

a human being rather than as an animal. Enkidu is taken to the city and to Gilgamesh, who falls in love with him as a soul mate. Soon, however, Gilgamesh takes his beloved friend with him to the Cedar Forest to kill the guardian, the monster Humbaba, in defiance of the gods. Enkidu dies as a result. The overwhelming grief and fear of death that Gilgamesh suffers propels him on a quest for immortality that is as fast-paced and thrilling as a contemporary action film. In the end, Gilgamesh returns to his city. He does not become immortal in the way he thinks he wants to be, but he is able to embrace what is. Relying on existing translations (and in places where there are gaps, on his own imagination), Mitchell seeks language that is as swift and strong as the story itself. He conveys the evenhanded generosity of the original poet, who is as sympathetic toward women and monsters—and the whole range of human emotions and desires—as he is toward his heroes. This wonderful new version of the story of Gilgamesh shows how the story came to achieve literary immortality—not because it is a rare ancient artifact, but because reading it can make people in the here and now feel more completely alive.

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From Mitchell's version of *Gilgamesh* should be the standard for general and classroom readers for the foreseeable future. It includes everything in the Akkadian texts, though shorn of some fragmentary passages and emended by Mitchell for clarity (extensive endnotes flag every change Mitchell makes and provide literal translations wherever Mitchell feels such would further illuminate meaning and spirit). The prologue and the closing page, both of which advert to Gilgamesh's great city of Uruk, are cast in five-beat lines, with the story per se in 11 books of four-beat lines. Mitchell manages both meters masterfully, writing verse that is musical and propulsive for all its "free" characteristics. The 66-page introduction interprets the entire poem as a philosophical fable as well as an engaging, episodic story, and not without describing some of the prosodic devices of the ancient Babylonian poem. Mitchell understands the poem to be overarchingly concerned with self-discovery and acceptance, with appreciating that humans are mortal, hence less than the gods, but also capable of love, and thus greater than mere gods. *Ray Olson*

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