

Vampires in Eden? Towards a 21st century reading of Genesis 1 – 11, ‘The Primeval History’.

Lacey turned; Babcock was perched above her, at the top of the tunnel’s mouth. As great and terrible a thing as God had ever made. Lacey felt no fear, only wonder at the magnificent workings of God. That He should make a being so perfect in his design, fit to devour a world. And as she gazed upon him glowing with his great and terrible radiance – a hallowed light, like the light of angels – Lacey’s heart swelled with the knowledge that she had not been wrong, that the long night of vigil would end as she’d foreseen. ¹

At first glance it is perhaps surprising, to anyone familiar with the early chapters of the book of Genesis, that the creature described in Justin’s Cronin’s new novel *The Passage*, hailed as the ‘novel of the decade’ with the film rights already purchased by Ridley Scott, is actually a vampire. On reflection, however, on the current fascination with these supernatural beings, evident in the phenomenal success of the Twilight books and TV series’ such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and True Blood with an online vampire library listing 1408 books in the genre, it is perhaps inevitable that such stories would eventually be given a theological slant raising some interesting questions regarding the interpretation of our ancient biblical texts.

Clearly the ‘supernatural’, rejected by many both within and outside the church as a now untenable feature of the Christian faith in the light of advances in the fields of science and technology, is still alive and well (if such a statement can be applied to the vampire!) in the 21st century imagination. Interestingly there are also echoes of Noah and the Biblical flood story in the novel in the potentially global destruction of the human race that forms the core of the story. The peopled world is not, however, consumed by water but devoured by vampires resulting in an apocalyptic environment inhabited by a few human survivors but dominated by an increasing number of soulless creatures doomed to an eternal search for their identities. As with Noah, but with an interesting twist, redemption will come through one person as yet uncorrupted by the darker side of humanity and whose preservation is essential for continuity and a new beginning. That such a situation was brought about by the deliberate development of an ultimate weapon against the ravages of both disease and terrorism also in some respects echoes the Babel story in the attempts to take control and even the role of ‘god’ by the construction of a potential power base capable of achieving ultimate authority and domination.

The 21st century imagination is clearly closer to that of the ancient Near East than may first be assumed, given the developments in several thousand years of world history, in its attempts to

¹ Cronin, *Passage*, 720.

construct worlds that relate to but are also beyond our immediate experience in a search for meaning that addresses both our deepest hopes and fears. Triumph over adversity through the emergence of super heroes with extraordinary powers, the psychological and emotional need for identity and the concern for continuity and the future of humanity are common themes. While today we may turn to molecular biology and quantum physics for answers, the text genres of the ANE that include creation stories, flood stories, genealogies, wills, entitlement deeds, dynastic guarantees, monuments and memorials are asking many of the same questions² revealing that the human condition and resulting needs have not fundamentally changed. We still need stories and the use of vivid imagery and metaphor to express what we may not otherwise have explanations or even the words for and in creating such stories we are only continuing a trend that has always been a part of our history. In this sense; ‘ It all comes down to stories – stories we tell ourselves about who we are, where we come from, and how we fit into the natural world, into the natural scheme of things.’³

Where then, do the biblical stories found in the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis fit in our 21st century understanding of the world that we inhabit? Do they have any relevance or should they be consigned to the past as no more than a primitive attempt to explain the world’s origins that can only be anachronistic in the present age? Or, however, if we approach them differently, is there a possibility that they may still speak into our culture with no less relevance than they had in their original context?

Despite, and perhaps in some ways because of, the domination of historical criticism of the biblical text over the past 100 or so years the perception of many is that theology and science are on a collision course with both claiming to be the source of ‘truth’. Attempts to provide details about the existence of Eden, the occasion of the ‘Flood’ and the events of the Babel story within a literal interpretation of the texts have resulted in an exhaustive but ultimately circular debate providing little more than fodder for the disparaging writings of those such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. It could even be argued that however well intended such a defence of the texts may be it actually only serves to mummify them further, locking them into an age long gone and preventing them from having a voice in the present. The alternative within more liberal Christian circles has been to demythologise the text removing elements such as the supernatural that do not sit comfortably within the 21st century mindset. Both interpretive efforts however, appear to work from the assumption of a lack of sophistication in the writings of the ANE which stem from a

² Sheriffs, *Imagery*, 14.1.

³ Eldridge, *Dominion*, 165.

more primitive mindset that we can no longer connect with today. On investigation, however this is far from the truth.

‘At The Cleaners’⁴ is a wonderful example of humorous writing addressing a situation that we can well identify with and laugh at today. The fact that it is actually Akkadian literature written in cuneiform on a clay tablet with a dating within the Old Babylonian period (c.2000-1600 BCE) should perhaps give us cause to reflect that when we move to what could be described as mythic expression emerging from ANE cultures it also cannot be easily labelled as simple minded or simplistic. Perhaps, rather soberingly, ‘it may well be instead that it is our own understanding and interpretation which is simpleminded and simplistic.’⁵ Hyers goes on to comment that in this light modern attempts to demythologise the Bible removing elements that no longer appear tenable and recasting biblical affirmations in terms of modern thought⁶ are actually as problematic as fundamentalising it ‘by taking statements literally and recasting them in terms of science and historiography’.⁷ The response instead, Hyers claims, should be to *deliteralise* and *remythologise* the text to ensure the preservation of its religious character and richness of meaning.⁸

It is also worth reflecting on McFague’s suggestion that the world today is more literalistic than any other time in history having lost the symbolic sensibility that allowed for multilayered realities with the literal level suggestive of meanings beyond itself.⁹ It is also, to some extent, what Taylor calls a disenchanted world ‘in which the only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan is what we call minds; the only minds in the cosmos are those of humans and minds are bounded so that thoughts and feelings are situated within them’.¹⁰ The inevitable conclusion is that when we discover that certain features of the Christian tradition and particularly those relating to our interpretation of the biblical text are untenable;

we end up adopting what remains after the unacceptable elements have been peeled off, be this some kind of deism, or word-soul, or cosmic force or blank atheism. Each variant has its designated end point which is seen as the truth, the residual kernel of fact underlying the husk of invention or superstition which used to surround it.¹¹

⁴ Foster, *Before The Muses*, 151.

⁵ Hyers, *Creation*, 109.

⁶ Hyers, *Creation*, 106.

⁷ Hyers, *Creation*, 106.

⁸ Hyers, *Creation*, 106.

⁹ McFague, *Metaphorical*, 5.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Secular*, 30.

¹¹ Taylor, *Secular*, 270.

But I would suggest that we are mentally and spiritually the poorer for it and that the words of T.S Eliot are perhaps salutary in reminding us;

Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of heavens in twenty centuries
Bring us further from God and nearer to the Dust.¹²

Post-enlightenment thinking has, however, resulted in a deep suspicion of the possible agendas behind religious texts and a belief that they are no more than social constructions in which we project our fears and longings into the sky.¹³ Christian claims of revelation and the presence of the Holy Spirit within the biblical text can then be dismissed as serving only to manipulate by legitimating the priestly power base of yet another religious sect struggling to establish itself within a polytheistic world. In this way the confidence of 21st century Christians is easily eroded as they attempt to defend their sacred scriptures and honour the continuing call to evangelise and bring their biblically based faith into the increasingly secular communities in which they live and work.

It is fortunate, therefore, that the more recent application of canonical and literary criticism to the text focusing on its final form has opened up new dimensions for our understanding and I would suggest a much more positive approach to its self-claimed position of Spirit-inspired revelation. While, as Sheriffs points out, our knowledge today of mainstream science and ANE literary tradition will clearly tend to dictate our reading strategy of the early chapters of Genesis making it difficult for us to take them seriously as geology, earth science or history this does not mean that we cannot take them seriously as story and theology.¹⁴ Long before the modern world ‘became conscious of green issues, of climate change, of pressure on resources as basic as water, of the threat of nuclear exchange. . . the ANE and OT were telling stories that engaged with the population explosion and with violence on a grand scale.’¹⁵ The Old Testament writers reworked their stories in ways that were unique within the cultures from which they emerged. Ironically, however, Sheriffs suggests the Christian church has often unintentionally demoted them to a level which has

¹² T.S. Eliot, *Choruses*, 107.

¹³ See Feuerbach’s critique of experience-based theologies.

¹⁴ Sheriffs, *Heaven*, 9.6.

¹⁵ Sheriffs, *Imagery*, 14.5.

the potential to turn profoundly theological pieces of writing and existential reflection into story book myths that are only suitable for children.¹⁶

The opening chapter of Genesis is, however, more compatible with current scientific thought than may first be assumed in its description of a beginning and ‘bringing order out of primordial chaos, largely through a process of progressive separation, division, distinction, differentiation . . . a slowly evolving cosmos, with life arriving late, beginning in the sea and only later emerging on earth, progressively distinguished into a variety of separated kinds’.¹⁷ It is also a fierce polemic against the prevalent theology of the ANE providing what Hyers describes as;

a radical and sweeping affirmation of monotheism vis-à-vis polytheism, syncretism and idolatry. Each day of creation takes on two principle categories of divinity in the pantheons of the day and declares that these are not gods at all, but creations of the one true God. . . And finally human existence too is emptied of any intrinsic divinity – while at the same time all human beings, from the greatest to the least and not just pharaohs, kings and heroes are granted a divine likeness and mediation.¹⁸

Then, in an extraordinary twist, this Priestly creation account with its ‘imagery drawn from the making, commanding and ruling of the great civilizations of the ancient world’¹⁹ is followed by the Yahwistic account in chapter 2 reflecting the values and traditions of the shepherd nomadic tradition of Israel²⁰ providing a vital balance to enrich the theological message.

Another example can be seen in the story of Noah which is often reduced to the singing of songs about animals entering the ark. There are other flood stories in the ancient Near East that are far more engaging in their description of characters and events than the story that unfolds in the 6th, 7th and 8th chapters of Genesis. But, as Sheriffs indicates, in these accounts it is the noise of humans, the unfathomable will of the gods or some non-moral fault that are given as the cause. In Genesis the story is reworked as an example of God’s judgment and grace at work in the face of escalating disorder and Noah is singled out as a man of exemplary moral behaviour. The ‘sin’ is not simply a religious failure in the Israelite cult but a moral problem for all humanity.²¹ The social order as God intended it has broken down from the first transgression in Eden, through the fratricide of the Cain

¹⁶ Sheriffs, *Imagery*, 14.5.

¹⁷ Kass, *Wisdom*, 46-47.

¹⁸ Hyers, *Biblical Literalism*, 101.

¹⁹ Hyers, *Creation*, 180.

²⁰ Hyers, *Creation*, 180.

²¹ Sheriffs, *Imagery*, 14.

and Abel account and increasing violence to become corrupt to the point of self-destruction, a situation that we can well identify with today.

We can even connect with the difficult verses of Genesis 6:1 – 2 when we recognise the strong link to the epic figure Gilgamesh in the characters belief in their possession of a divine prerogative to do as they will with other human beings, focusing on their perceived immortality which is soon addressed by the salutary reminder in verse 3 that ‘My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh’. (NRSV)

It is well worth looking at the way in which Wenham suggests that the biblical flood story is structured from Genesis 6:5 – 9:19 as a palistrophe²² or extended chiasm to emphasis its theological point.

Transitional Introduction (6:5 – 10)

- a) Violence in Creation (6:11 – 12)
- b) First Divine Speech (6:13 – 22) – resolve to destroy
- c) Second Divine Speech (7:1 – 10) – enter ark
- d) Flood Begins (7:11 – 16)
- e) Rising Waters (7:17 – 24)
- f) **GOD REMEMBERED NOAH** (8:1)
- e’) Receding Waters (8:1 – 5)
- d’) Drying Earth (8:6- -14)
- c’) Third Divine Address (8:15 – 19) – leave the ark
- b’) God’s Resolve to Restore Order (8:20 – 22)
- a’) Fourth Divine Address (9:1 – 17) – covenant blessings and peace

²² A palistrophe is a structure that turns back on itself with the first item matching the final item and the second matching the penultimate etc. The second half of the story is thus a mirror image of the first.

Transitional conclusion (9:18 – 19)²³

The palistrophic structure conveys increasing destruction in the first part and increasing restoration of the scene in the second part. It is the element at the centre of the whole that effects the turnaround, and it is an act of divine grace: God remembers Noah.

Another palistrophe within the narrative based on the number of days for each phase of the story also provides evidence of a carefully structured story.

7 days of waiting for the flood (7:4)

7 days more waiting (7:10)

40 days of flood (7:17a)

150 days in which the water prevails (7:24)

150 days in which the water wanes (8:3)

40 days of waiting for drying (8:6)

7 days waiting (8:10)

7 days waiting (8:12)²⁴

Such a structure allows the important theological truth of God's grace and commitment to his creation to take centre stage which is poignantly demonstrated in the medieval manuscript painting of The Deluge.

The manuscript illustration shows the anxious faces not only of the humans inside the ark, but the birds and animals as well. Noah, wearing a medieval cap, faces his wife, also in medieval headdress. Their sons stand close to each wife, supporting each other in this terrifying situation. The ark is in the shape of a shell holding the seed of a new humanity, a new beginning for the earth.

The climax of the Flood story is the rainbow and the covenant it represents. The author inherited a tradition which he reworked to present a specific theological message of sin, grace and covenant

²³ Anderson, JBL 97,38.

²⁴ Wenham, *Coherence*, 343.

with the key concept of covenant emerging to emphasise the grace of God in relational mode,²⁵ not only with human beings but also with animals and the earth. The idea of covenant and its implications will continue throughout the book of Genesis and beyond but there is another story within The Primeval History which has, I would suggest, an extraordinary resonance in our world today; a world still reeling from a global financial crisis with ongoing disclosures about excessive pensions and payoffs, salaries and bonuses amidst poor management and decision making that has left many with increasingly uncertain futures. But it is a world that has also, within the same time frame, seen the spending of around 1.5 billion US\$ on the Burj Dubai Tower.

Our culture today is, to a very large extent, a ‘technological’ culture. Atkinson suggests that not only have we developed technical skills in many areas of life but the way we think of ourselves is affected by technology. We tend to think of ourselves as constructionists, as makers and technical interveners, as those whose relationship to the world is primarily one of technical intrusion. While we can be thankful for many advances in technology that are life-enhancing we need to be aware of believing that what we *can* do (rather than what we *may* do) is the touchstone of what we *will* do. If we see the world outside of ourselves simply as something we make, it then becomes subject to our will and at our disposal.²⁶ The danger then is that technology ceases to be our servant, becoming instead our master with human communities and values often the casualties in the name of progress.

The final story in the Primeval History is that of Babel and clearly demonstrates the issues involved in crossing boundaries and attempting to establish a world without limits. The word ‘Babel’ for the Babylonians meant ‘the gate of the gods’ and Babylon in ancient times, especially in the second millennium B.C.E, was the heart of the ancient world and its centre of power. The mighty towers of the Babylonian ziggurats were widely known and such efforts to bridge the gap between heaven and earth²⁷ lead to great pride and prominence for Babylon.

The story in Genesis 11, however, mocks such boasting, poking fun at the elaborate efforts in brickwork and the enormous height of a tower that was going nowhere by the wordplay of linking *bābel/bālal* or Babel/confuse.²⁸ Instead of demonstrating the great wisdom of Babylon such towers, according to the biblical text, serve only as a monument to its folly.

In this sense it is a tale of technological pride, coupled with political will and an abandonment of the ways in which people are called to respond to God and his created order. Atkinson describes it

²⁵ Sheriffs, *How Long is Forever?* 38-42.

²⁶ Atkinson, *Message*, 179 – 180.

²⁷ Temples in Babylon were thought to have their roots in the netherworld and their tops in the heavens.

²⁸ Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 235.

as the sad description of the fracturing of community, of a breakdown of fellowship, of a failure in communication, of a growth in isolation and confusion. All resulting from a communal failure to live in dependence on God, an insistence on striving to reach the heavens and from giving way to pride in human achievements and power, and from human beings' determination to be the source of their own security.²⁹ A social warning which the world could perhaps do well to heed today!

In this respect it may just be that the real issue is not whether the Primeval History has any relevance to the workings of the world today but rather whether or not the world today has the ability, or more significantly, the desire to reclaim its language and ethos and allow the biblical text to engage in the polemic and correction for which it was originally and still is intended.³⁰

While we can celebrate the insatiable curiosity that has led to remarkable scientific and technological progress it has also 'plunged both humankind and the environment into deeper abysses of conflict and catastrophe.'³¹ Hyers claims that the consequences for a Promethean approach to improving the common lot by stealing the sacred fires and eating forbidden fruits has instead led to corruption, with the result that;

No era has been more promethean than our own. Now, as in the time of Aeschylus and the Yahwist, we are torn between eulogising the grand panorama of our discovery and invention and lamenting an array of ills, abuses and catastrophes that have attended our triumphs like inevitable retaliations from the gods upon our curiosity and daring.³²

History has shown, however, that the answers are not found in what Taylor describes as a longstanding obsession in Latin Christendom to 'nail down with ultimate, unattainable and finally self-destructive precision the bases of final, unchallengeable, inerrant authority, be it in a certain form of papal decision or a literal reading of the Bible.'³³ The challenge to Christian theology is rather to consider that;

The Bible is lit up with the colourful rays of metaphor, symbol, analogy, poetry, story, parable, imagery. It is not just information, data, exhortation or proposition from God. Nor is it merely a series of abstract principles or concepts linked by pedestrian factual

²⁹ Atkinson, *Message*, 177.

³⁰ Walton, *Ancient*, 43.

³¹ Hyers, *Creation*, 156.

³² Hyers, *Creation*, 157.

³³ Taylor, *Secular*, 512.

narrative. It is truth often deliberately framed in words that project brilliant images into our thinking, like a series of slides onto a screen.³⁴

The imprint of these ‘brilliant images’ opens doors for our imagination and consequent understanding that otherwise may be closed due to the limitations of our experience and linguistic abilities. It might be a large step today across a gulf of over two thousand years to believe with Aristotle that poetry may be an art higher than history in the sense of its universal truth-bearing power.³⁵ The ‘ugly ditch,’³⁶ however, starts to shrink if we are prepared to recognise that already by the era of Origen in the second and third centuries, Christians versed in cosmology were also faced with the truth of either suspending their belief in nature as they observed it or suspending their insistence on the literal or scientific interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis.³⁷

In only the last century Einstein made the comment that imagination was more important than knowledge which is an idea that is reflected on the CERN³⁸ website stating that imagination encircles the globe. On October 10th 2008 the CERN laboratory in Geneva turned on the Large Hadron Collider, heralded as the biggest and most expensive experiment in the history of science³⁹, with the goal of allowing scientists to look back into the past at the conditions that existed a trillionth of a second after the big bang. By recreating this environment it will allegedly be able to detect phenomena that have never before been observed and allow us to ‘look forward to a new era of understanding about the origins and evolution of the universe’.⁴⁰

One potential discovery is the Higgs boson that theory suggests gives matter its mass. The fact that it is also referred to as the ‘God particle’⁴¹ indicates its perceived significance for some in providing an explanation, through the means of science and reason, for the origins of life on earth, thereby replacing any sense of, or need for, a divine presence within this creative process.

In many respects the Large Hadron Collider is a good example of how, in Wright’s words, we are prepared to ‘probe ever further and ever more successfully backwards towards the origins and processes of all things, seeking to complete our knowledge of the great chain of causation.’ He goes

³⁴ Shaw, *Paying Attention*, 5.

³⁵ Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 181.

³⁶ Lessing argued that there was a gap or ‘great ugly ditch’ between historical and rational truth which could not be bridged.

³⁷ Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 118.

³⁸ The European Organization for Nuclear Research.

³⁹ Henderson, *Atom*.

⁴⁰ L. Evans, Project Leader CERN, as cited by Henderson, *Atom*.

⁴¹ Sample, *God Machine*.

on to add, however, that at the same time we almost dare not probe forward to the 'end' of things, or profess to fathom what the universe is *for*.⁴²

It is perhaps ironic that the stories from the ancient biblical text may be the best response to such a challenge but if they are allowed to reveal the surplus of meaning potentially contained within, then they may yet offer some surprises to the 21st century world within which predictability remains elusive.

On October 20th 2008, 10 days after it was turned on, the Large Hadron Collider was shut down due to technical problems, its short life span temporarily ending not with a bang and the end of the world, as some predicted, but with a whimper and the world still intact. Despite its complex technical background, as a product of human endeavour designed to explain and understand the mysteries of the universe, it is not in many ways dissimilar to the attempts within the ancient world to do the same. Significantly today the gap between these two worlds is closing with what Dawn describes as the current escalating sense of fatalism and reckless gambling upon wild chance, the distresses of advancement in warfare, enormous systems of power, immense numbers of people, colossal quantities of material and catastrophic situations that economists and politicians cannot understand.⁴³

The gap may never, though, have been as wide as we have come to believe if we are able to recognise the potential continuity between the ancient imagination and today's ventures into the world of not only science but also fantasy and science fiction throughout the arts. From the poetry and stories of the ancient texts to the scientific achievement of the Large Hadron Collider alongside the current fascination with vampires the search for answers continues marked by the rise and fall of perceived super heroes who have too often been proved to have feet of clay. The extraordinary lesson from The Primeval History, however, is that all such searching, driven by a common and deep-rooted need within the human makeup, can provide further insights into something so profound that our minds can often only grasp at the periphery of its fabric and wonder at its possibilities. We then start to discover that God has not absconded as some may claim today but actually spread as our vision and understanding of the universe have spread⁴⁴ to a new vision that, with the help of the sciences, may offer the best way forward if we ensure the continuity of both our planet and the species that it sustains.

⁴² Wright, *Ethics*, 113.

⁴³ Dawn, *Powers*, 611.

⁴⁴ Dillard, *Pilgrim*, 21.

If, in our post Enlightenment world, we truly prize reason and rational thought then perhaps we need to consider what Gadamer describes as the utterly rational principle that some given community, tradition or persons may actually know more about what we seek to understand than we do as; ‘The act of reason itself..., aware of its own limitations, accepts that others have better understanding.’⁴⁵

Accepting that others in the past may have been closer to understanding the language of transcendence should then make us more confident in retaining a shared religious language⁴⁶ from which we need illumination rather than proof.⁴⁷ The pre-scientific minds of the ancient Near East provided stories with much the same goal as the scientific minds behind the CERN experiment today demanding that faith involve a widening of the imagination⁴⁸ and the ability to be open to new possibilities.

Whether we can shed the potential stumbling block of the almost ‘slavish deference’⁴⁹ to a perception of the role of science that has come to define much of the contemporary world remains to be seen, but there are hints in the popularity of films such as the recent Avatar that there is a growing awareness of the need for change. If the stories of the early chapters of Genesis in their depiction of God’s intentions for his world nudge us towards a deeper understanding of our place within it then our imagination is freed not simply to take uncontrolled flight in falsehood and delusion⁵⁰ but rather to be ‘taken captive and reshaped by the Holy Spirit’ with transformative effect.

Despite our increasing knowledge our world remains a place of wonder as the tiny leafy sea dragons that are found off the South Australian coast reveal in their natural beauty that still surpasses all the digital creations of the fantasy world of film. But transformation is essential if we are to ensure the survival of such creatures and preserve the delicate balance that shapes our world and our own future. The challenge, I would suggest, is therefore to resist the calls to sacrifice our ancient biblical text to a spirit of the age which is no more than the vampire that sucks the life out of our faith. Instead we need to reclaim its message with the confidence that it is still a valid and even vital voice that must be heard as we struggle to find a way through the already turbulent waters of the 21st century.

⁴⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 248.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Secular*, 727.

⁴⁷ Ollenburger, *Zion*, 30.

⁴⁸ Shaw, *Imagination*, 3.

⁴⁹ Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 183.

⁵⁰ As claimed by modern sceptics such as Richard Dawkins.

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At The Cleaners

“Come now, Cleaner, let me give you a commission:
Clean my clothes!

Don't neglect the commission I am giving you!

Don't do what you usually would!

You should lay flat the fringe and the border,

You should stitch the front to the inside,

You should pick out the thread of the border.

You should soak the thin part in a brew.

You should strain that with a strainer.

You should open out the fringes of the ...,

You should... with clean water,

You should...as if it were (fine, imported) cloth.

In the overnight...

In the closed container...

You should [] soap and mix in gypsum,

You should beat it on a stone,

You should stir it in a crock and [rinse it],

You may want to...the...and comb it,

You should [tap it] with a cornel-tree branch,

You should [fluff out] the flattened nap,

[You should...] the woven work with a pin,

You should split the seam and cool it,

You should dry it in the cool of the evening.

If the south wind has not dried it,

You should put it on a rack in the east wind,

Make sure it's cool!

Carry (this) out, I'll make you very happy fast.

You should deliver it to my home, a measure of barley will be poured into your lap!”

The cleaner answers him, “By Ea, lord of the washtub,

Who keeps me alive,

Lay off! Nobody but a creditor or [tax collector]

Would have the gall to talk the way you do,

Nor could anyone's hands do the job!

What you ordered me I could not narrate, declaim, speak, or repeat.

Come now' – upstream of town, at the city's edge,

Let me show you a place to launder,

The big job you have on your hands

You can set to yourself,

Don't miss your chance, seize the day!

Do ease if you please the countless [tangles] of a cleaner.

If you can't give yourself more breathing room,

The cleaner's not born yet who will pay you any mind.

They'll think you a ninny, so, as they say,

You'll get all heated up,

Then you'll have a stroke.”

Text: Gadd, UET 6/2 414.

