

Week 3: Tyrants, Wild Men, and Grief! Tablets I-III, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

As you read through the assigned readings (see syllabus), think about the following questions and jot down your thoughts. Make sure that you cite the texts (use page numbers) and include some quotations. You do not need to answer all of the questions, but answer at least 8. Do your best to understand the plot and begin to probe into deeper meanings. VERY IMPORTANT: There are no right or wrong answers. The goal of this assignment is not to test you, but to give you the opportunity (and challenge) to develop your thoughts.

Background:

The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the most important texts from the very ancient world. A foundational tale of ancient Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq and Afghanistan), *Gilgamesh* tells the story of Gilgamesh, a Babylonian king who was a real person. His story navigates the fraught waters of governance: doing great things and being a great person, and how those two ideas are often in conflict.

Questions to think about as you read this *Gilgamesh* assignment:

1. Throughout this text, repetition of lines (with small adjustments) plays a huge role in the epic's rhythm. Pick one set of repeated lines and think about its significance. Why might the poet have selected those lines to repeat? In other words, why do you think they're significant?
2. On page 4, in the line section "MB Ni," we see the prayers of common people who are calling upon the god Aruru to create an equal to Gilgamesh, Enkidu. What do you think this says about the role of the individual (distinct from his community) in Babylonian society?
3. Line 108 (on p. 5) says of Enkidu, "he knows not a people, nor even a country" and implies a distinction between "a people" and "a country." In the context of our assigned reading, why is this?
4. Strangely enough, lines 195-202 (on p. 8) show that sex with Shamhat has changed the perception of Enkidu in the wild. Why is that? What has sex changed?
5. "...mighty as a rock from the sky" is a repeated phrase in this epic to discuss the power of our various heroes. What is "mighty" about a rock from the sky?
6. Between lines 229-Y18 (pp. 9-17), Enkidu and Gilgamesh went from being in combat to being friends. In the context of your reading, why do you think such a friendship formed so quickly?
7. On page 17 (II 177-81), Enkidu begins weeping. What do you think caused this?
8. Enkidu argues that this is a journey that should not be made. Why do you think he feels this way, given his clear expertise in the forest?
9. What do you make of Shamhat's role in their journey?
10. How do you think the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu will be affected by this journey?