

have granted immortality, in order to learn from him the secret of eternal life. The remainder of the epic incorporates the story of the Flood (see Selection 2), which originally existed as an independent tale. Utnapishtim relates how he obtained eternal life as a reward for the deeds he performed at the time of the Flood. But this unique event cannot be duplicated. As a parting gift to the dejected Gilgamesh, Utnapishtim tells him of the Plant of Life that grows on the bottom of the sea and renews the life of him who eats it. But once again Gilgamesh's hopes are ended when the Plant of Life is stolen from him by a snake. The epic ends with Gilgamesh's bitter lament over the failure of his quest; though snakes may hereafter slough off their old skins and eternally renew their youth, the sad lot of man is old age and death.

He who saw everything to the ends of the land,
Who all things experienced, considered all! . . .
Two-thirds of him is god, one third of him is human. . . .
The onslaught of his weapons verily has no equal.
By the drum are aroused his companions.

Gilgamesh's despotic behavior leads to the creation of Enkidu.

The nobles of Uruk are gloomy in their chambers:
"Gilgamesh leaves not the son to his father;
Day and night is unbridled his arrogance.
Yet this is Gilgamesh, the shepherd of Uruk.
He should be our shepherd: strong, stately, and wise!
Gilgamesh leaves not the maid to her mother,
The warrior's daughter, the noble's spouse!"
The gods hearkened to their plaint,
The gods of heaven, Uruk's lords . . .
The great Aruru they called:
"Thou, Aruru, didst create Gilgamesh;
Create now his double;
His stormy heart let him match.
Let them contend, that Uruk may have peace!" . . .
Aruru washed her hands,
Pinched off clay and cast it on the steppe.
On the steppe she created valiant Enkidu, . . .
Shaggy with hair is his whole body,
He is endowed with head hair like a woman. . . .
He knows neither people nor land; . . .
With the gazelles he feeds on grass,
With the wild beasts he jostles at the watering-place,

Having heard of the animal-like Enkidu, Gilgamesh sends a harlot to civilize him and bring him to Uruk.

With the teeming creatures his heart delights in water. . . .
 The lass beheld him, the savage-man,
 The barbarous fellow from the depths of the steppe: . . .
 The lass freed her breasts, bared her bosom,
 And he possessed her ripeness.
 She was not bashful as she welcomed his ardor.
 She laid aside her cloth and he rested upon her.
 She treated him, the savage, to a woman's task,
 As his love was drawn unto her.
 For six days and seven nights Enkidu comes forth,
 Mating with the lass.
 After he had had his fill of her charms,
 He set his face toward his wild beasts.
 On seeing him, Enkidu, the gazelles ran off,
 The wild beasts of the steppe drew away from his body.
 Startled was Enkidu, as his body became taut,
 His knees were motionless — for his wild beasts had gone.
 Enkidu had to slacken his pace — it was not as before;
 But he now had wisdom, broader understanding.
 Returning, he sat at the feet of the harlot.
 He looks up at the face of the harlot,
 His ears attentive, as the harlot speaks;
 The harlot says to him, to Enkidu:
 "Thou art wise, Enkidu, art become like a god!
 Why with the wild creatures dost thou roam over the steppe?
 Come, let me lead thee to ramparted Uruk,
 To the holy temple, abode of Anu and Ishtar,
 Where lives Gilgamesh, accomplished in strength,
 And like a wild ox lords it over the folk."
 As she speaks to him, her words find favor,
 His heart enlightened, he yearns for a friend. . . .
 Enkidu says to her, to the harlot:
 "Up, lass, escort thou me,
 To the pure sacred temple, abode of Anu and Ishtar,
 Where lives Gilgamesh, accomplished in strength,
 And like a wild ox lords it over the folk.
 I will challenge him and will boldly address him,
 I will shout in Uruk: 'I am he who is mighty! . . .'"
 The nobles rejoiced:
 "A hero has appeared
 For the man of proper mien!
 For Gilgamesh, the godlike,
 His equal has come forth." . . .

Enkidu and Gilgamesh meet and battle to a draw.

They met in the Market-of-the-Land.
Enkidu barred the gate with his foot,
Not allowing Gilgamesh to enter.
They grappled each other, butting like bulls,
They shattered the doorpost, as the wall shook.
As Gilgamesh bent the knee — his foot on the ground —
His fury abated and he turned away. . . .
They kissed each other
And formed a friendship. . . .

Enkidu quails at the prospect of fighting the monstrous Huwawa, guardian of the Cedar Forest, and Gilgamesh reassures him with a reminder of the heroic meaning of life.

Gilgamesh opened his mouth, saying to Enkidu:
“In the forest resides fierce Huwawa.
Let us, me and thee, slay him,
That all evil from the land we may banish! [. . .]
Enkidu opened his mouth, saying to Gilgamesh:
“I found it out, my friend, in the hills,
As I was roaming with the wild beasts.
For ten thousand leagues extends the forest.
Who is there that would go down into it?
Huwawa — his roaring is the flood-storm,
His mouth is fire, his breath is death!
Why dost thou desire to do this thing?
An unequal struggle is tangling with Huwawa.” . . .
Gilgamesh opened his mouth, saying to Enkidu:
“Who, my friend, is superior to death?
Only the gods live forever in the sun.
As for mankind, numbered are their days;
Whatever they achieve is but the wind!
Even here thou art afraid of death.
What of thy heroic might?
Let me go then before thee,
Let thy voice call to me, ‘Advance, fear not!’
Should I fall, I shall have made me a name:
‘Gilgamesh’ — they will say — ‘against fierce Huwawa
Has fallen!’ Long after
My offspring has been born in my house, [. . .]
Thus calling to me, thou hast grieved my heart.
My hand I will poise and will fell the cedars.
A name that endures I will make for me! . . .”

Having slain Huwawa, Gilgamesh next scornfully rejects the goddess Ishtar's offer of love, and she forces the gods to create the Bull of Heaven to punish his insolence.

Ishtar was enraged and mounted to heaven.
 Forth went Ishtar before Anu, her father,
 To Antum, her mother, she went and said:
 "My father, Gilgamesh has heaped insults upon me! . . ."
 Anu opened his mouth to speak,
 Saying to glorious Ishtar:
 "But surely thou didst invite [. . .],"
 Ishtar opened her mouth to speak,
 Saying to Anu, her father:
 "My father, make me the Bull of Heaven that he smite Gilgamesh. . . .
 If thou dost not make me the Bull of Heaven,
 I will smash the doors of the nether world,
 I will [. . .],
 I will raise up the dead eating and alive,
 So that the dead shall outnumber the living!" . . .

The heroes slay the Bull of Heaven and again insult Ishtar.

Up leaped Enkidu, seizing the Bull of Heaven by the horns,
 The Bull of Heaven hurled his foam in his face,
 Brushed him with the back of his tail. . . .
 Between neck and horns he thrust his sword.
 When they had slain the Bull, they tore out his heart,
 Placing it before Shamash.
 They drew back and did homage before Shamash.
 The two brothers sat down.
 Then Ishtar mounted the wall of ramparted Uruk,
 Sprang on the battlements, uttering a curse:
 "Woe unto Gilgamesh because he insulted me
 By slaying the Bull of Heaven!"
 When Enkidu heard this speech of Ishtar,
 He tore loose the right thigh of the Bull of Heaven
 And tossed it in her face:
 "Could I but get thee, like unto him
 I would do unto thee.
 His entrails I would hang at thy side!" . . .
 In the Euphrates they washed their hands,
 They embraced each other as they went on,
 Riding through the market street of Uruk.
 The people of Uruk are gathered to gaze upon them.
 Gilgamesh to the lyre maidens of Uruk
 Says these words:
 "Who is most splendid among the heroes?
 Who is most glorious among men?"
 "Gilgamesh is most splendid among the heroes,
 Gilgamesh is most glorious among men."

By means of a dream, Enkidu learns two things: that the gods have decided he must die as punishment for the insolent behavior of the two heroes, and that the land of the dead is a most dismal place.

Gilgamesh in his palace holds a celebration.
Down lie the heroes on their beds of night.
Also Enkidu lies down, a dream beholding.
Up rose Enkidu to relate his dream,
Saying to his friend:
"My friend, why are the great gods in council? . . .
My friend, I saw a dream this night:
The heavens moaned, the earth responded;
[. . .] I stood alone.
[. . .] his face was darkened. . . .
Looking at me, he leads me to the House of Darkness,
The abode of Irkalla,
To the house which none leave who have entered it,
On the road from which there is no way back,
To the house wherein the dwellers are bereft of light,
Where dust is their fare and clay their food.
They are clothed like birds, with wings for garments,
And see no light, residing in darkness.
In the House of Dust, which I entered,
I looked at rulers, their crowns put away;
I saw princes, those born to the crown,
Who ruled the land from the days of yore. . . ."

Enkidu dies, and the reality of death as the common lot of all mankind — even fearless heroes — strikes home to Gilgamesh. The remainder of the epic deals with his attempt to find everlasting life, a quest that all tell him is hopeless. In the following selection, Gilgamesh is talking to a barmaid who gives him sage advice.

"He who with me underwent all hardships —
Enkidu, whom I loved dearly,
Who with me underwent all hardships —
Has now gone to the fate of mankind!
Day and night I have wept over him.
I would not give him up for burial —
In case my friend should rise at my plaint —
Seven days and seven nights,
Until a worm fell out of his nose.
Since his passing I have not found life,
I have roamed like a hunter in the midst of the steppe.
O ale-wife, now that I have seen thy face,
Let me not see the death which I ever dread."

The ale-wife said to him, to Gilgamesh:
“Gilgamesh, whither rovest thou?
The life thou pursueth, thou shalt not find.
When the gods created mankind,
Death for mankind they set aside,
Life in their own hands retaining.
Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly,
Make thou merry by day and by night.
Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing,
Day and night dance thou and play!
Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,
Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.
Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,
Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!
For this is the task of mankind!” . . .

Gilgamesh next searches out Utnapishtim, the immortal hero of the Flood (Selection 2), who also cannot help him. The dejected Gilgamesh is about to depart when he is told of the Plant of Life — his last and most disappointing hope.

His spouse says to him, to Utnapishtim the Faraway:
“Gilgamesh has come hither, toiling and straining.
What wilt thou give him that he may return to his land?”
At that he, Gilgamesh, raised up his pole,
To bring the boat nigh to the shore.
Utnapishtim says to him, to Gilgamesh:
“Gilgamesh, thou hast come hither, toiling and straining.
What shall I give thee that thou mayest return to thy land?
I will disclose, O Gilgamesh, a hidden thing,
And about a plant I will tell thee:
This plant, like the buckthorn is [. . .].
Its thorns will prick thy hands just as does the rose.
If thy hands obtain the plant, thou wilt attain life.”
No sooner had Gilgamesh heard this, . . .
He tied heavy stones to his feet.
They pulled him down into the deep and he saw the plant.
He took the plant, though it pricked his hands.
He cut the heavy stones from his feet.
The sea cast him up upon its shore.
Gilgamesh says to him, to Urshanabi, the boatman:
“Urshanabi, this plant is a plant apart,
Whereby a man may regain his life’s breath.
I will take it to ramparted Uruk. . . .
Its name shall be ‘Man Becomes Young in Old Age.’
I myself shall eat it

And thus return to the state of my youth.”
After twenty leagues they broke off a morsel,
After thirty more leagues they prepared for the night.
Gilgamesh saw a well whose water was cool.
He went down into it to bathe in the water.
A serpent snuffed the fragrance of the plant;
It came up from the water and carried off the plant,
Going back to shed its slough.
Thereupon Gilgamesh sits down and weeps,
His tears running down over his face.
He took the hand of Urshanabi, the boatman:
“For whom, Urshanabi, have my hands toiled?
For whom is being spent the blood of my heart?
I have not obtained a boon for myself.
For the serpent have I effected a boon!”

2

The Epic of the Flood

The Babylonian Noah

Archaeologists have discovered evidence of great floods in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, one of which left a deposit of sediment eight feet deep. Undoubtedly one such disastrous flood became the historical basis for a Sumerian flood epic, fragments of which have survived. It told how a Sumerian Noah, Ziusudra, warned beforehand by the god Ea of the intention of the gods “to destroy the seed of mankind” by a flood, built a ship and embarked upon it with his household, his possessions, and all types of living things. Because Ziusudra had thus “perceived the secret of the gods,” they decided to give him “life like a god” and so made him one with themselves.

The later Babylonians incorporated the flood story into their composite Epic of Gilgamesh. When the yearning for everlasting life takes hold of Gilgamesh after the death of his friend Enkidu, he searches out Ziusudra, whom the Babylonians called Utnapishtim, to gain from him the secret of eternal life. Utnapishtim tells him his story, and it is this more complete Babylonian ver-

From “The Epic Of Gilgamesh.” Tablet XI, based on the translation in Morris Jastrow, *The Civilization of Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1915), pp. 445-52. Reprinted by permission.

sion that is given in part below. The striking similarities with the later Hebrew story are quite evident, but the great gulf between them needs to be emphasized: the Hebrew version has been completely moralized. In the Hebrew account the Flood is sent because of sin, and the hero is saved because he is righteous. In the Sumero-Babylonian version the hero is saved out of mere favoritism and the gods send the Flood, as we learn from a separate account, because their sleep has been disturbed: "oppressive has become the clamor of mankind, by their uproar they prevent sleep." Above all, the one supreme righteous God of the Hebrews contrasts with the gang of weak, quarrelsome, greedy gods who "cowered like dogs" in the presence of the Flood and who later "like flies gathered around the sacrificer."

Gilgamesh speaks to him, to Utnapishtim, the far-removed:

"I gaze at thee, Utnapishtim!

Thy appearance is not different. As I am, so art thou. . . .

Tell me how thou didst enter into the assembly of the gods and secure [eternal] life."

Utnapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

"I will reveal to thee, Gilgamesh, a secret story,

And the decision of the gods I will tell thee.

The city Shuruppak, a city which thou knowest,

The one that lies on the Euphrates,

That city was old, as were the gods thereof,

When the great gods decided to bring a flood over it. . . .

THE GOD EA WARNS UTNAPISHTIM

"The lord of brilliant vision, Ea, was with them.

He repeated their decision to the reed-hut.

'Reed-hut, reed-hut, wall, wall,

Reed-hut, hear! Wall, give ear!

O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubara-Tutu,

Break up this house, build a ship,

Abandon your property, seek life!

Bring into the ship seed of all living things!

The ship that thou shalt build,

Let its dimensions be measured, so that

Its breadth and length be made to correspond.

On a level with the deep, provide it with a covering.'

I understood and spoke to Ea, my lord:

'The command of my lord which thou hast commanded,

As I have understood it, I will carry out.

But what shall I answer the city — the people and the elders?'

Ea opened his mouth and spoke:

'As answer thus speak to them:

Know that Enlil [god who rules all Sumer] has conceived hatred towards

me,

So that I can no longer dwell in your city.
On Enlil's territory I dare no longer set my face.
Therefore, I go to the Deep to dwell with Ea, my lord.
Over you he will cause blessings to rain down.' . . .

THE SHIP IS BUILT AND LOADED

"On the fifth day, I designed its outline.
Its walls were ten *gar* [120 cubits] high;
Ten *gar* the measure of its width.
I determined its shape and drew it.
I gave it six decks.
I divided (the superstructure?) into seven parts.
Its interior I divided into nine sections.
Water-plugs I constructed in the interior.
I selected a punting-pole and added accessories.
Six measures of asphalt I poured on the outer wall.
Three measures of pitch I poured on the inner wall. . . .
All that I had I loaded on her.
All that I had of silver I loaded on her.
All that I had of gold I loaded on her.
All that I had of living beings of all kinds I loaded on her.
I brought to the ship all my family and household;
Cattle of the field, beasts of the field, all the workmen I brought on
board. . . .

THE FLOOD

"As morning dawned,
There arose on the firmament of heaven black clouds;
Adad thundered therein; . . .
Adad's roar reaches to heaven,
All light is changed to darkness. . . .
For one day the hurricane raged,
Storming furiously, . . .
Coming like a combat over men.
Brother sees not brother,
And from heaven people cannot be recognized.

"THE GODS ARE TERRIFIED"

"The gods are terrified by the deluge,
They flee and mount to the heaven of Anu;
The gods cowered like dogs in an enclosure.
Ishtar cries aloud like one in birth throes,
The mistress of the gods howls aloud:
'The former days are turned to clay. . . .
My people are like fish, they fill the sea.'

All of the Anunnaki gods weep with her;
The gods sit down, depressed and weeping. . . .

THE FLOOD SUBSIDES

“Six days and nights
The storm and flood continued to sweep over the land.
When the seventh day approached, the storm and flood ceased the combat,
After having fought like warriors. . . .
I looked at the day and the roar had quieted down,
And all mankind had returned to clay.
The landscape was level as a flat roof.
I opened a window and light fell on my face,
I bowed down and sat and wept,
Tears flowed over my face.
I looked in all directions of the sea.
At a distance of twelve miles an island appeared.
On Mount Nisir the ship stood still.
Mount Nisir held the ship so that it could not move.
One day, two days, Mount Nisir held the ship fast. . . .
When the seventh day arrived,
I sent forth a dove, letting it free.
The dove went hither and thither;
Not finding a resting place, it came back.
I sent forth a swallow, letting it free.
The swallow went hither and thither.
Not finding a resting place, it came back.
I sent forth a raven, letting it free.
The raven went and saw the decrease of the waters.
It ate, croaked, but did not turn back.
Then I let all out to the four regions and brought an offering.
I brought a sacrifice on the mountain top.
Seven and seven cult jars I arranged.
Beneath them I strewed reeds, cedarwood and myrtle.
The gods smelled the odor,
The gods smelled the sweet odor.
The gods like flies gathered around the sacrificer.

THE GODS QUARREL

“As soon as [Ishtar] the mistress of the gods arrived, . . .
‘Ye gods . . . I will remember these days — never to forget them.
Let the gods come to the sacrifice,
But let not Enlil come to the sacrifice,
Because without reflection he brought on the flood,
And decreed destruction for my people.’
As soon as Enlil arrived,
He saw the ship, and Enlil was enraged,

Filled with anger at the gods.
‘Who now has escaped with his life?
No man was to survive the destruction!’
Ninib opened his mouth and spoke,
Spoke to the warrior Enlil,
‘Who except Ea can plan any affair?
Ea indeed knows every order.’
Ea opened his mouth and spoke,
Spoke to the warrior Enlil:
‘Thou art the leader and warrior of the gods.
But why didst thou, without reflection, bring on the flood?
On the sinner impose his sin,
On the transgressor impose his transgression,
But be merciful not to root out completely, be considerate not to
destroy altogether! . . .
I did not reveal the secret of the great gods,
I sent Utnapishtim a dream and he understood the secret of the gods.
Now take counsel for him.’

UTNAPISHTIM IS GRANTED ETERNAL LIFE

“Enlil mounted the ship,
Took hold of my hand and led me up,
Led me up and caused my wife to kneel at my side,
Touched our foreheads, stepped between us and blessed us.
‘Hitherto Utnapishtim was a man;
Now Utnapishtim and his wife shall be on a level with the gods.
Utnapishtim shall dwell in the distance, at the mouth of the rivers.’
Then they took me and settled me at the mouth of the rivers.”