There is a sense in which the narrative of Gilgamesh, as *mythic* narrative if not as literary,\(^1\) unfolds within the space between two trees. The first marks the point at which his heroic career authentically begins; the other iconically designates that career’s final limit, its *terminus post quem non*. That is to say, the full range of his heroism both literally and also figuratively spans the seemingly vast distance between the cedars guarded by the monster Humbaba, whom Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill at the end of Tablet V, and the otherworldly trees that bear rare jewels for fruit in the garden into which the hero emerges alone from the tunnel of the sun at the close of Tablet IX.\(^2\) In this short essay I

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\(^1\) The distinction — roughly the same one that structuralism makes between “deep” and “surface” structures (Lévi-Strauss 206-31) — is meant to draw attention to the possibility of older, anonymous underlying meanings (“myth”) beneath the layered, deliberate reworkings (“literature”) of the *Gilgamesh* narrative. Precisely by reason of its heavily literary character, Kirk 134f., for instance, would deny the narrative any mythic status. My presupposition in the present essay is that mythic elements can indeed be recovered despite that literary artifice.

\(^2\) Unless otherwise noted, all references (by tablet and line) are to the recent translation by George (*Gilgamesh*). Other translations consulted are those of George (*Babylonian Gilgamesh*), Foster 3-95, Bottéro, Tournay and Shaffer, Dalley 39-153, Kovacs, Gardner and Maier, and Sandars. For an extensive exegetical edition of the Standard Babylonian Version of the epic, see George (*Babylonian Gilgamesh*) 444-530. A brief tablet-by-tablet synopsis of the narrative may also prove useful here: (I) Arrogant in his semi-divine status, Gilgamesh of Uruk rules his subjects abusively. The gods in response create his match in the figure of the wildman Enkidu. Lured into intercourse by a prostitute sent to tame him, Enkidu loses his natural powers and becomes "civilized." (II) Enkidu and Gilgamesh fight to a stalemate, after which they adopt each other as brothers. (III) Together they plan an expedition to the Cedar Forest, in search of glory. (IV) They travel to the Cedar Forest; admonitory dreams attend them. (V) They defeat the monster Humbaba, guardian of the forest, then cut down the cedars and use them to build the great temple door in Nippur. (VI) Back in Uruk, Gilgamesh rejects the erotic advances of Inanna,
propose to measure some of that distance by reference to a number of different but closely interrelated scales.

The first such scale is simply topographic, in the sense that these two trees represent the boundaries of the physical world through which Gilgamesh passes in the course of his career. Whatever arguments can be legitimately raised over specific details of what Campbell styles the heroic “monomyth,” — itself by and large an elaboration of Raglan and Propp — his characterization of the overall shape of the hero’s life is certainly true to the mark. For in its most basic form, the heroic narrative proceeds along the looping track of Departure outward and subsequent Return, travel to the limits of the world and then the long way home again. Of course, nothing prevents (and much in fact encourages) repetitions of this pattern within a single narrative, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh (EG)* in its Late Babylonian or Standard Version (SB) indeed encompasses two major journeys: the first from Uruk to the Land of Cedars and back (Tablets II-V), the second (and also the last) from Uruk arduously to the goddess of sexuality. Enraged, she sends the Bull of Heaven against them, but they defeat it. Enkidu insults Inanna. (VI) As punishment, the gods decree Enkidu’s death. On his deathbed, Enkidu conveys to Gilgamesh a vision of the miserable existence awaiting all in the land of Ereshkigal, Queen of the Dead. (VIII) Gilgamesh mourns his dead companion. After initially refusing to bury the corpse, he relents when signs of corruption appear, and orders artisans to make a statue of Enkidu. (IX) Distraught, Gilgamesh wanders to the ends of the earth in search where Utnapishtim and his wife, once mortal, now live eternally. Along the way, he wrestles lions, encounters Scorpion-Beings, travels through the darkness of Mount Mashu, and finally reaches a jewelled garden near the tavern of Siduri. (X) She directs him to the ferryman Urshanabi, who conveys him across the Waters of Death to Utnapishtim. (XI) Gilgamesh fails a test to determine whether he is eligible for immortality, and must return to Uruk. As a consolation, he is given a plant that insures rejuvenation, but on his way home it is stolen by a snake. Gilgamesh returns empty-handed, and rules Uruk wisely and justly until his inevitable death.

3 On the “monomyth,” see Campbell 3-46, with a brief history of scholarship on the issue in Segal (*Theorizing*) 117–134 and a critique in Csapo 201-11. See also Raglan (in Segal [*Quest*] 89-175) and Propp for earlier typologies of the heroic narrative.

4 One thinks in particular of the great number of *athloi* (labors), *praxeis* (deeds), and *parerga* (side-deeds) that fill the Greek Herakles legend(s), with their highly repetitive narrative situations and motifs.
ends of the world, then home to Uruk once more (Tablets IX-X). The western cedars and the fabulous gem-trees presumably somewhere out in the distant east — at the sun’s ultimate rising — each represent one of the destinations to which the hero’s two journeys extend. They are the poles of his world.

This last claim would appear to ignore the literal itinerary in the story of the Old Babylonian (OB) text that fills most of Tablet X. The fact is that Gilgamesh, after emerging from the tunnel of the sun, enters the garden of jewelled trees and then passes beyond it — to the ‘tavern’ of Siduri and the shore where Urshanabi’s boat is moored, and finally across the waters of death to the home of Uta-napishti, where he is destined to fail the test and to return to Uruk bound by his mortality. The status of the Uta-napishti episode as an integral part of the narrative has of course long been questioned, and there is consensus that it was not part of the earliest OB version of the tale. More recently, Abusch’s

5 For a synopsis by tablets, see note 2 above. The development of the Gilgamesh narrative spans a millennium or more and any number of different voices and hands, from independent Sumerian oral poems dating from roughly 2300 BCE, through the Old Babylonian (OB) version of 500 years later and Middle Babylonian (MB) texts over the following three centuries. All formed the basis for the composition of the Standard Babylonian (SB) text by the scholar Sin-leqi-unninni, some time between 1200 and 1000 BCE. For a detailed history of sources and texts, see George (Babylonian Gilgamesh) 3-70 and Tigay 23-139. A brief summary can be found in George (Gilgamesh) xvi-xxx, along with a chart (Ix).

6 On the somewhat vexed issue of the location of the garden, see George (Babylonian Gilgamesh) 494-98, Alster (“Dilmun”), During Caspurs 31-44, Butterworth, and Grelot 59f.

7 Without further elaboration, Oppenheim (“Mythology”) 48 remarks with reference to the jewelled trees: “This ‘Garden of the Gods’ which so patently duplicates the cedar grove seems to have been the scene of an episode dealing probably with another attempt of Gilgamesh to obtain a means of escaping death (cf. the Apples of the Hesperides). What happened in this wondrous garden, we shall most likely never know, not so much on account of the sorry state of preservation of the text, but because the author has the tendency to suppress secondary episodes, doublettes, etc. without eliminating them completely, to which his audience would certainly have objected.”

8 See George (Babylonian Gilgamesh) 159-286 and Tigay 39-54.

9 On the overall development of the poem, see George (Babylonian Gilgamesh) 3-70 and Tigay, a brief summary of whose argument is reprinted in Maier 40-49; and also the following note.
arguments in favor of reading the Gilgamesh-Siduri episode as a (if not ‘the’) more original destination of the hero’s wandering, and thus as the goal of an earlier version of the OB narrative itself, lend plausibility to the status of the garden as a truly terminal space and not just one more station along the way to an interview with Uta-napishti. The present essay may to a certain extent provide additional support to that larger thesis. For the time being it is enough to acknowledge the possibility of a narrative in which “Utnapishtim was not part of the tale” and instead “Siduri was…the goal of the journey” (Abusch, “Gilgamesh’s Request” 9). In what follows I propose that whether the failure of his quest for immortality is indicated by the rejection of his (implicit) offer of marriage to Siduri or else by his inability to pass the test of wakefulness that Uta-napishti sets before him, either failure is already implicit in his encounter with the jewelled trees themselves. They can prefigure both his alienation from hope of everlasting life and also his literal expulsion from the paradise of Uta-napishti.

The prefigural value of the jewelled trees derives from the fact that this simple, topographic scale is itself implicated in more complex and far more significant frameworks of reference. Among the many striking things about EG is the narrative’s sophisticated awareness and artful manipulation of spatial registers. Full exploration of this issue is the aim of a separate study; here a few summary points can be made. The story of EG unfolds within and across what can be called three major “epistemic” spaces,” namely the Wilderness, the City,

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10 See Abusch (“Development”) 615 note 3: “The earliest form of the Epic did not contain the Utnapishtim episode, but the meeting with Siduri was the climax of Gilgamesh’s wanderings.” His thesis forms the basis of a series of studies; see also Abusch, “Ishtar’s Proposal,” “Gilgamesh’s Request I,” and “Gilgamesh’s Request II.” Summaries of this argument can be found in Maier 110-21.

11 The term is adapted from Foucault to refer to the complete set of relations — including signs and symbols, whether discrete or arranged in narratives, along with the understandings and practises that follow from them — by which any
and the Otherworld. Each space provides the venue for encounter with beings (Enkidu, Shamhat, Humbaba, Ishtar, Bull of Heaven, Scorpion Creatures, Siduri, Stone Ones [?], Uta-napishti) and also with objects (cedar forest, tunnel of the sun, jewelled trees, Stone Ones [?], waters of death) that are principally defined by their radical otherness, their qualitative difference from the world of the narrative subject (the trapper, Enkidu, Gilgamesh) who meets up with them.\textsuperscript{12}

To understand each of these spaces — each one divisible in turn into smaller (though perhaps sometimes even culturally ‘larger’ or more important) venues\textsuperscript{13} — as mere backdrop to the narrative is to ignore its rich metonymic value and the critical role it plays in this and other mythic narratives.\textsuperscript{14} Each space along

given culture makes sense of some aspect of its world and of its own position relative to it; for a general definition, see Foucault 191. For example, the \textit{Wilderness} as an “epistemic” space in Mesopotamian culture would not only comprise specific representations of the physical space extending beyond the circles of city, field, and marsh, but also (1) the totality of ways in which that physical space and what happens within it are understood by reference to (and often by contrast with) the space that is defined as human or cultural; and (2) the full range of ways — from beliefs and behaviors (individual and ritualized) to institutions — in which that understanding is embodied.

\textsuperscript{12} This is of course to oversimplify. The complete set of encounters mediated by “epistemic” space would necessarily also include those between the trapper and Enkidu, Enkidu and Shamhat, the citizens of Uruk and both Enkidu and Gilgamesh, Siduri and Gilgamesh, and so on. As a rule, wherever the story assumes a different agent’s perspective, there is the possibility for a different (and sometimes contradictory) representation of events and values. On the multiplicity of perspectives in \textit{EG}, see Ray, and also below, note 25, on the issue of “focalization.”

\textsuperscript{13} A full inventory of the “epistemic” space of the City as represented in \textit{EG}, for example, would need to encompass the more discrete spaces of Walls, Street, Threshold, Bedroom, Council, Armory, and Temple — each of which embodies its own specific cultural meanings. The liminal space of Dreams, on the threshold between human and divine worlds, would partly also figure here, partly also as an instance of Otherworld space.

\textsuperscript{14} The role of the garden of jewelled trees in \textit{EG} has for the most part either been entirely ignored or discounted as pure “fairy-tale,” or else taken up into larger (and sometimes overly-ambitious) studies that on the whole tend to obscure its specific place and function within the story itself. On the one hand, note Kirk’s dismissive remark (145) identifying “elements of fairy-tale or folktale origin — like the garden of jewels, the waters of death and the means found to cross them — which add greatly to the richness of the narrative but little to its central subject.” On the other hand, see Widengren’s broad study of the Tree of Life in the ancient Near East, as well as Parpola’s far more ambitious (and often
with the others it contains in fact functions as the embodiment and expression of a distinct matrix of ideas and relationships mapped out by Mesopotamian culture in the process of organizing and understanding its world. There is a sense here in which the physical spaces in the mythic narrative are just as much agents in the generation of meaning as the characters are.\(^\text{15}\)

This is immediately evident in the contrast between the wild cedar forest on the one hand and the preternaturally immaculate garden of jewelled trees on the other. The language of the story characterizes the forest of Humbaba chiefly by reference to its density, height, and depth; from this it derives a vastness that threatens to dwarf and overwhelm the heroes, insofar as it is far more in keeping with divine than merely human proportions (V 6). Its physical space, that is to say, embodies a truly ontological dimension.\(^\text{16}\) The monster’s woods are wilderness for 60 leagues (ll Y1o8), and the mountains on which his huge trees grow are themselves exhaustingly steep (V 1f.). The forest is thick with luxuriant growth in the form of both cedars and underbrush, deep in shade from the canopy of leaves and also within its dark, matted thickets of thorns (V 7f.). The path on which Gilgamesh and Enkidu set foot into the groves, though straight and well-trodden, is a path made by no human traffic but instead by the creature himself (V 5) and possibly also the gods. The otherworldliness of the venue is corroborated by the measured leagues after formulaic leagues of space (IV 1-4 \(\sim\) 34-38 \(\sim\) 79-83 \(\sim\) 120-124 \(\sim\) 163-165) that separate it in distance and therefore also in quality from the walls and familiar streets of Uruk — a western journey of

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\(^{15}\) See Dickson for an exploration of this claim with reference to the Sumerian myth “Enki and Ninhursag.”

\(^{16}\) On the cultic significance of the cedars, see Shaffer, Forsyth, Hansman, and Marszewski.
some fifteen days or even more, which lesser men would in fact have taken whole months to complete.\textsuperscript{17}

Associations with a remote, potentially threatening, and essentially non-human world are likewise evoked by the series of spaces into which the hero is cast by his own premonitory dreams during the course of the long journey to the cedars.\textsuperscript{18} The fragmented style of their narration by Gilgamesh — the staccato juxtaposition of brief, vivid images — in fact lends them both an energy and also a surreal quality that remove what they describe even farther from the realm of ordinary experience. The dreamscapes are generally hostile and profoundly stark, and once more reinforce the physical and ontological distance between human being and the natural world: violent winds through deep mountain gorges, choking clouds of dust from the ground split asunder (IV Ha, 5f.), wild beasts (IV Ha, 4f.), oppressive weight of earth (IV 22-25, BO₂ 12’-14’), panic and tremors (IV 100f.), blast of lightning (IV 103), blaze of fire (IV 104-106), thick rain of profuse, deadly ash (IV OB Ni 14f.). These are dreams whose vastness is only amplified by contrast with the smaller and humbler and implicitly far more fragile space that would contain them — namely, that of the Dream House that Enkidu on each night prepares for Gilgamesh (IV 10-13 ~ 43-46 ~ 88-91 ~ 130-133 ~ 171-174).\textsuperscript{19}

Enkidu made for Gilgamesh a House of the Dream God, he fixed a door in its doorway to keep out the weather.

\textsuperscript{17} On the issue of the possible location(s) of the Cedar Land, see Shaffer, Forsyth, Hansman, Marszewski, and Virolleaud. Regardless whether it existed once in worldly space, its construction within the narrative space of \textit{EG} stresses distance from Uruk as an essential feature of its character. On the temporal length of the journey, see George (\textit{Babylonian Gilgamesh}) 463.

\textsuperscript{18} On dreams, see Oppenheim (\textit{Interpretation}), and also Butler 217-39.

\textsuperscript{19} On the Dream House or \textit{bit zaqi}, see George (\textit{Babylonian Gilgamesh}) 463f., with references.
In the circle he had drawn he made him lie down,
and falling flat like a net lay himself in the doorway.

With its door fixed “against the weather” — to say nothing of the even
greater threats afoot in wilderness at dead of night — Gilgamesh asleep inside
the circle on the floor, and his sidekick like a protective net between the dreamer
and the looming worlds outside and also within, the House itself arises each
night out of the ritualized space brought into being by the slow, repetitive,
formulaic acts — deeply cultural, deliberate and orderly — of preparation for
dreaming. These acts in turn, presumably intended both to invoke oneiric
powers and at the same time to defend against too deadly an incursion, offer an
even more dramatic contrast to the speed and brutality of the visions that
assault Gilgamesh. In such raw spaces as these — scapes dominated by the sheer
velocity, violence, and mass of elemental forces — no human thing survives for
very long, even within the strongest ritual boundaries culture’s magic can
erect.  

I propose that much the same can be said with reference to the garden of
jewelled trees in Tablet IX, even despite (and maybe because of) its contrasting
silence and stillness. The garden, presumably that of Shamash the Sun —
though possibly Siduri’s — is reached after an even longer and more arduous
trek than were the cedars, this time through steppes and mountain wilderness
and finally through the dark solar tunnel itself, its entrance guarded by scorpion-
beings. The description of the place into which after twelve double-hours the
tunnel finally opens is once again fragmentary and lacunose, this time due to the

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20 On magic circles and incubation, see the references in Tournay and Shaffer 107
note f, along with Bottéro 99 and Dalley 126 note 33.
21 On the garden, see George (Babylonian Gilgamesh) 497f., along with
Horowitz 100-02. In general, see Armstrong 1969.
poor preservation of the text — most scholars assume it would have had a much larger place in the original version — but through the bright splinters of hematite and carnelian, *sasu*-stone, coral, shards of *lapis lazuli*, *abashmu*-stone, and agate we can nonetheless catch fleetingly sharp glimpses of a world just as strange: this one both luminous and brilliant (not dark) but ultimately just as inhospitable.

This is moreover no less true despite the fact that Gilgamesh’s reaction to the jewelled trees, insofar as can be ascertained from the broken text at hand, is one of amazement and wonder rather than dread. On the surface, the two scenes — themselves both arguably to a large degree products of the spaces in which they are set — could not be more dissimilar. The hero’s response at the end of Tablet IX, so unlike the fear inspired in Tablets IV-VI by his dreams and by anticipation of the upcoming encounter with Humbaba, is now instead one of calm, almost rapt, attraction. This is entracement, not flight. Vision — the most detached and controlling of the senses — is in fact the one that primarily structures this scene, with its repeated references to sights lovely to behold (IX 174, 176) and the unstated but nonetheless implicitly rich palette of mineral colors. Gilgamesh goes straight ahead into the garden “as soon as he saw them” (IX 172), admires the blossoming carnelian (IX 173), gazes on the *lapis lazuli* in its foliage and “full fruit” (IX 176), and possibly even stretches out his hand to touch a carob that is actually made of *abashmu* (IX 189) — stretches just to touch, it might be asked, or perhaps to pluck and maybe also to taste it? The entire episode, even in its fragmentary preservation, unfolds within a space dominated by the quiet splendor of the jewelled trees as reflected in the awe of the one

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22 In both of George’s translations of this line (1999 and 2003), the actual touch is qualified as an insecure decipherment: “*He touched a carob, [[it was]] *abashmu* stone,” where italics indicate “uncertain renderings.” Foster 70 is more confident: “He took up a carob...” Other translations preserve lacunas in the line.
who encounters them; we see them as Gilgamesh does. The most detached and controlling of the senses is for precisely that reason also the most distanced and distancing, however, and the awe of the hero in his vision of the trees also reflects an unbridgeable separation in which we ourselves are also implicated. Between his hand that reaches to touch the fruit and the abashmu that somehow grows here on the branch, there lies an ontological gap far wider even than the one that separates Gilgamesh from the raw world of the Land of Cedars. Despite his very different experience of this radically different garden space, both venues are in their ways equally alien and alienating, and therefore also express much the same value in the mythic space traversed by the hero’s career.

More in general on mythic space at the conclusion. What is immediately clear from the description of cedar and garden in EG, however, is the degree to which their physical differences evoke more fundamental and essentially cultural meanings, along with the degree to which those meanings in these two cases strangely tend to converge. This is a second scale by which the distance between these two venues can be measured. The vastness and depths of the cedar forest, we have seen, limn the contours of a natural world in which human beings have no native place — or else have it no longer, as is evident from the anthropogenic myth of Enkidu’s ‘fall’ in Tablets I and II. A select few humans enter that alien space as heroes-to-be, under the banner of incursion, along the track of a significant quest, with a mixture of arrogance and trepidation, invading a territory that rarely if ever welcomes them, usually in order to slay its beast, exploit its resources — fine wood for doors — and perhaps (it is hoped)

23 On Enkidu’s narrative as one species of ‘fall’ from Nature into Culture, see e.g. Walls 28-32, Mobley 220-23, Tigay 192-213, and Kirk 135ff., 145-147.
even leave some more permanent mark on the landscape.²⁴ The Land of Cedars, haunt of Humbaba, is defined precisely by its otherness, its opposition as Nature to the world of Culture as embodied by the hero Gilgamesh and his sidekick, the former wildman and lately defender of shepherds.

A similar opposition mutatis mutandis defines the brilliant garden into which the lone hero enters in Tablet IX, though here the positions are somewhat reversed. I have already noted vision as the sense that chiefly structures this episode. To appreciate better its opposition to the Land of Cedars, it will help to shift perspective from what the hero sees here to how he is seen by those who inhabit this strange new world. At least since the death of Enkidu, if not earlier, what narratologists would call the story’s focalization — namely, the point of view from which the story unfolds — has been almost exclusively that of Gilgamesh himself.²⁵ A change in narrative focus occurs upon (if not a little before) the hero’s arrival in the world beyond the tunnel of the sun, however, when he becomes as much the object of others’ gazes as the subject of his own.

In the eyes of that realm’s inhabitants, his hand that stretches to touch the fabulous fruit has more in common with the paws of beasts than with whatever immaculate hand it is that cultivates that garden. After all, this is the same hand that will shortly afterwards demolish the mysterious Stone Ones that crew Urshanabi’s boat (X 92–106; cf. 155–59) and thus necessitate a novel, folktale...

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²⁴ See Forsyth 21–26 and Hansman on the possibility of actual, historical Mesopotamian expeditions to fell trees in forests variously situated. On heroic motivations, see Alster (“Paradigmatic Character”).

²⁵ De Jong 7 distinguishes three primary narrative functions as follows: “The text ... is the result of the narrative activity of a narrator. The content of this text is the story ... and the agent on this second level is the focalizer: it is with his/her/its eyes and in general through his/her/its perception that we ... perceive the fabula. ...This fabula consists of the chronological sequence of events, and the agents on this level are the actors” (italics mine). For more on the concept of focalization, see Bal 100–06. Walls 9–92 represents an attempt to approach the text of EG with sensitivity to some of its different focalizations, especially with reference to those that center on the erotic gaze. The shifting focalizations in this scene are the subject of an independent study; see Dickson (forthcoming).
crossing of the waters of death — a hand violent and impulsive, a hand that is best at destroying things. It is in fact less as human than animal (or better, as much animal as human) that Gilgamesh is seen by Siduri and later Uta-napishti and his wife. In the land beyond the tunnel, Gilgamesh of Uruk — the hero-king whom the SB prologue (I 1-8) celebrates as the master of vision, namely the One Who Saw — appears for the first time as seen, and seen as radically Other.26

It has often been noted that one effect of Enkidu’s death on the hero is a lapse into the kind of natural state that his sidekick had himself once embodied, and as whose opposite Gilgamesh himself had originally been cast. There is a shift here in roles and at the same time also in the structural categories the roles imply — whether the result of a desperate identification with the character of the deceased beloved in order to deny his death,27 some sort of rite du passage in the course of mourning,28 or else a more global rejection of culture itself in an effort somehow to be rid of the mortality that clings to it29 — and the King becomes the Wildman. If the road to the Land of Cedars is one along which Gilgamesh — despite or maybe even thanks to his frightening dreams — slowly

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26 Compare Walls 70, remarking on the transformation of Gilgamesh’s face from sexually alluring to desolate: “looking through the eyes of Siduri and Utnapishtim, then, the epic text replaces the erotic gaze of Tablets I-VI with the vision of Gilgamesh’s repulsive appearance.”
27 Walls 68 speaks of the “abyss of despair” into which Gilgamesh plunges, “driven relentlessly onward by his wrenching heartbreak into isolation, despair, and madness.” Leick 269 interprets the act as a measure of the degree to which Gilgamesh has “internalized Enkidu,” while the notion of Enkidu as “second self” to Gilgamesh is the core of Van Nortwick’s study of the epic. Abusch (“Development”) 617 in turn remarks that Gilgamesh “rejects all human obligations and identities, flees to the wild, where he assumes the identity of his dead friend.”
28 See Barre 178-81 on the interrelated themes of wandering and grief. Kirk 148f. speaks of the transformation of Gilgamesh as an effort to “simulate nature in a typical rite du passage inversion.”
29 Kirk 151: “his rejection...of the appurtenances of culture is a rejection of death itself. Just as Enkidu blamed his acculturation for the manner, if not the inevitability, of his dying, so Gilgamesh rejects the actuality of Enkidu’s death by seeking out the world of nature, of the animals who were Enkidu’s companions and seemed to symbolize freedom, lack of restraint, lack of corruption...” In general, see also Dollimore and Jager.
acquires an authentically heroic status, the journey to Siduri and Uta-napishti initially at least seems to take a dramatically different course. On the contrary, it charts a kind of disintegration, a loss or denial of human culture and a return instead toward something more like the raw natural world from which Enkidu had emerged in Tablet I.

The narrative directly addresses this change, and does so by means of a shift in focalization very similar to the one by which Enkidu first came into view through the trapper’s eyes (I 117-121). The transformation of Gilgamesh initially takes place as what is perhaps part of the regular (but usually temporary) disfigurement and self-debasement of ritual mourning, in which hair is torn out and fine clothing shredded (VIII 63f.; 90f.). Soon afterwards, however, his sorrow over Enkidu’s death becomes an expressly narcissistic quest (IX 1-6) for personal immortality, in the course of which Gilgamesh roams the wilderness and gradually also takes on its character (IX 17f. + Si i.2):

Like an arrow among them he fell,
he smote the [lions, he] killed them and scattered them.
[He] clad himself in their skins, he ate their flesh.

When Gilgamesh arrives at the shore where Siduri lives (X 4), the narrative emphasizes his wild and unsettling appearance — the hides of animals on his back, the divinity of his flesh belied by the mortal grief within (X 5-9): as it would have struck a viewer who at first remains unidentified, but who is

30 On mourning and disfigurement, see Walls 69.
31 See Kirk 148-51 and Foster 40f. Walls 69 implicitly acknowledges the narcissism of his reaction and further notes the “feral” transformation of Gilgamesh.
32 Walls 90 note 83 remarks that “[I]n his savagery and wearing of lion skins, Gilgamesh is portrayed as the antithesis of the civilized royal figure.”
surely meant to represent someone who natively belongs to the world into which this creature has just entered:

Gilgamesh came wandering...

he was clad in a pelt, and fearful \textit{to look on.}

The flesh of the gods he had in \textit{his body,}

but in [his heart] there was sorrow.

His face resembled one come from afar.

The closing line of this passage, shortly afterwards repeated by Siduri and Gilgamesh himself (X 43, 50), is of course an echo of the same line spoken with reference to the hunter/trapper after his initial meeting with Enkidu by the water-hole in Tablet I (I 121).\textsuperscript{33} Both scenes narrate an encounter with a stranger reflexively, namely by focusing on how that stranger appears to and thereby affects those who see him; and in both, moreover, the formula succinctly relates spatial to ontological distance. However, the scenes differ in exactly how the formula is applied to its referent in each case.\textsuperscript{34} With respect to the hunter in Tablet I, it expresses the gulf separating wildman from man of culture, animal from trapper, and in so doing marks the experience of otherness as a deeply transformative one. Specifically, it speaks to the physical and emotional changes wrought in the trapper by his encounter with Enkidu. The narrator has of course

\textsuperscript{33} In the present article I adopt George's 1999 translation (\textit{Gilgamesh}) of the line; his 2003 translation (\textit{Babylonian Gilgamesh}) renders it "his face was like one who has travelled distant roads." Compare Dalley: "His face was like that of a long-distance traveller"; Foster: "His face like a traveller's from afar"; Kovacs: "and his face looked like one who had made a long journey"; and Sandars: "His face was altered like that of one who has made a long journey."

\textsuperscript{34} The following argument is predicated on the assumption that the attribution of this line to the trapper and not to Enkidu is a certain one; see Dalley 126 note 12 and George (\textit{Babylonian Gilgamesh}) 450f. Edzard 48-50 interprets the description of the encounter between Enkidu and the trapper as deliberately comic.
already (I 105-112) described the beast-man in the course of relating his birth, but
the real significance and depth of his otherness are fully experienced only when
he is seen through the trapper’s eyes (I 117-121). The mere sight of the creature
has the power to trouble him deeply and make him despondent, and even to
alter his look in much the same way that a long journey can. While he has not
literally travelled all that far from home — though it should be recalled that the
venue for their encounter is the wilderness, that space (three days’ trek out from
the city) in which the worlds of nature and culture most violently intersect in
acts of hunting and predation — the trapper himself has nonetheless somehow
been transfigured by his face-to-face confrontation with Enkidu. If nothing else,
this confirms how far removed he is in ontological space from the awesome
thing across the water-hole.

On the other hand, and especially with reference to Gilgamesh in Tablets
IX-XI, the analogy in the formula may more properly mean to focus on the
traveller as object, not subject, of the gaze. Here he is the one seen, not the
roaming master of sight. Its true referent, that is to say, may not be the voyager
who returns to his own kin after an extended trip abroad, during which time his
experience of strange life has transformed how he appears, marking his face;
this at least seems to be the point of the analogy in the trapper’s case. When
predicated of Gilgamesh in the garden, however, the analogy rather intends the
voyager himself as the one who is foreign, namely the one who arrives as a
stranger in some distant, strange new land. There, in the eyes of those who meet
him, his appearance is not just an index of the travails of the journey — how
long he has wandered, amidst what dangers, through what sights, and with
what suffering — all of which can of course make changes in a once (and
implicitly still somewhat) familiar face. It is also and even more fundamentally a
sign of his status as genuinely Other, of how very different are these people who
come here among us from such a very great distance away. Estrangement is the issue. What does the face of one who arrives from afar best resemble? Most certainly nothing familiar, nothing at all like what we see around us every day, but instead something totally different — as if not quite even the same species, perhaps, and at the same time fascinating and disturbing.

Such is Gilgamesh in the eyes of all who encounter him after Enkidu’s death. He is estranged, a creature whose alterity the weird scorpion guards at the gates of the tunnel in the Mashu Mountains immediately perceive long before he arrives in the garden (IX 48–51):

The scorpion-man called to his mate:

“He who has come to us, flesh of the gods is his body."

The scorpion-man’s mate answered him:

“Two-thirds of him is god, and one third human."

By the time Siduri meets him, as we noted above, this distinction on the basis of mixture — namely, between what would seem to be different portions of different kinds of flesh (divine/human) — has instead become interiorized and therefore spatial, and is now expressed as a distinction of inner and outer (X 7–9): “The flesh of the gods he had in [his body,] / but in [his heart] there was sorrow.” As much as his lapse into a state of nature marks him as a divided or doubled creature — a man who wanders clad in animal skins — this division in turn reveals an even deeper, constitutional split, namely divine flesh wrapped around a fragile and mortally wounded human heart. The uneasy juxtaposition makes for an appearance deeply unsettling to those who have a share in neither animal nor human worlds — Walls (70) interprets Siduri’s reaction at the beginning of Tablet X as one of “fear and revulsion” — and who instead belong to the scarcely imaginable tertium quid in which Gilgamesh desperately seeks
membership. All who encounter Gilgamesh beyond the tunnel are drawn first (even despite their disgust) to how he looks, which is implicitly marked by its difference from their own. For it simply cannot be the case — it is false by definition, in fact — that the inhabitants of the land at the end of the world have sunken cheeks, haggard faces, and hearts filled with sorrow. From the perspective implicitly embedded in the formulaic claim that “his face resembled one come from afar” — the perspective of one who looks on another who is radically different from oneself — we see the hero through the eyes of Siduri and (later) Uta-napishti. Along with their gaze, our own attention is likewise drawn to the transfiguration of Gilgamesh’s body by physical suffering and grief, to his divine flesh somehow weirdly transparent to the human sorrow lodged within it, and also to the nature of his clothing, as if these three features were all in a way unquestionably linked (X 40-45 ~ 113-118 ~ 213-218):

’[why are your] cheeks [so hollow,] your face so sunken, 
[your mood so wretched,] your visage [so] wasted? 
[Why] in your heart [does sorrow reside,]
and your face resemble one [come from afar?]
Why are your fingers burnt [by frost and by sunshine,]
[and why do] you wander the wild [in lion’s garb?]’

Wrapped in an animal’s hide, the hero has himself become the beast — but even stranger than a beast, since this is a peculiar kind of beast that feels

35 On the customary rituals, see Abusch ("Gilgamesh’s Request I") 9f. and Walls 69f.

36 Note that Tablet IX ends (and the encounter in Tablet X begins) with explicit reference to the shift in perspective, as Siduri raises her eyes (IX 195f.) to watch Gilgamesh. See also Tournay and Shaffer 197 note y; Dalley 9 and Foster 71, however, assign the gaze to Gilgamesh instead.
sorrow on account of its knowledge of death. Kirk and others have noted, from a structuralist frame of reference, the narrative’s use of a vestimentary code to signify the passage from Nature to Culture and vice-versa.\(^{37}\) The acculturation of Enkidu in Tablet II (P 66-71, 110) involves clothing his nakedness along with other culturally significant acts of personal grooming. In Tablet XI (251-270), a fundamentally similar process at the home of Uta-napishti — stripping, washing, discarding of pelts, and donning of immaculate robes — transforms Gilgamesh from a desperate beast into the wiser king who will return to Uruk to rule that city more justly. Between those two scenes the correspondence is clear. Among the jewelled trees at the end of Tablet IX, however, he is neither yet as clean nor certainly as resigned to his lot. In a striking symmetry, on the contrary, the wild Gilgamesh in the Garden of Shamash is instead the structural double of Enkidu at the water-hole: both are alien, both are icons — one naïve, the other no doubt sentimental — of Nature as opposed to Culture, both are terrifying savages, and both stand right on the threshold of what to each of them are incomprehensibly strange new worlds.

The scenes are implicitly balanced one against the other by a flawed but still compelling kind of propositional logic. As was Enkidu to the trapper, so is Gilgamesh to Siduri and Uta-napishtim; as Nature (A) to Culture (B), so Culture (B) to Divinity (C). To see it this way involves a hermeneutic shift, whereby the question asked predisposes what kind of answer it receives. What from the standpoint of a character’s inner motivation — (Why does Gilgamesh play the beast?) — resembles either narcissistic identification with the dead beloved, loss-driven withdrawal of cathexis (Walls 68f.), inverted rite du passage, or wholesale rejection of the morbidity of culture, may well from the standpoint of

\(^{37}\) Kirk 146f. addresses the issue of change of clothing as an index of transition to Culture. On the wildman theme, see Mobley and in general Bartra.
narrative *function* — with which myths are chiefly concerned, after all — turn much more simply on an attempt to understand an incomprehensible difference by analogy to a difference that is somewhat easier to grasp.\(^3^8\) By contrast with the gods, humanity is as rough and uncouth and repellent as is raw nature by contrast with the world of cultured human beings. The identity between king and wildman may therefore be less a psychological or existential event — more the stuff of literature, perhaps — than a matter of the special logic of myths. If \(A:B = B:C\), then \(A = B\). Functionally, Gilgamesh in the Garden is Enkidu at the Water-Hole.

Their itineraries may differ once they cross their respective thresholds, but their final destination is of course one and the same. The world into which Enkidu passes, thanks mainly to the guidance of Shamhat, is the one he will later first curse and then fully embrace as he lays dying in Tablet VII. Thanks to the prostitute, Enkidu has become like a god (cf. I 207, II P54), has eaten bread and drunk ale and worn splendid clothes (VII 134-137), and therefore he should bless the transformation he has undergone, even unto his own death. Gilgamesh, by contrast, will enter the world beyond the tunnel of the sun only far enough to learn — thanks to the guidance of Siduri\(^3^9\) — that he can have no permanent place within it, and that he must finally return home to Uruk to die. Despite this divergence in their routes towards death, both Gilgamesh and Enkidu cross their respective thresholds at water-hole and garden as radically other than the worlds into which they venture. Each of the two — Gilgamesh directly, Enkidu

\(^{38}\) See Peradotto on motivation vs. function in narratives, as well as on some of the workings of the logic peculiar to myth.

\(^{39}\) On the analogies among Shamhat, Siduri, and Kalypso in the Odyssean tale, see especially Abusch, (“Mourning”) 110-21; the theme is also explored in “Ishtar’s Proposal” and “Gilgamesh’s Request II.”
(perhaps) through a curious kind of mirroring in the trapper’s own face — is like “one come from afar”.

The distance Gilgamesh has travelled by the end of Tablet IX is arguably greater than the distance Enkidu traverses in the course of his ‘fall.’ Here the measurement can be taken by use of a scale analogous to the vestimentary code — nakedness vs. clothing, filthy pelts vs. immaculate robes — uncovered by structuralist analysis. Perhaps even more fundamental than distinctions between Nature and Culture based on what is worn, after all, are those based on what is eaten. For a culinary code clearly figures prominently in the early episode of Enkidu’s acculturation as one index of his change, where in his prelapsarian state he grazes on grass with the gazelles and drinks from the water-holes (I 110f. ~ 127f. ~ 175f.), but then afterwards learns what properly to do with bread and ale (II 44-46; P 90-105), “the lot of the land.” The same issue is present implicitly in the characterization of Gilgamesh during the wanderings that follow Enkidu’s death, where his sustenance is presumably quite far removed from the more genteel food in the city. By the end of Tablet IX, Gilgamesh has travelled from the kitchens of Uruk, provisioned by its sheepfolds and rich herds of cattle, its date groves and cultivated fields, first to the rough fare of the wilderness — flesh of lions (IX Si i.2) — and now finally to the incomparably strange stuff that somehow grows on trees in the garden at the end of the passage through the tunnel of the sun. He has passed from Culture to Nature to something quite incomprehensibly alien.

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40 Serracino Inglott 14 notes that “Gilgamesh’s dazzlement shows that he is a stranger here; it is not the home of humans but of gods.”
41 This is of course the organizing premise of Lévi-Strauss (above, note 1). Consider also Oppenheim’s comment (quoted above, note 7), making explicit what is implicit in all analogies drawn between the jewelled garden in EG and the fruit-bearing plants in other mythic “gardens of the gods.”
42 See Mobley 220-223, Bartra, Tigay 202f., and Kirk 146f.
The garden of jewelled trees is in fact a locus of difficult questions. What is this strange garden? How can it transgress the fundamental categories that structure our essentially binary understanding of the world,\textsuperscript{43} with its fixed boundaries between opposites? Specifically, what somehow makes possible the passage from mineral to vegetable, dead to living, inert to animate? How can gemstone be fruit? What kind of plant produces what — despite its generative link to process and change — is in fact imperishable and incorruptible? Even more challenging to the cultural imagination, and more germane to the figure of Gilgamesh the Wildman King in Shamash’s Garden, is the question of agency, both efficient and final: What hand tends the garden? How is such stuff grown? From what seeds? By what weird agronomy? And perhaps most important of all: What kind of being can pluck and eat it, what hand can reach to take from the tree and move to the mouth and then chew \textit{abashmu}-stone or lapis lazuli or agate, swallow and somehow incorporate its jewelled stuff into the stuff of its own flesh?\textsuperscript{44}

Just as Enkidu, who gapes like a child and looks askance at the bread and ale set before him in the shepherds’ camp (II 44-46), Gilgamesh in Tablet IX has entered a realm whose utter strangeness is marked by the fact that it presents him with food he does not know how to eat. Unlike his sidekick, however, who is successfully taught “the lot of the land” (II P97) by Shamhat, the Wildman in the Garden comes implicitly to learn only that this brilliant fruit can never be his sustenance. Its pure, hard, everlasting nature is surely what gives the same

\textsuperscript{43} See Lévi-Strauss 1-74.
\textsuperscript{44} Widengren approaches the tree in Tablet IX from the broad viewpoint of ritual, and therefore considers it artificial, namely branches hung with gems as a simulacrum of the king’s role as guarantor of the renewal of life and fertility; see also Hansman. From the viewpoint of its function within \textit{EG}, however, its status as (1) living and (2) the source of divine food cannot be discounted.
gemlike quality to the bodies of those who are able to eat it, but he himself will never have the ability either to effect or to participate in such a transformation. In fact, the best he could do — in an episode that recalls the litany of precious minerals and jewels at the close of Tablet IX — was to construct a (more or less) permanent simulacrum of the decomposing body of his friend Enkidu, a statue with “eyebrows of lapis lazuli, chest of gold...” (VIII 67-72), and to send the corpse off to the otherworld laden with obsidian, carnelian, lapis lazuli, alabaster, gold, ivory, and silver (VIII 92-219). That is to say, the most that Gilgamesh in his mortal grief can accomplish through the skill of all the craftsmen of Uruk is the translation of perishable stuff into an icon of imperishability — a planned resemblance merely, but not the real thing. For that matter, the material of the statue, however resplendent it is with the suggestion that it has been removed from the world of change and decay, remains nonetheless as inert as the corpse it is meant to replace. It does not live, as Gilgamesh would ardently want it to; nor can it grow, mysteriously, like fruit on a tree.

Moreover, its intended alchemy also fails — no sympathetic magic here — since the precious stuff from which the image of his friend is made of course has no power to communicate its incorruptibility to Enkidu. If the statue is a marvel of gold and lapis lazuli, Enkidu himself has by contrast “turned to clay” (X

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45 See (with caution) Parpola, and also Müller, Grelot 59f. (with references), and Widengren, along with e.g. Greek myths of the apples of the Hesperides, descriptions of the island of the Hyperboreans, and the mythical tree in the garden of the Phaikians in Odyssey 8. Foster 71 note 1 remarks on the rhetorical (and ontological) distance between mundane appearance (carob) and otherworldly (abashmu) in this passage. Serracino Inglott 15 speculates on the reference to grapes (IX 173f.) as a prolepsis of Siduri’s role as vintner of the gods’ ambrosiac drink.

46 On iconic representation, see Leach 9-16. On the contrast between simulacrum and corpse as a negation of the heroic ideal of “beautiful death,” see Walls 65f.
68f. ~ 145f. ~ 245f.), the stuff of decomposition.47 The Garden of Shamash, however, miraculously offers an image of ‘dead’ mineral that is somehow alive and flourishing: carnelian trees burgeoning with what seem to be clusters of grapes, a tree of lapis lazuli that bears leaves and is “in full fruit,” stone vials that grow instead of thorns and briars (IX 173-190). These are themselves in a way simulacra too, but exquisitely far more perfect ones, true embodiments of what they represent, since in this case the jewelled fruit is figurative of the divinity that eats it — both alive and yet somehow also (like gemstones) incorruptible — and that Gilgamesh himself will neither taste nor possess. It is therefore also a striking measure of the distance that permanently separates him from the object of his desire.

The two spaces — forest and garden, cedars and jewelled trees — between which the hero’s career unfolds metonymically represent and also mythically embody his own intermediate position between Nature and Divinity. If he is partly each, he is also wholly neither, and in both spaces he therefore always remains an interloper, a kind of freak, a beast-king simultaneously alienated and alienating, a stranger “come from afar.” From one perspective, the two venues differ from one another as drastically as do filthy animal pelts from the immaculate robes of the gods, or the tough flesh of lions from the unimaginable texture and taste of abashmu-stone. In another sense, however, and with specific reference to Gilgamesh caught in medio situ, both spaces converge on the image of the alterity that in fact most essentially defines him.

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47 Compare Walls 69.
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