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Literary Analysis: The Hero’s Quest Questions

1. Located in the Prologue, the author leaves a hint about Gilgamesh’s quest: “he went on a long journey, was weary, [and] worn out with labor” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 19). This indicates to the reader that the quest requires much endurance for the many hardships and obstacles that Gilgamesh faces.
2. Gilgamesh believes that one is required to have courage and strength to fight fierce enemies. Gilgamesh tries to explain these traits to Enkidu by saying, “If your heart is fearful throw away fear; if there is terror in it throw away terror. Take your ax in your hand and attack” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 20).
3. The fact that Gilgamesh has enough authority to summon Shamash and have him respond to him shows immense power. However, this power becomes more limited as the reader sees Shamash “summon the great wind, the north wind, the whirlwind, the storm and the icy wind, the tempest and the scorching wind” *(Epic of Gilgamesh* 20). This puts the miniscule power of Gilgamesh into perspective with the mighty power of Shamash.
4. Due to the toilsome journey, “the strong man who would have everlasting life, even now in the mists of sleep is drifting over him” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 30). The quest was very labor intensive and proves that his remarkable strength was still not enough for him to receive the power of immortality.
5. The plant “restores his lost youth to man” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 31), which is similar to Gilgamesh’s unrelenting quest to seek immortality. However, a snake later “rose out of the water and snatched it away” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 32). During Gilgamesh’s quest, both the plant and his wish for immortality are unfortunately snatched away from him.

The Mighty Flood Tales

The concept of a Flood is evident in both the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the book of *Genesis*. In the two versions, both share the archetype that the gods or god are angered with mankind. With this anger comes the destruction and renewal of the earth. Within the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Enlil, the Sumerian god of the moon, said that “‘the uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of babel.’ So the gods agreed to exterminate mankind” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 25). This uproar is also displayed in *Genesis* when “the Lord said, ‘I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created-men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them’” (*Genesis* 6:7). The condemnation is repeated again as “God said to Noah, ‘I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth’” (*Genesis* 6:13). This pattern of wrong-doing by mankind is evident in both texts as both gods decide to send a mighty flood upon the earth. Also, the content included in both tales displays the archetype of the god or gods distinguishing one person to carry out their will. The Bible shows God directing Noah, the distinguished man for the quest, how to prepare for the Flood to wipeout mankind: “make yourself an ark of gopher wood: make it an ark with compartments and cover it inside and out with pitch” (*Genesis* 6: 14). Unlike the rest of mankind, God said to Noah, “I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives” (*Genesis* 6:18). God is drawing Noah out of the crowd of mankind and is distinguishing him to fulfill his quest of building the ark. On the other hand, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* shows the god Shamash establishing his for quest Utnapishtim: “O man of Shurrupak, son of Ubara-Tutu; tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life, despise worldly goods and save your soul alive. Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat…take up into the boat the seed of all living creatures” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 25). In both of the mighty flood tales, archetypes are displayed: the god/gods becoming angered at mankind, the renewal of the earth, and the appointment of a man to fulfill the quest given by the gods.

The Ruling Style of King Hammurabi vs. King Gilgamesh

The ruling styles of King Gilgamesh and King Hammurabi share similarities and differnces. By examining the Stele of Hammurabi, one is able to depict “Hammurabi in the presence of Shamash, the flame shouldered sun god. The king raises his hand in respect. The god extends to Hammurabi the rod and ring to symbolize authority” (Gardner 43). This shows that Hammurabi displays extreme authority and power to be in the presence of the god Shamash. His ruling style is based off of the morals and values of his Sumerian religion to serve Shamash. Also, Gilgamesh was said to be “two thirds…god and one third man” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 19). The fact that Gilgamesh is said to be part god and Hammurabi is displayed at eye level with a god shows the immense power that the men held when ruling. Later in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh cried out for the help of Shamash in battle with Humbaba and the “glorious Shamash heard his prayer and he summoned the great wind” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 20). The ruling styles of the two kings show that they believe that they held the divine right to the throne due to favor with the god Shamash. However, the kings had different primary focuses when ruling. Hammurabi is famous for saying: “if a man puts out the eye of another man, his eye shall he put out” (Gardner 43). His ruling style consisted of fairness and no tolerance for acts of wrong doing. Gilgamesh however, ruled strictly, but cared more about a valid name or title for himself rather than focusing on the fairness toward the people. He seeks a quest of immortality and defeats the great Humbaba and receives praises: “O Gilgamesh, king and conqueror of the dreadful blaze…glory to him” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 22). The two kings are both ruling under the same gods; however, one cares about the fairness of the citizens while the other is more occupied with finding a name for himself. Hammurabi rules strictly with zero tolerance, and Gilgamesh rules with arrogance as he seeks immortality instead of focusing on the people.

The Similarities in Cultural Values of the Mesopotamians and Egyptians

The ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures have similar concerns regarding moral code and laws. Both ancient societies had deep concerns regarding manslaughter. In the Mesopotamian culture, *Hammurabi’s Code of Law* states: “If a man has accused a man and has charged him with manslaughter and then has not proved [it against] him, his accuser shall be put to death” (Stearns 21). The people of Mesopotamia were so concerned about the mention of manslaughter that they would even kill the accuser if he was false! In the Egyptian’s *The Book of the Dead Spell*, the weighing of the heart of the dead person takes place. The dead being is required to prove that his heart is good before he can continues in the afterlife. The Egyptian books says, “I have not killed” (*The Book of the Dead Spell* 2) to help prove that he is worth keeping. Furthermore, both cultures opposed the act of manslaughter. The societies also were concerned about stealing from the temple. The Mesopotamian society believed that “if someone steals property from a temple, he will be put to death, as will the person who receives the stolen goods” (Gardner 43). Whereas the Egyptians stated, “I have not harmed the offering-loaves of the gods” (*The Book of the Dead Spell* 2). In both circumstances, the two cultures were very religious. Stealing from the gods was intolerable because they believe horrific things might occur if one angered the gods. That is why they would both would continuously present offerings to the gods in temples to find peace and favor with them. The concept of stealing or taking something that is not your own occurs again in the two cultures. Besides stealing from the gods, *Hammurabi’s Code of La*w addresses stealing from one another: “if a merchant increases interest beyond that set by the king and collects it, that merchant will lose what is lent” (Stearns 21). Just as a merchant should not steal from the King, the Egyptians said, “I have not taken milk from the mouths of babes” (The *Book of the Dead* 2). In both cases, the cultures are emphasizing that one should not take what is not rightfully theirs. Overall, the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures share key concerns about manslaughter, stealing from the gods, and taking what is not rightfully theirs.