

Summary

Enkidu has just died, leaving Gilgamesh very heartbroken and longing to have his friend back. He wants to talk to Utnapishtim, an immortal man, in order to find the secret to immortality to revive Enkidu. His journey takes him to the mountains of Mashu which are guarded by the scorpion people. After travelling further, Gilgamesh comes to the cottage of Siduri, where he stays for a short time. Gilgamesh repeatedly rejects her sexual advances as he only wants to find Utnapishtim. Eventually, she gives tells him to find Urshanabi, a boatman who possesses sacred stones. She also insults Gilgamesh causing him to run out angrily. In his haste, he smashes some stones that he sees in his path, not realizing that they are the sacred stones he needs to cross the sea of death and find Utnapishtim. Urshanabi presents him with an alternate method to cross the sea of death which involves using long wooden poles to push their ship. Gilgamesh and Utnapishtim get to know each other and Gilgamesh learns how Utnapishtim became immortal. Utnapishtim tells the story of how the god Ea took pity on him and spared him from a great flood. Afterwards, the god Enlil blessed him and his family with eternal life. Finally, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh about a plant that could bring Enkidu back to life. Unfortunately, shortly after Gilgamesh retrieves the plant from a river, he leaves it on the riverbank where a snake eats it. This leaves Gilgamesh sad once again. This chapter was mainly about Gilgamesh trying to find a way to bring Enkidu back to life.

Predictions

I think that Gilgamesh will continue to be angry and upset about Enkidu's death. I think that he will try to find another way to bring Enkidu back to life. He may be able to find another plant. If he is unsuccessful, I think he will become more depressed and potentially suicidal. He will neglect his people and Uruk will fall into ruins.

Questions

Why does Gilgamesh put on animal skins after Enkidu's death?

How do the sacred stones work?

Why did Gilgamesh leave the plant unguarded, especially since it is very valuable to him?

Important Quotations

"Mad,
Perhaps insane, he tried
To bring Enkidu back to life
To end his bitterness,
His fear of death.
His life became a quest
To find the secret of eternal life
Which he might carry back to give to his friend" (54-55).

I chose this passage because it sums up the main plot of this chapter. I like how this showcases how profoundly Enkidu's death affects Gilgamesh. He wants Enkidu to be alive so badly that it makes him a bit crazy, and becomes his entire life purpose. It shows how Gilgamesh reverts back to bitterness without Enkidu to bring him happiness.

Personal Response

This chapter made me want to throw my book across the room. I found the ending disappointing and anticlimactic. Gilgamesh's travels seem long winded and I wanted him to get to the end of his journey faster. When he finally gets the plant, it is satisfying to see his efforts rewarded. I want to ask Gilgamesh why he thought it was a good idea to leave such an important object unattended on a riverbed. It aggravates me a lot when characters do stupid things and this was one of those moments. All in all, I did not enjoy the ending of this chapter because it doesn't have a happy ending.

Connections and Conventions

The epic of Gilgamesh partially follows the cycle of "The Hero's Journey." This chapter covers each step from "tests, enemies, and allies" to "the road back." The "reward" in this story is the life-giving plant which Gilgamesh retrieves from the river. On "the road back" Gilgamesh loses his precious plant to a snake.

The story of Utnapishtim and the flood is very similar to the story of Noah's Ark. The similarities are so noteworthy that many theologians believe that they originated from the same event. Both stories chronicle a man who receives warning from a god about an upcoming flood. Noah and Utnapishtim are told to build a boat to house all the animals of the world. Noah does not receive immortality.

The description of the scorpion people reminds me of Medusa. Medusa's gaze will turn people into stone, while the gaze of the scorpion people will kill them.