Student’s Name

Professor’s Name

Course

Date

Epic of Gilgamesh

One of the primary ways through which society learns accounts of ancient civilizations has always been through deduction and understanding of texts and the contexts in which they were written. One such text has been the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* presenting the audience with an account of King Gilgamesh of Uruk, a city in ancient Mesopotamia (Foster 22). However, the most interesting aspect of the literature lies not in the story but in its position as one of the oldest surviving pieces of literature. Most importantly, the original text was writtenon tablets, but has since been translated into several languages, making the text significantly popular among literature scholars. The first tablet of the epic is particularly interesting, as it provides the audience with some different perspectives of King Gilgamesh, with the initial image created of the King being significantly different from the idea the audience gets towards the end of the text in the tablet.

Of particular interest in the story is the extent to which the poet uses different tools including narratives and metaphors as a means of presenting the audience with different perspectives of the characters therein. Being the main character, Gilgamesh takes a central role in the poem, with his qualities presented in the form of narratives and through the use ofmetaphors to highlight his qualities. These different approaches work in tandemto generally create a flow in the events of the poem, which evolve from a praising to one lamenting of Gilgamesh’s leadership approach.

Firstly, the king receives significant praise in the first lines of the text, owing to his position as the leader of Uruk. Considering the description of the Gilgamesh, one can easily conclude that the original author of the text had a significant level admiration of the king, viewing him as a liberator and discoverer of the different aspects of the society in Uruk. In particular, the lines note that “Gilgamesh, who saw the wellspring, the foundations of the land / He knew the ways, was wise in all things” (Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* 3-4). The poet praises Gilgamesh by according him the position of being the source of the civilization in Uruk. Considering his discovery of the wellspring, it would be important to note that society cannot thrive in the absence of water.

Notably, the praise accorded to the king is extensively figurative. Further on in the poem, the poet makes reference to Gilgamesh’s mother, an indicator that Gilgamesh may not have been part of the first generation to settle in Uruk. In particular, the reference to her mother is made with the assertion that she was old and wise, an allusion to her being part of an older generation (Foster, 28). However, the people gave him extensive respect and credence to much of the success therein, to the extent of associating life in the city with his existence. Water forms the basis of life in any environment, and the association of the character of Gilgamesh to a wellspring implies that he could have contributed significantly to the way of life in the city. His actions had such a major impact on the welfare of others, to the extent that they all revolved around whatever he did.

Secondly, the description of Gilgamesh changes tone in line 50 of the poem, according him attributes that are more godly than human. The poet explicitly notes that “two thirds of him was divine, one third of him was human” (Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* 3-4). This eventually exemplifies the nature of relationship between the poet and the character, noting that he was worthy of as much adoration and praise as is accorded to him in the previous lines of the poem. For an entity considered to be so possess the ability to achieve as much as Gilgamesh, the poet is bound to have had such an attitude towards his persona. At this point, much begins to change, with the tablet now taking on a different and rather interesting tone.

The poet deviates from the previous praise tone to one in whichGilgamesh appears to be full of pride and inconsiderate of his subordinates. “In the enclosure of Urukhe rode back and forth / Lording it like a wild bull, his head thrust high” (Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* 55-56). The metaphor use in this case differs significantly from the perfect being described in line 53. In essence, the tablet begins to present the audience with information beyond what anyone would naturally observe, but would experience after being in Urukfor some considerable time. A visitor to the city is likely to marvel at the high walls and the apparent tranquility among the residents therein, but such an environment is a result of having a leader who uses brutality as a means of getting the people to do his bidding.

A wild bull would be dangerous, inconsiderate, and oblivious of its implications on the people around as long isit is charging towards a particular target. In this case, the poet notes that Gilgamesh would ride back and forth throughout the city, lording the people around; an allusion to his assertion of authority in a manner unpleasant to the residents (Foster 24). The poet was at liberty of choosing an alternative animal, and using a horse instead of a wild bull. However, the choice of metaphor in this case serves to indicate that the public saw no compassion in Gilgamesh’s activities, something that could have kept them significantly subdued, and even fearful of the king. Ultimately, the introduction of Enkidufurther down in the tablet.

Wild bulls are bound to be territorial, with constant fights over mating rights relegating some of the weaker ones to becoming more timid than brute, until when they are strong enough to contend for the top positions. Similarly, Ennkidunotes “I myself will challenge him, I will speak out boldly / I will raise a cry in Uruk: I am the mighty one”(Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh,* 212-213). Enkidu thensets forth to challenge Gilgamesh’s approach and treatment of the people of Uruk, taking the role of a liberator for the said population. However, irony lies in the difference between the two, with Enkidubeing significantly human, even having grown up among wild animals, while Gilgamesh is not only a refined warrior, but an individual whom people believe to be more god than human.

In essence, the first tablet in the Epic of Gilgamesh involvesdifferent situations that lead an audience to questioning some of the ideas presented in the poem. It develops from one in which Gilgamesh appears infallible and an individual upon whom many people in society including the poet look, to one in need of change and with sabotage of his leadership being one of the ways through which to restore satisfaction to the people of Uruk. As long as they live under his rule, which is akin to that of a wild bull in the wilderness, the people enjoy neither peace nor satisfaction living in Uruk. They are consistently oppressed by his approaches, and his stature makes it hard for anyone to raise concerns and challenge his methods. The transition in the poem is a subject of interest, a lesson that leadership outcomes may not always be of interest, particularly in cases where the people are dissatisfied with the process that resulted in saidoutcomes.

Work Cited

Foster, Benjamin R. *The Epic of Gilgamesh.*