoken by each speaker. Held thought [*lā*] *tappal* “don't answer”, with a restoration of the negative, might have been the first line of a previous tablet. It could also be the catchline of a next one, or a general name for the composition, not corresponding to the first line on the Sippar tablet.

<sup>112</sup> Groneberg 2002: 174.

Man

- i(1) [h]urbī<sup>2113</sup> turki ezbi Hurry up and stop your answering back<sup>114</sup>  
i(2) lā magal dabābum (isn't there) too much chatter?  
i(3) qabê qabūmma I have not changed what I say  
i(4) ul ēni'akkim for you through talking.  
i(5) atwām mali šabtāku as far as I think about the matter<sup>115</sup>  
i(6) ša ana sinništīm ipparaqqadu he who lies flat for a woman  
i(7) samān dūrim (is) a weevil of the city-wall  
i(8) šumma lā itqud if he is not worried (about that)  
i(8) ul awīlum miḥiršu he is not a man of any kind

Woman

- i(9) lizziz kittī My truth shall stand  
i(10) ina maḥar Ištar šarratim before Ishtar the queen,  
i(11) liḥbit rāmī libâš my love shall triumph,  
i(12) karrištī my detractor shall be ashamed.  
i(13) k[ân]am palāḥam kuzzubam As for *being true*<sup>116</sup>, respectful, enticing  
i(14) itašhur mārīm fussing around (my) darling,  
i(15) ina qabê Nanaya bêlam dāriš by the command of Nanaya *ruling* forever<sup>117</sup>  
i(16) ali meḥertī where (is) a woman of my kind?<sup>118</sup>

Man

- i(17) elīki ḥassāku I am wiser than you  
i(18) ana šibqīki ša panānum as for your previous tricks  
i(19) mugrī atalkī get lost of your own free will,  
i(20) ana māliktīki šunnī tell your lady counselor (i.e. Nanaya?)  
i(21) kīma ērēnu that we are wide awake.

Woman

- i(22) ušabbatka ūmam I shall take hold of you by day

<sup>113</sup> Proposals for reading the first word: [k]u-úr-bi Held 1961: 6, a greeting or farewell *ibid.* 9; Groneberg 2002: 168 (“bend down”). [š]ú-úr-pi Hecker 1989: 743, 1a; Ponchia 1996: 89 “lamentati”; SEAL 4.1.2.1 “yell”. The partially parallel text at George 2009: 62 no. 10, 9 has ḥu-uš-bi “break off” in the corresponding line. [h]urbī, cautiously suggested here, from ḥarābu “to do something early”, fits the traces of the first sign drawn at Held 1962: 37, but the verb is not otherwise attested in precisely this usage (CAD H 87).

<sup>114</sup> Held 1961: 6; CAD T 272; Groneberg *tūrki* = “your restriction”. “Dein Zieren” von Soden 1950: 172; AHW 278, s.v. *ezēbum* 7a. “Zurückweichen” AHW 1373.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. the usage of *šabtāku* for “I think” noted at CAD S 22 (von Soden 1950: 172). George 2009: 64 “whatever words I own”.

<sup>116</sup> Held 1962: k[a-a-a]m without translation; Groneberg 2002: 169 k[ān]am “preening”, presumably following one example of G-stem of *kunnū* “treat kindly, honour” cited at AHW. 440 (cf. CAD K 159, 452 s.v. *kunnū*), a verb which is otherwise always D-stem. SEAL 4.1.2.1 (Wasserman 2016: 182) k[a-]i (?) “you”, suggested by Wilcke (1985: 195) does not fit the traces drawn at Held 1962: 37.

<sup>117</sup> *i-na qā-bé-e<sup>4</sup>na-na-a-a be<sup>2</sup>-lam da-ri-iš*. Groneberg’s (2002: 169) *bēlam* “to rule” fits the traces but does not fit the context unless it introduces a subversive twist. SEAL 4.1.2.1 (Wasserman 2016: 182) reads *ub!-lam!* translating “I have always (taken upon me) ... to take care of (my) baby!” which does not fit the traces on the photo so well but makes good sense and fits the grammar.

<sup>118</sup> Note the lexical and echo and response in i (8) *ul awīlum miḥiršu* and i (16) *ali meḥertī*.



i(23)	<i>râmka u râmî uštamaggar</i>	I shall reconcile your love and my love
i(24)	<i>ussenellîma ana<sup>d</sup>Nanaya</i>	I shall <u>keep praying</u> to Nanaya
i(25)	<i>salîmka bêlî dâri'am elegqe</i>	I will receive your goodwill, my lord,
i(26)	<u>nadnam</u>	as an eternal gift

As we have noted, A. Cavigneaux has pointed to the semantics of verbs used for praying in Akkadian that are also used for seduction.<sup>119</sup> The attitude of prayer constitutes an attempt to exert influence over the deity that seems to belong to a similar semantic nexus as the act of seduction by using words. By the time we reach the fourth and final column of the composition, at least after a break on the tablet, the male character's intransigence does not seem to have softened at all at first sight:

Woman:

iv(5)	<i>lûšîb lûteqqi šumma ša girrîya</i>	I shall sit and wait in case he comes across my path
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Man:

iv(6)	<i>atmâkim<sup>d</sup>Nanaya u Hammurapi šarram</i>	I swear to you by Nanaya and Hammurapi the king
iv(7)	<i>ša kînâtîya lû aqabbîkim</i>	Let me tell you my truths
iv(8)	<i>râmki eli diliptim</i>	(I swear) your love is no more
iv(9)	<i>u ašuštim lā watru<sup>u</sup> ina šērîya</i>	for me than trouble and depression

However, “trouble (*diliptum*) and depression (*ašuštum*)” are specifically the effects of love that one might expect to feel as a result of erotic bewitchment or successful seduction. Compare the short three-line incantation addressed to a woman from the Isin collection cited above:

(38)	<i>dilpî mušîtam</i>	be disturbed (f.) through the night
(39)	<i>urrî ē tašlalî</i>	do not sleep (f.) by day
(40)	<i>mušî ē tušbî</i>	do not sit (still) (f.) by night
(41)	<i>ka-inim-ma ša ki-âg-kam</i>	it is an incantation of the lover <sup>120</sup>

Could this be a hint that the woman's repeated protestations of submission combined with her supplications to the love-goddesses are having an effect, whatever the male participant might say or indeed want to the contrary? Unfortunately the final stanza, spoken by the man, is not only quite damaged but also uses obscure phraseology, so it is difficult to see whether there has been a development in his attitude throughout the poem. He appears at any rate to have had the last word. His very last words (*maḥar Ištar* iv 24) echo the first words of the woman in i 9-10 (*lizziz kittî maḥar Ištar šarratim*). Throughout the poem he appropriates the supports that the woman appeals to, the goddesses Nanaya and Ištar and the notion of “my truth” *kittî* (cf. i 31, iv 7')

The most recent literary assessment of the use-context for this poem considers it a kind of competitive performance poetry based on the use of puns made by playing on words used by the opponent in the competition.<sup>121</sup> The fact that the man swears by Nanaya and by Hammurapi the king may mean that we might envisage a court context

<sup>119</sup> Cavigneaux 2011.

<sup>120</sup> IB 1554 obv. 38-40 (Wilcke 1985: 200-201); Wasserman 2016: 261.

<sup>121</sup> Groneberg 2002.

for the performance of this piece, possibly after Hammurapi had died, but it could doubtless have been performed in non-court circles.<sup>122</sup>

A tablet from the Schøyen collection in Norway, with no known provenance but dated on the basis of script, language and format to the Old Babylonian period, has now been published which contains a poem using two of the stanzas from the “Faithful Lover” (stanza I = IX, II = I) alongside a number of its own, which are all spoken by a male figure.<sup>123</sup> There is in this poem no mention of the king nor of any goddess. This is an extremely bitter poem, interpreted by A.R. George as a poem of love’s demise.<sup>124</sup> It begins with the stanza that occurs as no. IX in the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover”, where the man is at the height of his arrogance, and continues with stanza no. I of the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover” as its second, which we already cited above.

The two stanzas known from the “Faithful Lover”, largely the same but slightly altered, are not bound into the same series of puns and verbal echoes that B. Groneberg has identified for the “Faithful Lover” composition. Rather than saying that the Faithful Lover is in any sense the “original” poem and that the Schøyen tablet (MS 3285) has borrowed from it, it is more accurate to say that Mesopotamian poetry sometimes used stock phrases or indeed whole sections of verse for particular topics. In a culture where the vast majority of literary productions did not have an author this is not surprising. However, the use of a passage would belong to a particular poetic register, just as the choice of a particular word might belong to a linguistic register, which either introduces, as in this case, or jars against the tone and possibly the genre of the poem. Despite there only being one speaker in this poem it is quite possible that the text was meant to play a role in just such a dramatic performance context as the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover”, using some of the same building blocks. It merely records the male persona’s contributions to that exchange. In order to gain an idea of just how bitter each of them sounds as a monologue, let us compare the male part of the “Dialogue” with the text of the tablet in Norway in translation.

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Klein and Sefati 2008: 623-624. M. Worthington points out to me that the composition is unlikely to have mentioned Hammurapi by name while he was king.

<sup>123</sup> MS 3285 “A Field Full of Salt”. George 2009: 60-66; Wasserman 2016: 95-100.

<sup>124</sup> George 2009: 60.

## A Field Full of Salt

I obv. 1-8

[I] spurn the girl who will not seduce me  
I don't desire the girl who does not flirt  
I will not give her my love-charm  
I will rise above her  
Talking in order to disagree,  
why does that exist?<sup>125</sup>  
[I shall] give my love to the midst of darkness  
No one shall gain control of [it]

II obv. 9-16

Break off, leave, you have [made] me silent  
Not so much chatter  
What I say, through talking [...]  
I have not changed [for you]  
He who [lies prostrate] for a woman  
[he] is a weevil of the city-wall  
If he is not [worried (about that)]  
He is not a man of [any kind]

III obv. 17-25

[You were] born the daughter of a substitute  
With [no] dowry.  
You have a mole [on the] forehead  
As long as you show disrespect, you [are] shameful?<sup>126</sup>  
Let me tell you [your] place<sup>127</sup>  
You do not listen to me  
As you please  
You ride clouds  
You chase every boyfriend away

IV obv. 26 – rev. 34

You go [too] far! Why are you rebellious?  
Ask the previous women  
Like a field of salt (you are?)  
Should I take pleasure in all of (it)?  
[I took] pleasure in the fruit  
[Should I take] pleasure in all of (it)?  
and(?) [...]  
mouth [...]  
lover [...]

V rev. 35-39

You must not [put ...] ...  
To your canal no one will approach

## Dialogue of the Faithful Lover The male part

I obv. i 1-8 (cf. Field Full of Salt II)

Hurry up and stop answering back  
(isn't there) too much chatter?  
I have not changed what I say  
for you through talking.  
as far as I think about the matter  
he who lies prostrate for a woman  
(is) a weevil of the city-wall  
if he is not worried (about that)  
he is not a man of any kind

III i 17-21

I am wiser than you  
as for your previous tricks  
get lost of your own free will,  
tell your counselor (i.e. Nanaya?)  
that we are wide awake.

V i 27-31

I shall lay siege to you  
I shall gather my clouds<sup>126</sup>  
May your supporter (f., i.e. Nanaya) take  
A boyfriend, end your unjust words<sup>127</sup>  
Accept the truth

VII ii 1-5

....  
Does not exist  
nothing in my heart ...  
... is/will be paid out to her  
(she?) is/will be deprived of my [love]

IX ii 10-19

[I] spurn the girl who will not seduce me  
I don't desire the girl who does not flirt  
I will not give her [my love-charm]  
Talking in order to [disagree],  
Why [does that exist]?  
I shall have [my?] slanderers stopped  
I shall not listen ....  
into the middle [of the darkness?]  
I have cast my love  
why do you (f. pl.) try to control me?

<sup>125</sup> Translation from SEAL 4.1.3.4 (Wasserman 2016: 96).

<sup>126</sup> A phrase used in hostile circumstances, with SEAL 4.1.2.1 (Wasserman 2016: 182).

<sup>127</sup> "boyfriend" reading *ru- 'à-am* as in MS 3285 obv. 25.

<sup>128</sup> Translation after SEAL 4.1.3.4.

You lord<sup>?</sup> is your task  
Do not place me<sup>?</sup> in the salt  
Your field is well explored<sup>?</sup>

VI rev. 40-45

You who have not brought forth for me from your womb  
Like the people's flesh you have become (too) hot for me.<sup>129</sup>  
Must I swallow a potsherd?  
Shall I let the bitch go?  
He who swallows a potsherd in letting you go  
When could he have his say?

VII 46-50

Actually, when someone approached you  
Like the goddess Belili you were staggering about  
Dancing around in the early hours (meant) for sleeping  
You are producing your own suffering.

XIII? iii 6'-10'

As for the women who keep telling you  
“you [are] not the only one”  
Stop! I have taken away my love, not ...  
I removed (it) from your body  
I *sent* my fruits a thousand miles away

XV? iii 16'-19'

I repeat and I repeat a third [time]  
I'll not let 'pleasant' [enter] my mouth  
Take your place at the ... of the window  
Come on! Catch my love!

XIX iv 6'-9'

I swear to you by Nanaya and  
Hammurapi the king  
I am really telling you my truths  
Your love is no more (important)  
For me than trouble and depression.

XXI iv 17-24

My only one, weren't your previous  
Features ugly?  
[Would I/did I] stand by you?  
They (f.) call you the mistress of  
counsel.

You have leaned ...  
Insolence is your name.  
May the [...] be our evil,  
in the presence of Ištar.<sup>130</sup>

Formally speaking the two monologues are quite different with regard to the length of the stanzas employed. The “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover” employs more variation in the number of lines per stanza. The topic also seems to be slightly different in each. “A Field Full of Salt” appears to concern a wounded male ego lashing out at a lover who refuses to submit to his view of how a relationship should be. He begins with

<sup>129</sup> As noted by George (2009: 65-66) *šīr nišī* is a good Babylonian phrase connected with the people's well-being, although he is unable to make sense of it here. It is also unclear precisely what it means in this translation, possibly an expression for sensual human feelings that are accessible to anyone. The reading *tēmam* “you have become hot for me” obviates the need for a restoration as per George 2009, or for a bizarre word order as per SEAL. The point is perhaps that the woman has, in the man's view, developed an entirely sexual passion for him, one that is not on the surface connected to producing children.

<sup>130</sup> iii 17 [e]t-ti la ma-ās-ku (18) [š]a pa-na zi-mu-ki (19) [lu-/li-/az-]zi-iz-ki-im-ma (20) [xx]x-di te-te-en-di-i? (21) [ma-g]i<sup>2</sup>-ir-tum šum-ki (22) [be-l]e-et mi-il-ki-i na-ba-ki (23) [x-n]i-tum(-)mi lu li(-)mu-ut-ta-ni (24) [ma-]ḥa-ar<sup>d</sup>ištar. Sense obscure: *ittī* is read as “my omen” by Groneberg (2002: 178, see fn. 28 for further suggestions); other translators do not consider (18)-(19) to be a question, which is possible because of the use of the negative *lā* rather than *ul*. Other interpreters have read it as a negated attributive adjective “your not ugly features”; (21) *magirtum*, if it is the correct reading of the traces, can mean “insolence” or “favour” (CAD M/1 44 s.v. *magirtu*, 46-47 s.v. *magritu*, *magru*). The allocation of signs to words in line (23) is entirely insecure. The subject of the final sentence (23) is important and could be restored *šanītum* “the other woman”, *tanittum* “praise”, but also *panītum* “the previous woman”. For a translation with an altogether more positive assessment of the man's attitude at the end see Held (1961: 9); SEAL 4.1.2.1; Klein and Sefati 2008: 623; Wasserman 2016: 181.

pompous observations on the relationship between men and women and proceeds along the route of personal insults until he reaches the conclusion that he does not want to give up the object of his desire. In fact, it is possible that his remarks at the end of the poem imply that he has been emotionally "stewing" at home with jealousy, while the woman he is talking to has been out late at night, which reading of the situation suddenly allows much of the apparent misogyny of his previous utterances to appear in a different light, one that is negative for him. He appears pathetic and impotent and his insults petulant.<sup>131</sup> The man in the "Dialogue of the Faithful Lover" is fed up with his lover and has little but insults for her depending on one's view of the final stanza. They appear to have been in a relationship for some time. He blusters but, as Groneberg observes, does not withdraw entirely, while the woman both stands up to him at the same time as acting in an outwardly meek and humble manner.<sup>132</sup> The tone of the male voice in both poems, however, is very similar and both poems seem to deal with relationships that have gone wrong in some way.

A further poem from the Schøyen collection (MS 5111 – "I Shall Be a Slave to You") seems to represent what may be the female part, if not to MS 3285 ("A Field Full of Salt"), then at least to a poem very much like it. Aspects of language and verse structure make it clear that these are essentially different compositions. As the tablets are both unprovenanced it is difficult to make any firm conclusions about their use-context. However, by far the majority of literary tablets found in Mesopotamia in secure archaeological contexts during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC are school tablets, so one might assume that these were exercises for trainee scribes based on compositions they had heard. Both tablets show southern Mesopotamian orthographic conventions. Their formats, while sharing a general shape and size, are slightly different when it comes to the distribution of the writing over the tablets, so it is unlikely that they formed a direct pair produced on one occasion and meant to correspond to one another. The divisions into stanzas that are made by the dividing lines on the tablets do not correspond to each other, the poem on MS 3285 having 8 stanzas over 50 lines (stanza length 8-9 lines), MS 5111 having 9 stanzas over a minimum of 36 lines (stanza length 4-5 lines). Even if we disregard the dividing lines written on the tablet as a mistake in the case of MS 5111 and re-construe the text as a group of 4 stanzas with 6-8 lines each, a satisfactory correspondence is not produced. The content of the texts on the two tablets, however, is related one to the other in a manner parallel to the male and female parties in the "Dialogue of the Faithful Lover" from Sippar: "A Field Full of Salt" is related to "I Shall Be a Slave to You" just as the male voice from the "Dialogue of the Faithful Lover" is related to the female.

B. Groneberg convincingly demonstrated that at least some stanzas in the "Dialogue of the Faithful Lover" are knitted together by a series of verbal echoes and responses. While it is not easy to see such a chain of verbal echoes running through either of the new poems individually, it may be the case that such a chain can be reconstructed for the relationship between MS 5111 and MS 3285, in as far as the verbal echoes are not simply those that belong to Akkadian love poetry generally. Perhaps the most sensible conclusion is that these two poems consist of building blocks that could be knitted together if need be into a dialogue form, but as they stand they do not represent the

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<sup>131</sup> I prefer this interpretation, but it should be remembered that it is reading extra information into the text. The reader may wish to leave their understanding of the meaning of the text with the fact that the man is criticising the woman for staying up late, which is all the text explicitly says.

<sup>132</sup> Groneberg 2002: 174.

two parties of a single dialogue, rather standing alone as poems in their own right, or collections of poetic units belonging to this type of poetry. For the moment, note the following correspondences, where part of the female monologue on one tablet appears to be an answer to part of the male one on the other, or otherwise echoes or anticipates it. The text is left in transliteration due to the uncertainty of interpretation and damage to the tablet in parts.

MS 3285 “A Field Full of Salt”

- (9) *ta-aš-t[a-ak-ni' q]ú-li*  
 (10) *la ma-gal da-[ba-bu-um]*

You have brought about my silence  
 Isn't there enough talking?

- (17) *ma-[r]a<sup>2</sup>-[a]t pu-ḥi wa-a[l-da-ti]*  
 (18) *i-na [la] ši-ri-[ik-tim]*

You were born the daughter of a substitute  
 without a dowry

- (25) *ru-ú-ḥa-am tu-uk-ta-na-aš-ša-di*

you drive every boyfriend away

- (27) *uṣ-ṣi-ṣi pa-ni-a-tim*

ask the previous women

- (30) *[a]ḥ<sup>1</sup>-du-ú in-ba-am*  
*[a-ḥ]a-d[u]-<sup>1</sup>ú<sup>1</sup> ka-la-[a-ma]*

I enjoyed the fruit.  
 Must I enjoy all (of it/you)?

- (43) *ka-al-ba-tam ú-uš-ša-ar*  
 (44) *la-i-im ab-ni a-na wa-ša-ri-ki*  
 (45) *ma-ti qá-ba-a-[š]u li-iš-ku-un*

shall I let the bitch free?

Swallowing a stone to let you go  
 When would a man ever get his say?

MS 5111 “I Shall Be Slave to You”

- (9) *ú-um-ta-aš-ši a-wa-ti-ia*

I have forgotten my words

- (25) *e-re-du-ku wa-aš-ra-ak*  
 (26) *ù ši-ri-ik-ta-ka ra-mi-ma*

I will follow you, I shall be subservient  
 And your dowry is my love

- (24) *da-du-ú-a ú-ul ša ka-ša-di*

my charms are not easily conquered

- (11) *pa-ni-ti-ia—ah-sú-us<sub>4</sub>-ma*

I have thought of the previous woman

- (23) *in-bu-ú-a ú-ul ša mi-ši*

My fruits are not forgettable

- (21) *na-as-qá-ku wa-aš-ra-tu ù a-ma-*  
*tu e-li-ka*  
 (25) *e-re-du-ku wa-aš-ra-ak*

I am chosen (as) the subservient one, and  
 a slave for you

I will follow you, I am subservient

The second to last stanza of the poem “A Field Full of Salt” on MS 3285 contains a wordplay on the verb *wuššurum* “to let free”: *uššar, ina wašārīki*. It is interesting that this appears to resemble the verb-form *wašrāk* “I am subservient” and the verbal adjective *wašratu*, “the subservient one” which form the defining characteristic of the

woman pleading with her lover in MS 5111, “I Shall be a Slave to You”.<sup>133</sup> Even if the poem on MS 5111 is not directly responding to the words in the precise poem on MS 3285, it is responding to content of a type that is also found there.

One may also observe that the male speaker in “A Field Full of Salt” appears to bend his will in the penultimate stanza. He is not quite able to let his lover go, although he is clearly very angry with her for staying up dancing all night, as the final stanza suggests. Is it possible that he has been persuaded by a female interlocutor much like the one found in “I Shall Be a Slave to You”? This may be similar to the pattern we see in “The Dialogue of the Faithful Lover”. Taken together, such similarities indicate that these two poems from the Schøyen collection belong to the same world of convention as the “Dialogue”. I submit that they are to be considered as the male and female parts of just such dialogue poems, although it is unlikely to impossible that they belong to the same one in the form in which they are preserved.

A further tablet with a dialogue poem or poems relating to love, and presumably non-cultic, has recently been published which does not seem at first sight to present such negative characteristics for either male or female interlocutors.<sup>134</sup> It is referred to as the *Moussaieff Love Song* on the basis of the private collection that the tablet belonged to when it was published. The text refers once to the man as “shepherd”, which may hint at a function in cult.<sup>135</sup> In my view, given that there are no other clear references to state cult or the Ištar-Dumuzi courtship themes, it is better to explain this reference as a reflection of the fact that imagery associated with the courtship of Ištar and Dumuzi could be called upon in non-cultic love-poetry as well. The border between the two was thus entirely fluid. It is also possible, as noted above, that lovers saw themselves as enacting divine prototypes of love situations, in particular that between Ištar and Dumuzi.

The primary edition tentatively divides the text on the tablet up into various compositions, at least two, possibly more compositions, of which at least two have “happy endings” for the lovers, i.e. seem to culminate in intercourse.<sup>136</sup> There is a female voice, a male voice, and what was interpreted in the first edition as a chorus of some kind, although the existence of this as a separate voice is not so apparent to this reader. The male and female voices are not divided over different stanzas, but respond to each other in quick succession, with unequal and indeed hard to segment allocations of poetry. It is clear that the male and female voices are very keen on each

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<sup>133</sup> (*w*)*uššurum* (D-stem only?) means “release” (CAD U/W 310-325). The G-stem verb *ašāru* B “to be humble” posited at CAD A/2 422, is only attested in lexical texts, where it appears explaining the same Sumerian word as also explained by (*w*)*uššurum*. It is to be expected that it existed on the basis of the verbal adjective (*w*)*ašrum* A “humble” (CAD A/2 454-55), from which the feminine form *wašratu* and the S1 Stative *wašrāk* are derived. It is currently unclear whether *ašāru* B can be construed as a G-stem “be loosened, sent down, dejected” to the D-stem factitive (*w*)*uššuru* “release”, as per AHw. 1484, or whether it should remain a separate lexeme. If the examples here of *wašratu*, *wašrāk* are in any sense answering a *wuššurum* in a male speech, then this would be good evidence for (*w*)*uššuru* and *ašāru* B being the same verb. Of course, this is in no way demonstrated here.

<sup>134</sup> Wasserman 2016: 130-145 (no. 11).

<sup>135</sup> Wasserman 2016: 135, l. 13.

<sup>136</sup> Wasserman 2016: 132-133.

other through most of the text, and the sexuality is explicit, possibly even containing a reference to the clitoris by the male voice.<sup>137</sup>

Contrary to the tentative division in the first edition of this poem, repeated mention of certain thematic or lexical elements in the different parts of the text may indicate that the different sections belong to one continuous composition, although this is extremely difficult to establish and by no means a secure conclusion.<sup>138</sup> It is not unusual for texts about love to talk about the same things, after all. My own subjective impression of the Moussaieff text is that it is one single poem that charts through extracts of dialogue in separate movements the growth of a relationship from passionate sexual infatuation mentioning primal emotions and wild mountain flowers through to a more organised emotional co-existence including gift giving, exchange and ostensibly set in the city and its agricultural environs, or at least using metaphors to do with these, and then to deterioration expressed with the word *šulummûm ikkir* (rev. 12) "the well-being/greeting has turned hostile", which seems to echo the apparently positive use of *pī<sup>2</sup> šulmi* "word of well-being/greeting" earlier in the text (rev. 5). The text is too poorly understood to be sure one way or the other, but if correct this interpretation leads us once again into the area of a highly complex emotional development and negotiation of relationship roles as expressed through the medium of dialogue.

In three of these poems it is notable that not only certain themes but even whole passages appear to be adaptable building blocks migrating from one composition to another. Thus even the psychologically nuanced profile of the male voice in the "Field Full of Salt" advocated here, or the subtle manipulating strategies of the female voice in the "Dialogue of the Faithful Lover" may correspond to wider stock characters using a variety of combinations of standard phraseology that is at home in this kind of poetry. The stock character need not be one-dimensional, the role he or she plays is necessarily complex, whether in life or in poetry. In the *Moussaieff Love Song* similar tropes such as the agricultural sexual metaphors to do with ploughing the field are also employed as in the "Field Full of Salt", although their use may have a different value judgement attached.<sup>139</sup> Stock characters playing type-roles and standard phrases

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<sup>137</sup> Obv. 1. 2: *appi lalêki* "your (f.) nose/tip of desire", suggestion of M.P. Streck *apud* Wasserman 2016: 136. See also an apparent reference to male erection (*tīb ... tīb* "rise ... rise") in obv. 1. 11, although spelling difficulties make the interpretation insecure. Also a reference to the vulva in rev. 8: *ša tarammu ūrī nadīkum bābum<sup>?</sup> rapšum šuddulum* "that which you love, my vulva, is laid down for you, a wide, spacious gate<sup>?</sup>", where the word for gate is largely restored due to damage on the tablet. Translation after Wasserman 2016: 140.

<sup>138</sup> The more striking echoes between obverse and reverse of the tablet are the following: Obv. 1 *nawartum* "light", rev. 7 *nawār kabattim* "happy mood (lit. light of liver)"; obv. 1. 10 *kabattī imḥi* "my mood has become stormy", rev. 7 *nawār kabattim* (as above), rev. 10 *libbī ittawir* "my hear rejoiced (lit. became light)"; obv. 2 *appi lalêki* "tip of desire (clitoris?)", rev. 6 *tāmarātu ... lalêki* "gifts ... (that are) your desire"; obv. 1. 4 *bītam adūl* "I pace round the house", rev. 1. 7 *ina bītim lumahḥirka nawār kabattim* "let me present you with happy mood in the house"; obv. 1. 6 *pīya anašsar* "I watch my words", obv. 1. 7 *pī ūši* "my speech came out, rev. 1. 5 *pī<sup>2</sup> šulmi* "word of greeting", rev. 12 *šulummûm ikkir* "the greeting turned hostile"; obv. 1. 9 *anāku erdēši* "I followed her" rev. 1. 10 *eredde ūmī* "I will follow my day"; obv. 1. 9 *alālū paspasim* "duck cries (of joy)", rev. 1. 5 *ba-AZ-ki paspasī* "duck squawks/laments?" (see Wasserman 2016:

<sup>139</sup> *Moussaieff Love Song* rev. 1. 9: *ugārum eriški tīdī maniātīšu* "the field is ploughed for you, you know its measurements", Wasserman 2016: 136. According to my interpretation of the poem it is unclear whether this is actually to be read positively or negatively at this stage in the development of the relationship, where a far less passionate and more matter of fact tone has set in with language and metaphors for love relating to economic relations and agricultural production rather than wild mountain



associated with specific genres provide a yardstick by which to measure and evaluate difference from the expected, and are thus a key means of manipulating audience reaction. They also further highlight the importance for love poetry of role play.

## 6. Insults against women as a literary form?

The theme of the rejection of love by a man has been addressed in two of the four poems we have just reviewed. Groneberg points out that addressing women in such a harsh and violent manner was unusual in Babylonian society, judging from the evidence of letters.<sup>140</sup> If this is the case “A Field Full of Salt” is a poem that gives us a highly nuanced psychological profile of a single man and his selfish attitude to love. However, literature is often the place where the demons are exorcised that the polite society found in letter-writing usually does not like to countenance. It is thus ultimately unclear how acceptable such open hatred of women was in male-dominated Babylonian circles. In the case of the goddess of love herself, Ištar, it appears to have been perfectly legitimate to humiliate her in a literary context.

Groneberg has suggested that certain passages in the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover” bear resemblance to a scene from the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš.<sup>141</sup> This work is preserved on tablets from the first millennium BC, mostly from the library of king Assurbanipal at Nineveh, but it was probably put together largely on the basis of earlier poetic segments some time in the 14-12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC or thereabouts.<sup>142</sup> In Tablet Six of the Standard Babylonian Epic, Gilgameš and his companion Enkidu return from their more or less heroic quest to slay the guardian of the cedar-forest, Humbaba. Gilgameš changes his clothes, and in doing so is spied by the goddess Ištar, who promptly propositions him, inverting the traditional Babylonian marriage formula to put the female voice first.<sup>143</sup> The hero’s response is to compare her to a list of useless and destructive creatures and objects, after which he proceeds to list her previous lovers and the dreadful consequences they suffered after enjoying her embrace.<sup>144</sup> The list ranges from Dumuzi, “the love of your youth, to whom you allotted perpetual weeping”,<sup>145</sup> the speckled *allallu*-bird (hoopoe) whose wing she broke, the lion, whom she caused to be trapped in pits, the horse to whom she gave the whip, muddy water to drink and also perpetual weeping, through to Išullanu the gardener, whose poorly understood fate (he was possibly turned into a dwarf) is presented in the form of a historiola which has the additional function of allowing us to better understand the larger narrative.<sup>146</sup>

None of the previous stories are known in anything other than allusive detail, but that of Išullanu appears in a Sumerian work from the Old Babylonian period, the *Tale of*

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flowers (obv. l. 13) and taking a plunge (into love, cf. obv. l. 15). Might the use of this phrase even not sound a little passive-aggressive?

<sup>140</sup> Groneberg 2002: 166.

<sup>141</sup> Groneberg 2002: 174. The subsequent characterization of the male voice as Gilgameš to the female’s Ištar advocated by Groneberg is stretching the comparison too far in my view.

<sup>142</sup> George 2003: 618-631. There is also a Middle Babylonian fragment of this episode from Emar (George 2003: 326-339).

<sup>143</sup> SB Gilg. VI 7 (George 2003: 618-19).

<sup>144</sup> SB Gilg. VI 22-29 (George 2003: 618-23).

<sup>145</sup> SB Gilg. VI 46-47 (George 2003: 620-21).

<sup>146</sup> See the most recent analysis of this episode in Currie 2016: 169-173.

*Inana and Šukaletuda*, although with somewhat different details.<sup>147</sup> After a lengthy but obscure introduction associating the raven or crow with the invention of the Shadoof, Šukaletuda the gardener sees Inana asleep under a tree and rapes her.<sup>148</sup> What she does precisely to Šukaletuda is unknown, because the end of the poem is broken, but it is clear that he will remain a subject of song, which does not necessarily have to be a positive thing.<sup>149</sup> This narrative is precisely the opposite of the way Ištar and Išullanu interact in the Epic of Gilgameš.<sup>150</sup> Here Išullanu the gardener is approached by Ištar who makes a proposition to him much as she does to Gilgameš, although with a far more direct eroticism.<sup>151</sup> Išullanu's response is to refuse her in a series of indignant questions. The divine reaction is to turn him into something that we do not understand entirely (*ana dallali*), probably a dwarf. Gilgameš then asks "And you would love me and [*change* me] as (you did) them?"<sup>152</sup> This is of interest, because Išullanu did not love Ištar, and was still transformed. Rejected by Gilgameš, the goddess Ištar then seeks from her father Anu, the sky-god, the help of the Bull of Heaven, the constellation Taurus, in killing the man who has just rebuffed her advances. However, the hero and his friend kill the bull and Ištar is sent scuttling off to the city-wall, with Enkidu throwing a haunch of the dead bull after her. The narrative of Išullanu serves to demonstrate that Gilgameš is such a superior hero that he can reject the goddess of love and not suffer any consequences, by contrast to Išullanu who did something similar and was punished.<sup>153</sup>

Of course, the consequences of killing the Bull of Heaven are keenly felt in the Epic of Gilgameš, in that the gods decide to kill Enkidu as a result. There are still no consequences for insulting and rejecting Ištar, however.<sup>154</sup> It is possible that the "Dialogue of the Faithful Lover" and the Schøyen tablet with the poem "A Field Full of Salt" form part of a tradition or mini-genre of anti-woman poems, one to which the scene of Gilgameš insulting Ištar was closely related as a literary type. The observations on the man who lashes out verbally after his lover does not conform to his thinking on relationship-politics may well be psychologically astute in the poem on the Schøyen tablet. He was, however, behaving in one of the ways he was expected to behave by denigrating and insulting a woman in a literary context. The female voice in the Dialogue of the Faithful Lover, and possibly also that of "I Shall be a

<sup>147</sup> SB Gilg. VI 64-79 (George 2003: 622-23); Volk 1995.

<sup>148</sup> *Inana and Šukaletuda* 123-24.

<sup>149</sup> *Inana and Šukaletuda* 297-300.

<sup>150</sup> Currie 2016: 171-172.

<sup>151</sup> SB Gilg. VI 68 *išullanīya kiššūtaki ī nīkul* (69) *u qātka šūsamma luput ḥurdatni* "Oh my Išullanu, let us taste your power, (69) stretch out your hand to me and touch our vulva!" (after George 2003: 622-23). A similar phrase appears in an incantation-like Old Babylonian love poem from Kiš, again addressed by a female voice to a male (i 13' *bilamma šumēlek luppitma ḥurdatni*, "bring (m.) your left hand to me, stroke (m.) our vulva", Wasserman 2016: 151-152), and the other way round in a so-called *pārum*-hymn to Ištar which praises her for her inexhaustible sexual appetite: Wasserman 2016 no. 12 obv. 11 *alkī lulappit ḥurdatki* "come (f.), let me stroke your (f.) vulva".

<sup>152</sup> SB Gilg. VI 79 (George 2003: 622-23).

<sup>153</sup> It is unclear how far Šukaletuda's fate is to be considered inglorious after raping Inana in the Sumerian poem, as he is to remain a subject of song. For exploration of possible political explanations for this paradoxical ending see Volk 1995: 37-8.

<sup>154</sup> We should emphasize that it is the rejection of Ištar's advances, not necessarily the litany of apparent insults directed at her by Gilgameš, which enrages the goddess. Compare the hymn (more specifically called a *pārum*-song) in her honour (fn. 151 above) which celebrates her ability to exhaust countless male lovers, edited at von Soden and Oelsner 1991: 340; SEAL 4.3.1.3; Wasserman 2016: 146-149).

Slave”, are not bowed by this monolithic male aggression, but subtly work against it, turning tenderness as a form of strength back on its simplistic and bombastic brutality.

#### (7) Further non-cultic love poetry?

One tablet from the Schøyen collection contains a poem that is addressed by a man to a woman and is not a misogynistic tirade, but instead a sensitive love poem charting in few lines the uncertainty of the lover with regard to the object of his affections and the accompanying mood-swings generated by his train of thought.<sup>155</sup> Initially entitled “Oh Girl, Whoopee...” by its first editor, A.R. George, being an attempted translation of its first two words, the poem has now been re-edited by N. Wassermann, who thinks it is addressed to the “daughter of an exile”, which is also a suggested translation of those first two words, and thus concerns the worries of an insecure lover who is separated from his beloved. Neither suggestion for the interpretation of the first line is particularly convincing.<sup>156</sup> The poem contains the unforgettable image of the love that “infests”, which Wassermann parallels with imagery from the Hebrew Bible.<sup>157</sup> At the end of the poem it emerges that the lover, who is a dreamer of dreams, has in fact been dreaming for real, and wakes up writhing around on his bed to the sound of the song of the swallow.<sup>158</sup> While this is perhaps the composition most like a modern love poem among those we have reviewed, it cannot be excluded that it belongs to the category of love-magic incantations, like the highly poetic piece published by A.R. George in this volume. There is no evidence that would either prove or disprove this hypothesis.

Two other compositions are spoken from the perspective of a woman directed at a male lover, and may belong to the Ištar-Dumuzi material. The poem on the tablet kept in Geneva, which is explicitly referred to as an *irtum*(-song) and was discussed above in that context, appears to address the issue of separation, because the lover is sent out into the steppe, while the woman fantasizes about his embrace.<sup>159</sup> The poem is rich with the typical language of love poetry, as its initial editor has demonstrated.<sup>160</sup> The poem ends with a prayer to Ištar and dedication to king Ammiditana, and thus most probably has a cultic background, although it does not show the repetition typical of cultic poetry.<sup>161</sup> It may nevertheless be that the woman is imagining herself in the role of Ištar, possibly even with the king being Dumuzi.<sup>162</sup> Perhaps all we need to assume is that the prayer and dedication are made to Ištar and the King as the ultimate lovers.

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<sup>155</sup> George 2009: 50-53, no. 8;

<sup>156</sup> The spelling *ma-ar-ti a-la-ni* of the *mārti alānē* needed for Wassermann’s initially quite attractive interpretation (SEAL 4.1.3.2) is not convincing, but this poem contains a number of unusual spellings. The word *alānū* “exile” is also rather infrequently attested (CAD A/1 334), but is no less unusual than the spelling *a-la-lī* suggested for reading these signs as an exclamation or interjection (George 2009: 52). The same objection is valid for a reading as *allallī* “my hoopoe”, with bird imagery standing in for the beloved (compare “my restless girl takes herself off like a hoopoe”, George 2009: 72-73, l. 4). A reading (*mārtī*) *allānī* “(my darling) my hazelnut” is also worth considering (suggestion courtesy A.R. George).

<sup>157</sup> SEAL 4.1.3.2 on lines 4-6; Wassermann 2016: 88.

<sup>158</sup> George 2009: 51, no. 8, 20-21.

<sup>159</sup> Groneberg 1999.

<sup>160</sup> Groneberg 1999: 181-190.

<sup>161</sup> Groneberg 1999: 174-175.

<sup>162</sup> Groneberg 1999: 176, 190.

Whether “cultic”, “royal” or none of the above, we have seen that the performance context of this poem was likely to have been public.

One final Old Babylonian fragment from Kiš was given the label “secular” by J.G. Westenholz.<sup>163</sup> Its explicit sexual content is voiced in a monologue by a woman entreating a man to make love to her, and shares one striking parallel with the language used by Ištar to seduce Išullanu in the Epic of Gilgamesh.<sup>164</sup> It is unclear how it can be excluded that this poem belongs to the Ištar-Dumuzi group, thus with the possibility of a cultic use, but it is also uncertain how far belonging to this group excludes that the song might have had a “secular” use as well. Westenholz considers use as a wedding song, adducing a number of parallels from Palestinian folk songs in her commentary, although the immediate use-context of the text on this particular tablet is likely to have been as a scribal exercise.<sup>165</sup> The description of the bed contains reference to the “incense-tree” (*kanaktum*), which can be found in love-incantations.<sup>166</sup> The poem contains several examples of the so-called “plural of ecstasy”, where body-parts particularly are referred to as if they were the shared property of the lovers.<sup>167</sup>

## (7) Concluding reflections

A frequent phenomenon to be observed within the poems is their fluctuating verse structure, as well as irregular lines and stanza length. They are not to be compared with the more regular metric arrangements of Akkadian epic poetry, usually into couplets of bipartite lines of verse. Such formal characteristics might be seen as a genre characteristic, suitable to the subject matter in that the short sentences and wandering focus of passionate discourse might be said to be iconically reproduced.<sup>168</sup> This hypothesis is only very tentative.

Unsurprisingly, the love-magic incantation is designed to gain possession (*šabātum*) or control of the beloved object by magical means combining the utterance of the spell and the performance of a usually analogical ritual. In a similar way to the analogical magic contained in the ritual, the use of the language of love in the spell is designed to bring about the desired effect. But is not this attempt to enchant or spellbind the beloved partially the conceit, and the risk, involved in writing love poetry in the first place? The language of the other poems associated with love frequently uses similar forms and imagery to that of the incantations. The image of the garden of desire is found as a locus of erotic activity in the love-magic incantations, as well as in love poetry (whether divine love lyrics or not); the metaphor of “fruits” and sexual activity or genitalia is also found throughout; specific items such as the “incense-tree” (*kanaktu*) are also found in both love-magic incantations and love poetry, as are the love-charms/cupids known as the *Ir’emus*. On

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<sup>163</sup> Westenholz 1987: 417.

<sup>164</sup> See fn. 151 above.

<sup>165</sup> Westenholz 1987: 420, 425.

<sup>166</sup> Westenholz 1987: 422, 8’.

<sup>167</sup> Westenholz 1987: 417. L. 9’ *rēšīni* “of our head”, *uznīni* “of our ears”, 10’ *budīni* “of our shoulders”, *irtīni* “of our chest”, 11’ *qātīni* “of our hands”, 12’ *qablīni* “of our waist”, 13’ *ḥurdatni* “our vulva (acc.)”, 14’ *tulēni* (spelled *tu-li-i-ni*) “of our breasts”. Sigrist and Westenholz 2008.

<sup>168</sup> For a similar observation see George 2009: 54 on “I Shall Be a Slave to You”, due to its short lines of two to three prosodic units, reproducing a sense of “breathless excitability”. See also Lambert 2013: 32.

the other hand the sexually arousing “laughter” of the beloved occurs 20 times in the 34 love poems collected by N. Wasserman, but only one dubious attestation occurs in a clearly identifiable love-magic incantation.<sup>169</sup> It is unclear whether any reason should be sought for this, given that the corpus is so small.

The type of lover portrayed in the incantations is frequently not sympathetic, and the violence involved in using magic to sway affections comes out in the imagery used: grab, strike, bind, make dizzy with vertigo. There seems to be little difference if the protagonists are male or female, although we did note that whereas the man “grabs” the vulva of the woman in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC love incantation from Kiš, the woman uses her vulva to “bind” the man in an Old Babylonian incantation from Isin which uses similar language. The use of violence is thus or can be asymmetrical.

The three poems that we grouped together as examples of or elements of dialogue or competition poems between men and women in section (5) appear to demonstrate a homogeneity of theme and language that is to an extent different to the other poetry associated with love, and should quite possibly be given a sub-grouping of their own. Here the language of the poetry is usually less lyrical than in the other love poetry, more prosaic and the topics of conversation more everyday. Certainly we observed implied allusions to the effects of love magic on the male participant in the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover”, possibly indicating a sub-text to the narrative of domination and resistant adaptation that develops throughout that poem. The three poems are however not lyrical in the sense of using high poetic language to emphasise heightened emotion. This contrasts with the recently published *Moussaieff Love Song*, which seems to use poetic language in a fluidly structured dialogue format to suggest an emotional peaks and troughs.

The emphasis on role-play, whether that be the stereotyped gender-positions which are occupied by the participants in the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover” or the figuring of the lover as a token or manifestation of the type represented on the divine level by Ištar or Dumuzi, a role which the lover performs, appears to be a central part of these types of love poetry. In the “Dialogue of the Faithful Lover” and the two poems that conceivably also belong to one or the other side of similar dialogues (“Field Full of Salt”, “I Shall be a Slave to You”), the positions taken by the male or alternatively the female figures are variously so similar that one might almost talk of their appearing in such characters as being one of the rules of the genre. This is something that could easily be understood in terms of the modern gender theoretical notion of “performativity”. This conception, outlined by Judith Butler almost a quarter of a century ago, argues that gender is a complex and ambiguous category, which we force into a monolithic, black and white, either/or polar scheme of male vs female appearances by repeatedly performing social gender roles that have been learned as prototypes for social behaviour.<sup>170</sup> Although Butler was clearly talking about gender as a social category, the application of this theoretical framework to drama, where characters appear in roles by definition, and from there to literature more generally, is of course readily comprehensible. A good deal of analytical mileage could be gained from seeing the form of poetry found in these three poems,

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<sup>169</sup> Wasserman 2016: 54, *ibid.* no. 26 word mostly restored in line 27. As discussed in section (7) above, the poem “Oh Girl, Whoopee ...” may or may not have been a magical incantation, and also contains this image in line 1 (George 2009: 50-53; Wasserman 2016 no. 2).

<sup>170</sup> Butler 2006: 189-193.

which were very likely performed in public, as a forum for the enactment and negotiation of power within and between gender roles.<sup>171</sup> The focus for expressing this enactment and negotiation of roles is the love relationship expressed in dialogue in a poetic love drama.

W.G. Lambert commented, despite the small sample that we have of this type of literature, on the apparent absence in Babylonian love poetry of the typical image of the male lover enslaved by the female beloved as is known from Roman elegiac and much later love-poetry.<sup>172</sup> Rather, in the poem from the Schøyen-collection "I Will be a Slave to You", spoken by a woman to a man, sentiments of self-abasement in the service of love seem at first sight to be female in gender. However, recent readings of the "Dialogue of the Faithful Lover", supported by the understanding of its parallel monologue "A Field Full of Salt" promoted here, show that the female participant, who appears as a partial parallel to the voice of "I Shall be a Slave to You", is in no way passive or enslaved.<sup>173</sup> Instead she presents a complex and adaptable strategy of response and indeed manipulation. The negotiation between the two is multi-faceted on the social level and multi-layered on the literary one.

What we do find occasionally, as we saw above, is the enslavement ("binding") of the man by the female sexual organ where the male drive to possess (*lulappit ħurdatki* "let me touch your vulva") is co-opted by the female into a means of taking control over him (*luppitma ħurdatni* "touch our vulva").<sup>174</sup> Here one cannot avoid the question of whether all these texts were ultimately written by men, projecting gender-hierarchical fantasies and an ideology of how women should be in a sexual relationship as the social norm, but for the moment I feel this question is not answerable within the framework of this essay. What we have is what the texts say, and that shows a surprisingly nuanced approach to the distribution of power between gender roles.

The comparison of the king to the divine lover of the love-goddess, in whose role he appears in some of the "divine love lyrics", allows the apex of the Mesopotamian social order to be figured in intimate and reciprocal relations with the divine. The cultic context of the "divine love lyrics" of Abi-ešuh, probably also of others too, is clear from their content, whatever that cult may actually have consisted of. However, it remains very difficult to find any Akkadian love-poetry that can certainly be regarded as manifestly non-cultic. The three poems reviewed in section (7) above cannot be safely assumed not to have had either a cultic or a magical use-context. Conversely that which had a cultic use in celebrating the (metaphorical?) marriage of the king with the goddess of love may well also have had a more popular use in providing an archetype to which all lovers could appeal.

At the one end of the spectrum of use of the Dumuzi-Ištar material we thus have the clearly cultic context of the 'Divine Love Lyrics'. At the other we have the personal use of much the same material, as possibly exemplified by the *Moussaieff Love Song*. The declaration of the speaker of a potency-incantation found at Boğazköy to the

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<sup>171</sup> See Groneberg 2002: 174.

<sup>172</sup> Lambert 1987: 33. Lambert saw this as a matter of courtship strategy based on allegedly different gender hierarchies in the respective societies where the literary motifs occur.

<sup>173</sup> Groneberg 2002: 174.

<sup>174</sup> See fn. 151 above.

effect that he too will sleep with the goddess of love can be seen as evidence of this type of attitude. It can only be verified in the rarest of circumstances that the poems were thus used, as this is a layer of data to which we can have little or no access. The preservation of certain songs as the fruits of scribal exercises, pieces known by heart, which might have been written down by trainee scribes precisely because they were popular, indicates that these were not originally compositions associated with anything like secret knowledge or the halls of learning.<sup>175</sup>

The performance of typical love poetry including Dumuzi-Ištar motifs may thus have linked the top of Mesopotamian society with the life-experience of the rest of the population, although this remains a crude and uncertain theoretical assessment at present. Even in Mesopotamia of many thousands of years ago love poetry in the forms outlined may have the potential to tell us a great deal about the values, hierarchies and ideological institutions which characterised society. It was part of the living social fabric, even though the documentary evidence has preserved so little of it. However, it is important to understand the voices and characters that speak through Mesopotamian love-poetry from a literary perspective first of all, as literary types particular to certain genres. The images of love-relationships that is to be gained from other genres of texts, such as law-codes, legal or economic documents, medical texts, rituals, royal inscriptions are themselves also likely to be varied according to the habitual forms and expectations of the genre concerned.

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<sup>175</sup> It is possible that the situation regarding the degree of learning involved in their composition was different for the Dialogues, but this would require a separate investigation.

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