



music

Suman's Lyrics: Diamond Ring in the Sky

by Binoy Barman

SUMAN Chatterjee is not now merely an individual — he is now completely an institution as a pioneer of a new trend in modern Bangla music. He has already been widely and warmly celebrated for his magical music. If not for their tunes, Suman's songs will be ever enjoyable for their unparalleled lyrics. His lyrics are all enriched with poetic beauty containing the depth of the ocean and the loftiness of the mountain. Suman employs various figurative devices to make his lyrics illuminating as well as stimulating. Specifically personification, metaphor and simile have found their home in Suman's lyrics whose tuned manifestations are as lyrical as the symphony of heartbeat.

Suman envisages time as a person with all human physical and mental attributes. Time acts and reacts, laughs and cries, sits and walks to experience the complexities of life when it is no more the eternal flow but an ephemeral identity liable to be influenced by its own momentum. Let us visit the poor small park of the locality where we will find time also on a stray visit. Look! "The wood of the benches is burnt in sun and soaked in water; the flowing time has sat there as an offended lover... as solitary chaplin.../A little away is a creaking tap; the falling day says to bucket let's fetch water.../The leaves of the pale trees are gray with dust; finding no way tired time folds off the shirt-sleeves."

As a dumb spectator time witnesses everything. Man's cruelty, injustice, foolishness, affliction — nothing escapes the eyes of time. Urban pursuits have made life complicated and feelingless like machines. True, at the cost of emotion, man has gained motion. He has been endlessly busy cutting the umbilical cord from nature and country culture. Children have forgotten their simple indigenous games out of tremendous pressure of urbanised education. In place of kid it is sparrow that now plays Akka-Dokka. "As soon as the sunlight in the morning steps on the ground, a sparrow is seen to play Akka-Dokka.../Now time sighs in the morning and evening; the sparrow only plays since the girl's stopped it."

Urbanisation has an ever rivalry with nature. With the spread of urban civilisation the limbs of nature are wounded and its complexion is blemished. The lungs of nature breathe polluted air, its blood circulates poison from water, its eardrum deafens by torturous sounds — thus all its existence is almost suffocated by the claustrophobic impositions of gray brick-layers. One of the most serious consequences of urbanisation is deforestation which makes nature bare and poor. Regarding this a piteous story is told by Suman: "The bending tree by pondside knew a frivolous fish/The fish played

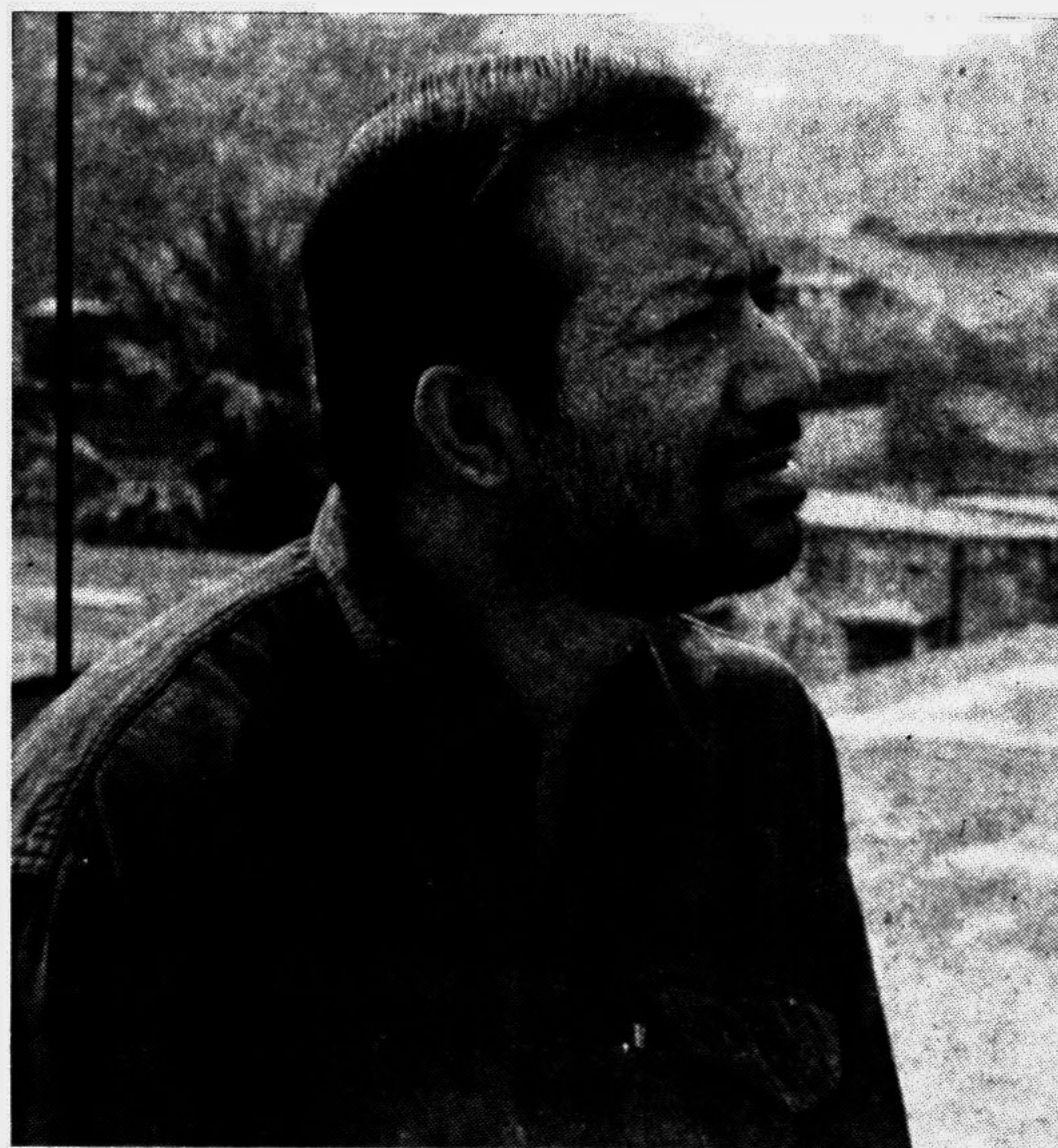
now and then/ The tree watched and swayed down/The leaves of the tree touched water/The pond was his notebook of music/If it rained all noon, the leaves would sing with a rhythm/The wind dropped in, wove various designs on water, hair-furrowed through the leaves and the pond laughed brightly." But one day the tree was out down and sold off. Hence now "absentmindedly the air of the age counts the money of selling land."

To see the wretched condition of nature, as it is bedeviled by the modern mechanical civilisation, time attempts to fly away, rejected and dejected. Sometimes Suman sets time in the role of a cashier or baker who cherishes vengeance for the wicked fellows. "Like a cashier time is keeping accurate accounts/Time with invisible pen in hand is writing everything." However tyrannical Parmita may be, Suman warns her with consolation. "As you shed flames from your sight, history will bake bread with it."

The going of time is so smooth, silent and gloomy as to impact on human temperament irresistibly. With varying mood of mind, time transforms its appearance, from morning to noon, noon to afternoon, afternoon to evening, and towards night. After the hot journey of noon the day arrives at the bank of afternoon, Suman feels. "Then afternoon starts walking down the dyke of evening; dusk lightly puts its fingers on the dust of way." The day bids farewell giving rise to rouge sombre disposition in the psyche of the firmament. Alone, alone it becomes. Away from the noises of city preoccupations — away from the agony of anxiety — away from the fuss of artificiality time seeks shelter in the bliss of solitude, as Suman observes. "Morning wants to be alone driving away the clouds.../afternoon wants to be alone by roadside where the day is over/Night wants to be alone being separate from darkness."

The movement of time is endless. It sees, hears and walks — walks, sees and hears. It is as old and experienced as the universe. Who knows life better than time? Time travels through life shaking it and making it hear the stories of life. "Time has gone away and is going on and is telling the stories of life while moving." During its on march time leaves inobliterable mark on human physique. Wrinkles in the skin, baldness over the head, myopia in the vision, arthritis around the ligaments — all characterise the advent of age. It is the inevitable consequence of all human bodies when everybody might feel like Suman, "Age teaches me strange trigonometry in my wrinkles of appearance — culture of middle age between the diminishing hair/Knees have got trouble and every joint has become weak/Time only plots in the middle-class body."

Not only time, many other things like sky, wind, tree, cloud etc. have been personified in Suman's lyrics. The sky



as an individual has got knowledge acquired through senses. "The sky knows all sensitiveness/ Won't happy days come for all? The sky seeks to hear the answer." Holding good news for new life, it appears to Suman, "The morning sky is smiling with watchful eyes." Founded on barbarism, urban civilisation has no sympathy for the boy who is thrust into the cave of death after an abject show of inhuman torture. The sky gets the view, while the wind gets the smell. "His eyes have been penetrated by dopten/The city wind smells it — the fantastic flavour of man-handing." The cloud in the sky can, however, give us shadow in the burning days. It can also entertain us with dancing. "Sometimes cloud wears ornaments round the ankles to dance/Sometimes cloud forgets the rhythm coming on the stage." Laughing, dancing, singing, or speaking — nothing is better performed by anybody than 'thou', the ever unrevealed figure. "As thou laugh, the sun gets so ashamed that it wants to adorn your head with the crown of light/As thou dance, the rhythm takes leave and the prosodists become helpless on the whole/As thou sing, all the known hypocritical songs split into pieces/As thou speak, Sandhi and Samas apply for a six-month leave from grammar." Optimistically, situation will change in course of time — happy moments will

usher real poems and songs to the scene. Suman is ready to seize them. "Wanted that poem for putting an end to poetry/Waiting for the day when well-shaped syntax would show up to enquire about the time/Wanted a song whose job would be ignite torch or put it out for the chain of stars in the darkness." Break through darkness — jump over difficulties and then emancipation is there at the end. Look, the baby of bush, breaking through the ancient walls, plays with its hands and legs. "Peace will prevail everywhere and then nobody will be ashamed like the cricket bat — "Little Raju lost his eyes—how is that?/ The cricket bat was only ashamed in the morning of poll." Neither price-hike will disturb diurnal livelihood nor will literature die under the heavy volumes of publications — "The rate of market bursts into houses.../Literature demises under the pressure of Puja issue." Free life-free thought like the unchained bird in the sky is the dream of the earth. Everybody is waiting for that undisturbed perfection of life — peaceful attainment of the earth. "Who's opened the cage door, life?/ I call you life, agent of freedom."

Apart from the figure of personification, Suman's lyrics abound in metaphors which are as vivid as ingenious. Suman's power to create metaphor is evident in this song — "Wish is a kind

of grasshopper that only hops despite reluctance/Wish is a kind of kitten that is very clever with its soft voice/Wish is a kind of chaotic kingdom where the unwillingness can swing in the wind of will/Wish in a kind of firework and so naughty as to make the night day/Wish is a kind of dauntless girl who ate up the sauce of her grandfather at noon/Wish is a kind of writing poetry and learning how to wish to live with words and music/Wish is a kind of mad who can do whatever he wishes/Wish is a kind of dream of mine, that is I want to see the unified farm before I die."

Suman realises money has its dual character. "Money is friend, money is enemy/Money is lord, money is disciple." Money is liable to be torn, but can 'hope' dwindle like a stone? "I narrowly lost many things, yet dwindling hope is not all finished." However, eyes can represent morning sky and tears dewdrops. "It doesn't matter whether you understand daybreak's in my eyes/Tears being dewdrops make the morning wet." Time is a sea blue deep vast, isn't it? "Wanted that young man of twenty or seventy three who is swimming boldly in the sea of this time." Everything has its own hue, own flavour. But desire, deprivation, future — can these be imagined as colourful objects? "Take the colour of this desire, take the colour of deprivation, take the colour of future." Cloud — is it only the collection of water vapour in the minimised temperature up in the sky moved by the wings of wind? It is tangibly more than that. "Sometimes cloud is listening to songs in ancient modes/sometimes cloud is agony of dissonance." Kite is not only a frame of paper to fly playfully in the sky, it can be the messenger of freedom to the fettered humanity. "The kite of freedom sent news to the boy who's trying his best to pull a rickshaw." The new moon can stand for a sickle, a farmer's tool to work in the field. "At midnight the sickle of the moon is getting sharp by degrees." Highly allegorical, this song has a political import and is even subject to multifarious interpretations.

The most popular number created by Suman is probably 'I want you...' Sky-touching emotion expressed in lyrics and heart-touching swings sown in tune has made this price a complete success. A bit of metaphor can be found in this ever chantable song — "I want you in the adolescence of the morning." Who is actually this 'you' in Suman's notes? Sometimes 'you' seems to be his sweetheart whom he has created in his imagination. Sometimes 'you' comes as the image of the country — the motherland. As such, what is her condition now? Not pleasant at all, Hence Suman says, "Don't draw the face of your country with cheeks broken and bosom deformed whose should hornet is about to fly." It is feelings for the country — love to the language that makes a man patriot. Only a patriotic man can utter, "The 21st February is my light — my

eyes.../That eyes are my hope, my language, my promise." A champion of patriotism loves man and freedom so hates military intervention and tyranny. Can anybody think freely if curfew is promulgated in the brain. "Curfew in the brain so I fear to think." These are some of the metaphors pictured by Suman in his lyrics which enchant all the audience making them spell-bound.

There are also some brilliant instances of simile in Suman's lyrics. "This kind of figure has made his numbers lively and sprightly. The sun rises every morning with some new message and recites poem, as it were, in the eastern sky spreading red courage. Allegorically, "An aged poet stood up to read a new poem, as stands a sapling in decomposed soil.../as stands a female leopard in cage.../as stands common people suddenly to resist.../as stand lovers by the force of their heart.../as stands the living of a mother who's lost her child.../as stand unfamiliar words in a familiar poem.../as stand the wings of a crane in the magnificent cloud." Like cloud, days also have their distinctive tone and colour, being cheerful or dull, bright or gloomy, fiery or watery. "Some days are colourful like the lips of lover and red of flag/Some days are so colourless that my morning laughs like ailment." After the light of the day is put out, night gradually creeps down the earth. But what is its colour? Is it like the cry of a black fellow? — "When the night will come black like me." On the opposite page of darkness, sunlight with a similar pace can run, fly, sing and play. "Sunlight mixed with golden sail runs all day long through the greenery like a deer/He is called to play by the bushes whose smell is full of delusive appeal/Sunlight is waiting there motionless like a tiger behind the tree; any moment he may spring up in order to shatter everything/O sunlight riding on the feathers of bird breaking through the air crosses the sky like a thief so the night drifts away/With the spirit of golden light morning chirps sweet notes like a bird." Suman does not seem to believe in the philosophy of setting up friendship with opposite sex merely based on physical relation, rather it should be sacred, pure, divine, devoid of all carnal feelings which, however, smacks something of platonic love. "I don't want to pluck you like a flower.../to ransack you like slates.../to smother you like oil.../to suck you like leech."

Suman presents in his lyrics such a variegated array of personification, metaphor and simile captivating and marvellous. He is a great artist, say, a mature poet, with magnanimous scholarship mixed to superb musical sense. He has tremendously influenced his audience portraying vivid imagery in his uncommon lyrics. Fans and admirers of Suman now just look at the sky for the diamond ring of rainbow which glistens calmly with the dreams of life.■

Oldest Epic

by Iftekhar Sayeed

WE begin to feel that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the fountainhead of literature. This feeling is reinforced by their antiquity. Imagine my surprise when I stumbled on the oldest epic in the world — the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Disenchantment with Homer turned to disillusionment on discovering similarities between the older and the younger works. In both the travels of Gilgamesh and the *Odyssey*, the representation of the joys of this worldliness in an attempt to suspend the hero's journey to the netherworld devolves, respectively, on the divine bargirl, Siduri, lodged as inn-keeper amidst the garden of the sun-god near the ocean, and Circe and Calypso on their mythical isles. Both in the *Gilgamesh* epic and the *Iliad*, friends die their surrogate deaths for the heroes, Patroclus for Achilles, Enkidu for Gilgamesh, both to return and report on the nothingness of death.

I should not have been surprised, of course; the Greek civilisation was derived from the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations, after all. The *oikoumene* of the ancient Middle East embraced the regions from Iran to Egypt and from Anatolia and the Aegean Sea to the Arabian Peninsula through the years 3000 to 330 BC. The word means the inhabited world and signifies a distinct historical and cultural continuum. From the dawn of civilisation the area constituted a far-flung house (*oikos*, house) until Alexander's empire replaced the intimacy of the ecumene. Architectural, ceramic, metallurgical and other products radiated from the first civilisations to their younger contemporaries. Just as the secular crafts were monopolised by professional guilds, so were other-worldly services concentrated in priest-guilds. The mobility of guilds disseminated ceramic as well as religious forms: sacrifice in Mycenaean (Late Bronze Age) Greece mimicked the Hebrews, its memory preserved to this day in

ritual Jewish slaughter. Merchants and priests were equally to be found rubbing shoulders in ancient Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of northern Syria as in Israel or hobnobbing at the Mesopotamian gateway at Alalah in what is now modern Turkey. The Greek world, in the late Bronze Age, thereby, drew on the inventory of the Middle East, material, cultural and spiritual.

Thus, the consecutive occupation of the divine throne by Uranus, Cronos and Zeus, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, appears to be the reflex of the successive theocracies of Anu, Kumarbi and the storm god in a Hittite version of a Hurrian myth. The court of Hattusa was the royal school of chariotry for Achaean princes, and the empire, no doubt, proved equally dexterous in the art of diplomacy.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, inferring from the number of copies discovered in the Levant, enjoyed the status of a bestseller. Since senior to the *Iliad* by some 2,000 years, it would not be stretching a commercial analogy overmuch to suggest a parallel between the piracy on the Mediterranean and the influence of the epic on Homer. The Epic, composed in Mesopotamia around 2,800 BC, tells of the odyssey of a king in quest of immortality. To humanise his tyrannical reign, the gods respond to the subjects' adjurations by creating Enkidu, a wild man initially living among the desert animals,

*With the gazelles he feeds on grass,
With the wild beasts he jostles at the watering places,
With the teeming creatures his heart delights in water.*

later civilised into urban life, and finally befriended by the king. This epilogue introduces us to their swashbuckling and daring-do, such as the killing of Huwawa and the 'bull of heaven'. The latter had been sent by Ishtar, the goddess of Uruk and 'a woman scorned', to kill Gilgamesh for repudiating

her fickle love with a set of unflattering similes:
*"Thou art a brazier which goes out in the cold.
A backdoor which does not keep out blast and windstorms.
A waterskin which soaks through its bearer.
A shoe which pinches the foot of its owner!"*

When Enkidu gets into a funk before the terrible monster Huwawa, Gilgamesh remonstrates with him thus:
*"Mere man — his days are numbered,
whatever he may do, he is but wind.
You are — already now — afraid of death.
Where is the fine strength of your courage?
Let me lead,
and you (tarrying) call out to me: 'Close in, fear not!'
And if I fall, I shall have founded fame.
"Gilgamesh fell (they will say) in combat with terrible Huwawa."*

Yet his Braggadocio proves just that, when the reality of death is brought home through the loss of the one closest to him. For, from this pinnacle of brotherhood, juxtaposed against the habitual infidelity of the goddess, the twain are dashed by the gods to the depths of division. Their united actions recoil against their unity, as Enkidu dreams of the 'house of dust', falls ill and dies. The fact of death transmitted so intimately to Gilgamesh for the first time, the invincible hero doubles up under grief and terror, and begins his quest for eternal life.

*"Fearing death I roam over the steppe:
The matter of my friend rests heavy upon me.
How can I be silent? How can I be still?
My friend, whom I loved, has turned to clay.
Must I, too, like him, lay me down
Not to rise again for ever and ever?"*

En route to meet Utnapishtim, the only mortal to attain immortality, he meets Siduri, the barmaid who dwells on the edge of the sea, 'who, notwithstanding her calling, gives him sober advice.

*"Gilgamesh, fill your belly —
Day and night make merry,
Let days be full of joy,
Dance and make music day and night
And wear fresh clothes,
And wash your head and bathe.
Look at the child that is holding your hand,
And let your wife delight in your embrace.
These things alone are the concern of men."*

Unsurprisingly, the content of a barmaid constitutes the despair of a king and a hero. Gilgamesh sails over the waters of death of confer with the Sumerian Noah, Utnapishtim, who once played a role similar to his biblical counterpart, for which service to gods and creatures he received his boon, both event and gift not permitting replication. Yet Utnapishtim holds out one last forlorn hope — a rejuvenating, underwater plant. Like a pearl-diver, Gilgamesh plunges for the priceless treasure of the deep; only to lose it to a serpent when he stops at a pool on the warm journey back to Uruk, having left it on the bank. Henceforth, snakes, rather than Gilgamesh, were to endure forever, sloughing off their bodies when old to renew youth. To Urshanabi, Utnapishtim's boatman who had piloted him over the Persian Gulf to find the plant of youth, he communicates his 'incommunicable woe'.

For whose sake, Urshanabi, have I strained my muscles?
For whose sake has my heart's blood been spent?
I brought no blessing on myself —
I did the serpent underground good service."