

Summary

Book 3 opens with a grief-stricken Gilgamesh, whose memories of Enkidu haunt him. Gilgamesh is helpless, trapped in his own mind, and trying to find a way to accept Enkidu's death or bring Enkidu back. Gilgamesh embarks on a journey to find Utnapishtim, a wise man who was protected by a great flood by the gods. Gilgamesh believes Utnapishtim may be able to give him immortality to revive Enkidu. Firstly, he reaches the gate between the twin peaks of Mashu after a long trek through the desert. The gate between the mountains is guarded by the Scorpion people, who scoff at his quest and say that travelling beyond the mountains is futile. Gilgamesh persists, and the Scorpion people just let him pass, fed up with his unreasonable attitude. Gilgamesh travels past the gate and onto the Road of Sun, which is shrouded in complete darkness. After a very long time of walking, a valley comes into view, and Gilgamesh passes through the valley, recounting the adventures he had with Enkidu to himself. Next, Gilgamesh reaches a cottage and is taken in by the barmaid, Siduri. She puts him to rest on her bed while he mutters about the past he shared with Enkidu. Siduri calms him down and tries to convince Gilgamesh to forget Enkidu in favour of the pleasures he could find with her. Gilgamesh however, is too focused on reviving Enkidu and refuses, demanding for the way to Utnapishtim. Siduri tells him that he must seek out Urshanabi, who will show him how to get across the sea of death to Utnapishtim. After some difficulty, Gilgamesh manages to cross the deadly waters. Finally, Gilgamesh reaches Utnapishtim and tells Utnapishtim what he seeks. Utnapishtim laughs and tells Gilgamesh that his search for eternal life is pointless. After talking with each other about the events that lead to their current state, Utnapishtim challenges Gilgamesh to go without sleep for six days and seven nights, reasoning that he needs to overcome sleep to avoid death. Gilgamesh fails his challenge and Utnapishtim is going to make him go back to Uruk, but Utnapishtim's wife reminds Utnapishtim of the same grief he once went through. Utnapishtim pities Gilgamesh and tells him that if he retrieves and cuts himself with a special flower from the bottom of the river, he will be rejuvenated. Gilgamesh gets the flower, and is heading back to Uruk when he stops to bathe. While he's bathing, a serpent devours the flower and slithers away. Gilgamesh realizes the flower is gone, and falls to the ground, weeping.

Main Idea

This chapter was mainly about how death is inescapable, as even after all the trials and hardship he went through, Gilgamesh fails to secure immortality for himself and Enkidu.

Prediction

I predict that Enkidu will continue to be at the forefront of Gilgamesh's mind, but Gilgamesh will use the good memories he had with Enkidu to be a more compassionate ruler for his subjects. Moreover, Gilgamesh will appreciate death, as he has learned that although someone may die, their legacy will continue in the hearts and minds of those who remember him/her.

Questions

- Why didn't Gilgamesh take the flower into the pool with him if the flower meant so much to him?
- Surely Gilgamesh would have learned about the creatures in the forest, so why didn't Gilgamesh build or do anything to protect the flower?
- How would the story have turned out if Gilgamesh died and Enkidu lived? **Great question**
- Would Enkidu mourn Gilgamesh and seek out immortality in the same way?
- Would Ninsun hate Enkidu and disown him?
- Would Enkidu go to the gods and ask for Gilgamesh?
- Would Enkidu become the tyrant Gilgamesh once was?
- Has Utnapishtim given the secret to immortality to anyone else in the past?

Important Quotation

"It could go on for years and years, and has, for centuries, for being human holds a special grief of privacy within the universe that yearns and waits to be retouched by someone who can take away the memory of death. Gilgamesh wandered the desert alone as he had never been alone when he had craved but not known what he craved; the dryness now was worse than the decay" (54).

- This quotation marks the moment where Gilgamesh goes from being a passive mourner to trying to chase a solution to his grief. The first sentence illustrates a passive mourner, who has desires something or someone to take the death of a loved one out of their life and mind, so that they can be at peace. It also demonstrates that someone who has just

lost a loved one may go to any lengths to ease their pain. The second sentence illustrates how Gilgamesh is reflecting on his life, and realizes that he was just a passive observer to his life, not making any real connection with anyone, and not knowing what he wanted from his life.

Personal Response

When I read the chapters, I felt a strong connection to the text. I felt semblances of pity for Gilgamesh, who underwent many trials and tribulations to get the plant of rejuvenation, only to lose it so close to the end of his journey. Gilgamesh losing the flower and going back to Uruk empty-handed made me ask myself: What was the point of Gilgamesh's quest? One might answer that Gilgamesh learned the value of life and to appreciate death. They wouldn't be wrong, many modern stories have well-defined characters and a well-defined plot that often follows the hero's journey, like the "Harry Potter" or "Percy Jackson" series. The ending of "The Epic of Gilgamesh" didn't conform to the ending of many modern books where the hero gets what they want, sometimes with sacrifice; Gilgamesh gets nothing at the end of the story except for life lessons, and loses his best and only friend, making this story very unique.

Connections & Conventions

- The Hero's Journey
 - Gilgamesh creates a second cycle of the Hero's Journey when he goes on his quest searching for immortality, fulfilling the steps of the Hero's Journey from when he sets out past the mountains of Mashu (Crossing the threshold) to losing the flower (The Road Back), and everything in between.
- Epic Conventions
 - Gilgamesh travels over a vast setting again, going from Uruk to the mountains of Mashu, to Utnapishtim's home; receives supernatural help in the form of his reward, the rejuvenating flower, and experiences humility when he loses the rejuvenating flower.
- Text-to-Self
 - There are multiple instances throughout book 3 where other characters realize that they cannot deter Gilgamesh. In order for him to realize the error in his ways, he must see them for himself. This begs the question, do we only learn through failure? I connect to this because there have been many instances in the past where I didn't listen to others'

warnings and then failed, which was usually accompanied by “I told you so”. But through my failure, I learned to try different methods until I gave up or succeeded.