Looking at the Other in *Gilgamesh*

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THE TRAPPER’S GAZE

One day, across a water-hole, in a wilderness three days’ trek from the city, a trapper sees what has not been seen before: a wild man, like a beast—like a god—fallen from heaven, naked, his body rough with matted hair, down on all fours, crouching to lap up the water. This happens for a second day, and also for a third, but in the way in which this story gets told, these three distinct occasions are fused into a single encounter, as if each were identical to the others, as if each happened at one and the same time, or else all were stuck somehow in a kind of recursive and possibly nightmarish loop. The trapper looks, and his gaze for that brief moment could be ours, but what we see most clearly is not what he saw, but how what he saw gives his face in our eyes a different and yet still recognizable look: It is the look of “one who have travelled distant roads” (*Gilgamesh* I 113–21):

A hunter, a trapper-man,
came face to face with him by the water-hole.
One day, a second and a third, he came face to face with him by the water-hole.
The hunter saw him and his expression froze,
[he ⟨Enkidu⟩] and his herds—he went back to his lair.
[He ⟨the hunter⟩ was] troubled, he grew still, he grew silent,
his mood [was unhappy,] his face clouded over.
There [was] sorrow in his heart,
his face was like [one who has travelled] distant [roads].

An odd shift thus occurs, a kind of narrative bait-and-switch. The fact that the verbs in this passage are all preterit and that the narrated action has already taken place does not change the fact that in the narration of the story—whether we are reading it, or else hearing it told—we are implicitly invited to look at Enkidu with or through the trapper’s eyes. This is encouraged by the formulaic looping of the action (“one day, a second, and a third . . .”) that sets up the scene (I 115) by heightening suspense. The narrative leads us twice to the same brink of direct encounter, only to draw back on each occasion and then return to that brink a third time, thereby generating expectation of something that will happen or be seen. What we are shown, however, is not the face of the wild man—which we have already seen “for ourselves,” after all (I 105–12)—but instead the face of the one through whose eyes we expected to look, with the result that the reputed viewer now becomes the object of the view. We see the trapper when he has seen Enkidu “face to face” (114, 115).

What is the significance of this shift? At least two questions are involved here, which the present essay aims to explore. One is perhaps existential, and the other has to do with what narratologists generally call “discourse”—“the narrating as opposed to the narrative”

1. All references (by tablet and line) and quotations rely on the translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* by George 2003. Other translations consulted are those of Foster 2001: 3–95; George 1999; Bottéro 1992; Tournay and Shaffer 1992; and Dalley 1989: 39–153.
(Prince 1987: 21)—or more simply, how the story (whatever its content may be) gets told. Specifically, it is an issue that concerns shifts in “focalization,” namely in the “perspective” or “viewpoint” or “angle of vision” that orients a story’s telling. In the passage quoted above, the narrator of the enframing tale makes the trapper the “focalizer” in his encounter with the wild man, and the wild man takes the part of the “focalized,” one the subject of the gaze, and the other its object. Or at least that initially seems to be the case. As we have noted, it is the trapper himself who becomes focalized through his encounter with Enkidu; the seer becomes the seen. Why do we see his face? I propose to address this question first narratologically, in the expectation that the answer will also bear on its existential import.

What can it mean that our view of the wild man in this passage is a refracted one, and this also in two senses of the word? It is refracted first because it represents a different focalization from that of the story’s narrator, with whose point of view ours is identical through much of the narrative. This too involves a shift, since in the lines (I 105–12) immediately preceding the passage at issue, we in fact glimpse the beast from the narrator’s detached and, for all intents and purposes, omniscient vantage point. From the all-encompassing distance of that view, ranging (in the course of barely 40 lines) from the temples of Uruk to the court of Anu and then down to the wilderness, we are given the sight of an utterly natural being; thick hair on his body, long tresses like those of a woman, the strength of Ninurta within him as he eats grass along with the gazelle and jostles with other beasts at the water-hole. But having seen him thus once, why are we invited to see him twice, so to speak, and from a different perspective? What difference does it make that after the “objective,” narrated vision of the wild man we are manipulated into expecting to look at him again from another point of view?

The switch from seeing through the eyes of the external narrator (“extradiegetically”) to seeing through the eyes of a character embedded in the story (“intradiegetically”) is a narrative device that aims chiefly at generating affect. It does this first by reducing the distance between the viewer and the viewed. Here in the wilderness, the trapper’s implicitly far more limited perspective allows us in turn to share in a more naïve and thus more direct vision of what he sees, or at least in the semblance of such a vision. It offers a sight that is apparently less mediated by the narrator’s extradiegetic view and also less filtered, perhaps, by the experience of what might even at this early date be conventional representations of wild men.

To the extent to which we and the original audience are invited to crouch down and look across the water-hole, we are also encouraged to see as it were directly what it is that crouches on the other side, over there, just opposite us. Rather than maintaining separation, then, the trapper’s viewpoint would bring us into dangerous proximity to the beast. This close encounter tends to cancel out the distance of our initial perspective from the safety of

3. On different kinds of narrator and levels of narration, from classically omniscient and omnipresent to embedded, see Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 86–105.
5. This is of course an argument from silence, but an argument not without some plausibility. While no evidence of earlier Mesopotamian narrative representations of wild men is extant, it is unlikely that Enkidu will have been the audience’s first encounter with the figure, given the background of oral traditions of folktale and myth out of which literary narratives per se often arise, and by which they tend to be influenced. On other representations of the wild man in the Ancient Near East, see Tigay 1982: 202–9; Mobley 1997; George 2003: 450. For the later tradition, see Bartra 1994.
the omniscient narrator’s viewpoint. As a corollary, the wild man himself would therefore seem less a fictional type—something encountered in stories told by narrators—than an individual in his own right. For Enkidu to be seen intradiegetically gives him greater authenticity, as it were.

Proximity in turn supplies the encounter with the emotional content it initially lacked. To be sure, our embedded gaze is an interrupted one, a kind of narrative feint, a blind alley, in that it never actually reaches its target. We see Enkidu only once, after all, not twice; we never see the beast as the trapper really saw him. Instead, our gaze is deflected onto the trapper’s face, where we see not what he saw but instead his own response to the sight. This is a loss, perhaps, but at the same time also a gain. The response in its emotional and existential density is in fact something we could not have seen extradiegetically, from a remote position outside the narrative. Seeing the trapper after he has seen Enkidu lends us a different kind of vision, namely a vision with greater affective depth. Even in the case of an embedded as opposed to an external point of view, vision still remains the most distancing of the senses; it keeps its object at arm’s length, and to that extent perhaps controls it better, but at the same time also precludes direct involvement. Note that in the run of lines preceding this encounter (I 105–12), where the perspective is that of the detached narrator, the description is dominated by the sense of sight: body, matted hair, long tresses, coat of hair, grazing, jostling. Only twice is what is narrated an inner state, interestingly, the beast’s ignorance (I 108) and satisfaction (I 112), rather than some outward, visible feature.

By contrast, the description of the trapper dwells mostly on inward feelings. All but two of the adjectives attributed to him in lines I 117–21 refer to affective and thus not directly observable states: “troubled, he grew still, he grew silent, | his mood [was unhappy,] . . . | There [was] sorrow in his heart.” Even the reference to his actual features (“his face clouded over” [I 119]) addresses his appearance as an index of mood. The encounter “face to face” (I 114, 115) exposes the trapper’s own face (I 116, 119, 121) not as surface but instead as transparency, allowing us a glimpse into the depth of his heart. Unlike the distancing of sight, emotions are markers of proximity—to the trapper himself, perhaps, as much as to the beast across the water-hole. Through them, we are brought perilously closer to experiencing less Enkidu himself than the significance of an encounter with him.

Through the literary device of embedded (and interrupted) focalization, we gain a kind of affective vision, or better, the vision of an effect. What we see on the surface, the rigidity of the expression, the clouding of the face, reveals what lies within. This device in turn reflexively turns on us too, since by its means we are also implicitly led to reassess our own initial response to our first view of Enkidu just a few lines earlier (I 105–12). How likely is it, after all, that upon that first sight of the wild man our own expressions “froze,” that we “grew still . . . grew silent,” and that our faces seemed to others like the faces of those who have “travelled distant roads”? The description of the trapper’s response, the fact that right after having seen Enkidu we are now directed to look at another who has also just seen him, prescribes specific affective content in response to that sight. It fills in a blind spot in our extradiegetic view of Enkidu. What was missing or indefinite and unspecified in our own experience when we looked from the narrator’s viewpoint is now supplied to us when we are asked to look from the viewpoint of the trapper. His response, in a sense, is offered as a template for ours, and possibly even as a mirror. Seeing the trapper after he has seen Enkidu forces us to take a look at ourselves as well.

6. See the remarks of Kuriyama 1999 on the transparency of facial expression to mood.
We see the trapper’s expression, then, and not the wild man’s face a second time because more than any direct view of Enkidu it measures the magnitude of the latter’s strangeness.\(^7\) The trapper’s shock reflects the beast’s alterity, and we too are encouraged to experience that otherness as shocking. At the same time, we are not brought too close for comfort; the distance is never really collapsed, but on the contrary only preserved by interposing the trapper’s face between us and the face of Enkidu. Not only does it preserve that distance, moreover, but the device of deflected focalization at the same time also implicitly augments the danger of encountering Enkidu by protecting us from “directly” experiencing it ourselves. What seems like an impediment may in this respect actually be more like a shield. The trapper is a foil. In his face we see the result of unmediated confrontation with the wild man, confrontation unlike the one enjoyed at the safe and affectless distance of the narrator’s gaze. If nothing else, this lets the storyteller maximize the impact of the encounter without having to undertake the task of describing it again, and in such a way (if it were possible) that the audience might react just as the trapper did. More than just a narrative trick, however, the tactic also helps to thematize the issue of the effects, both physical and existential, of confrontations with others, which is one of the abiding themes of *Gilgamesh*.\(^8\) There is perhaps even a sense in which Enkidu before his “fall” into culture resembles the Medusa of Greek myth, the sight of whose face turns the viewer to stone.\(^9\) The trapper’s frozen expression would serve in this case as a kind of reflection that lets us see what ours would have been if we had had the misfortune to look at the creature with our very own eyes.

The passage closes with the formula that strikingly combines outward appearance with inner state to register the full extent of the trapper’s reaction (I 121): “his face was like [one who has travelled] distant [roads].” His experience of the wild man transforms him; it alters how he feels (troubled, despondent, sorrowful), and therefore even alters the very look of his face. The simile in the formula is of course partly a simple reference to the physical travails of travel, for the Mesopotamians, as for many in the ancient world, always a perilous and exhausting enterprise. Along, the “distant path” (III 25) to the Cedar Forest, for instance, Gilgamesh and Enkidu need to dig wells for their water every night (IV 5f., 38f., 83f., 125f., 166f.), at the end of each day’s long fifty leagues. On his second journey, the hero must kill lions, both to survive and for his food (IX 15–18), and his passage along the path of the sun, “pitch dark and seemingly interminable” (George 2003: 494), is a grueling and nightmarish race over the course of an entire day.\(^10\) The theme of the journey and its toll is in fact raised in the opening lines of the poem (I 9): Gilgamesh “came a distant road and was weary but granted rest.” Here travel figures as a kind of heroic labor in itself, and the journey itself as a narrative structuring device. This is in keeping with what Campbell styles the heroic “monomyth,” in whose terms the hero’s story always follows a circular track of Departure and later Return, travel outward to the ends of the known world and then back home again to rest or die.\(^11\)

More than just this, however, the simile also registers the *inward* effect of travelling “distant roads.” What the trapper feels in Tablet I is less physical weariness than existential weariness, even more than existential weariness, because the strain on his face reflects our own reflection on the strange otherness of the wild man and his effects on us. The passage is not simply dealing with the impact of the other’s gaze, but also with the **gaze of the other** on us.

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7. On the liminality of Enkidu, see Ackerman 2005: 106–8, with references; and above, note 5.
8. See, among others, Jacobsen 1976 and van Nortwick 1991: 34–38, for whom much of the narrative unfolds in terms of the motif of the other as “second self.”
10. See George 2003: 492–97 on the contested issue of the location and orientation of the Path of the Sun.
fatigue; the sight of the wild man somehow makes him sorrowful and despondent. In a narrative that has much to do with mapping the changes wrought through encounters with others, of the trapper with Enkidu, Enkidu with Shamhat, Gilgamesh with Enkidu, both heroes with Huwawa, Gilgamesh with Siduri and Uta-napishtim, this first encounter in the story is in fact richly prefigurative of others later on. Seeing the other is transformative; it always brings with it a risk of oneself no longer being the same.

Inner changes in *Gilgamesh* mostly take place precisely in the context of confrontation and distant travel, whether literal, from Uruk to the wilderness, from Uruk to the ends of the earth, or else figurative, as in the case of Enkidu’s own passage from nature to culture. In that case too, as in the trapper’s face, the change is reflected in how Enkidu appears afterwards, as he sheds the look of the beast and becomes instead groomed and anointed with oil like a man, “like a warrior” (II P 105–11), “like a god” (II P 54). The beginning of his own journey, in the act of sexual initiation by Shamhat, may not cover much physical space, but the ontological distance he traverses is considerable. In turn, the face of Gilgamesh will likewise undergo transformation in the course of his painful quest after Enkidu’s death, though there the change takes the form of a kind of disfigurement (X 40–45 ~ 47–52 ~ 113–18 ~ 119–25). 12

The traveller who leaves his familiar walls to venture into the wild that stretches between one town or city and the next, and especially the traveller who is gone for long and whose journey takes him far afield, returns home to his kin a changed man because of the labor of travel and also because of what he has seen along the way. According to the use of the formula in Tablet I to illuminate the effects of the trapper’s encounter with Enkidu, seeing what is other somehow causes a change in the heart that is reflected in the face, thus permanently altering one’s outward look. This alteration is presumably commensurate with the strangeness of what gets seen. By analogy, the greater and longer the trek—how much farther one has wandered, amidst how many more dangers, through how many more strange sights, and with what deeper suffering—the more it transfigures the traveller. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that the inner change wrought by travel and encounter with others consistently seems to be that of grief, not joy. Seeing the other causes anguish. Contrast the statement “there [was] sorrow in his heart” (I 120) applied to the trapper after he catches first sight of Enkidu, his gaze traversing the gulf between man of culture and wild man, mortal human and godlike beast, with the reference a few lines earlier (112 ~ 177; cf. 173) to Enkidu’s heart “growing pleased with the water” alongside the beasts. 13 Sorrow will of course inevitably follow Enkidu’s transformation, too, though only after a lengthy detour through a failed heroic career (cf. VII 263–67). After the delight he experiences in Shamhat’s embrace (I 189–95, 300; P II 135), which even brings on forgetfulness of the wild where he was born (II P 46–50), in the food and drink of his acculturation (II P 100–105), and perhaps also in the quasi-erotic company of Gilgamesh, 14 Enkidu suffers despondency and regret on his deathbed in Tablet VII.

What this suggests is that the sorrow that results from the sight of otherness is a sorrow closely linked to self-consciousness and to awareness of death. 15 Seeing the other evokes

13. George 2003: 545 n. 17 notes the literal translation of line 112, with reference to Enkidu at the water-hold, as “his heart grew pleased.” The contrast with the sorrow in the heart of the trapper (I 120) may or may not be intended.
14. On the homoerotic relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, see Walls 2001: 9–92, along with Leick 1994: 164–69, 265–69; for a somewhat more balanced discussion, see Ackerman 2005.
awareness of oneself, and especially of oneself as isolated, finite, and impermanent. Seeing the other makes one see oneself as mortal. This is of course precisely the awareness to which the hero Gilgamesh comes after the death of Enkidu. That knowledge impels him on a journey whose transformative effects can also be read in his face. To appreciate the change he undergoes, it will help to see it through yet another focalization.

SIDURI’S GAZE

Through veils, she raises her eyes (IX 196) to see a wild creature approach from the garden of jewelled trees.16 His aspect is frightening; afraid for her life, she quickly withdraws inside her house, bars the door, and goes up to the safety of the roof. Her concern is not baseless, since the creature is violent. He in fact confronts her from outside and threatens to shatter the bolts and smash her gate (X 15–22). Most striking about his appearance is its fundamentally dual nature; this is a creature divided against itself (X 5–9):

Gilgamesh came wandering, and [. . . . . :]
he was clothed in a pelt, [he was imbued with] menace.
He had the flesh of the gods in [his body,]
but there was sorrow in [his heart.]
His face was like one who had travelled a distant road.

A man dressed like a lion, outwardly a beast since covered by its pelt, he is also a grieving (human) heart covered by the flesh of the gods.17 This makes for an unsettling combination, and also suggests his own liminal status, his position midway between animal and deity,18 though this time not as a source of heroic strength but instead an occasion for grief. Mirroring Enkidu’s earlier passage, he has exchanged Culture for Nature.19 His animal skins (cf. XI 250ff.) stands in contrast—as uncouth to refined, savage to civilized—with the hoods and veils in which Siduri is wrapped (X 4).20 A similar contrast presumably holds between his face and hers, since it is implicitly to that difference that her attention is immediately drawn (X 40–45):

“[why are your] cheeks [hollow,] your face sunken,
[your mood wretched,] your features wasted?
[(Why) is there sorrow] in your heart,
your face like one [who has travelled a distant road?]
[(Why is it)] your face is burnt [by frost and sunshine,]
[and] you roam the wild [got up like a lion?]”

16. Tablet IX ends (and the encounter in Tablet X begins) with reference to the shift in focalization, as Siduri raises her eyes (IX 195f.) to watch Gilgamesh, who up to this point had been the focalizer of the jeweled garden. See also Tournay and Shaffer 1994: 197 n. y, and George 2003: 498; Dalley 1989: 99 and Foster 2001: 71, however, assign the gaze to Gilgamesh himself.
17. The scorpion-beings make the same observation about his divided nature at IX 48–51.
20. Bottéro (1992: 165 n. 1) takes these as indices of her married status, which may well be the case. This does not in itself preclude their functioning within a vestimentary code as indices of culture vs. nature. On various codes in the structuralist analysis of myth and literature, see Lévi-Strauss 1966: 1–74; on the issue as specific to the Gilgamesh narrative, see Moran 2000, Anderson 1991: 78–80, and the discussion in Ackerman 2005: 99–105 and 130f.
Before looking more closely at the details of this description, whose fourth line echoes and is therefore confirmed by the narrator’s extradiegetic use of the same formula at X 9, it will be useful to remember how great a switch in focalization has taken place with respect to the hero’s character. Throughout much of Tablets X and XI of *Gilgamesh*, it is Gilgamesh himself who is the object of the gaze of others rather than its subject. How he appears to Siduri, Ur-Shanabi, and Uta-napishtim receives the greatest emphasis in these episodes, as each of the inhabitants of this realm sees and comments on his troubled looks and desperate, impulsive behavior. Gilgamesh as the object of sight—namely, as focalized—instead of the prime focalizer strongly contrasts with his position at the opening of the narrative, which celebrates more than anything his role as subject, as the master of heroic vision (I 1–7):21

[He who saw the Deep, the] foundation of the country,
[who knew . . . ,] was wise in everything!

[Gilgamesh, who] saw the Deep, the foundation of the country,
[who] knew [. . . ,] was wise in everything!

[. . .] . . . equally [. . . ,]
he [learnt] the totality of wisdom about everything.
He saw the secret and uncovered the hidden.

The One Who Saw has now become the One Who is Seen and, even more tellingly, the one seen not as the acme of heroism or the standard of masculine beauty, but rather the one who is radically and even repellently other, both alien and alienating.22 It is chiefly his alterity, the degree to which he obviously has no place beside Siduri and in the company of Uta-napishtim, despite the strength of his desire to be rid of his mortality, that is the focus of his adventures in these final scenes. No longer the confident hero and arrogant king, the builder of walls and tamer of wastelands, Gilgamesh is now an intruder in a strange world, just as Enkidu too once was: Both of them “savage,” potentially violent, ignorant, and vulnerable.23 The threat of battery he utters against Siduri (X 15–22) he soon afterwards carries out against the Stone Ones, whoever or whatever they are,24 smashing them in fury and thereby stupidly depriving himself of the safest means of passage across the Waters of Death (X 92–108).

Once arrived on the opposite shore, he fails the simple test of vigilance he is given the very moment it begins (XI 210f.), like a folktale buffoon,25 and the plant of rejuvenation too will later elude his grasp (XI 303–7), leaving him only with tears and useless lament (XI 308–14). Gilgamesh is clearly an interloper in this world; he is a clumsy and even pitiful

23. In Enkidu’s case, most of the true violence actually seems to be a consequence of his acculturation (cf. II 60, 111–15; V 179–85 ~ 238–42; VI 154–57), though from the trapper’s perspective (cf. I 150–60) he is clearly perceived as a threat. Walls 2001: 18f. remarks: “The description of Enkidu ‘eating grass with the gazelles’ and ‘enjoying the eaters with the herds’ (I 93, 95) suggests a peaceful and idyllic existence among the animals, but Enkidu is really a dangerous predator (*etla saggasa*; I 162), an experienced fighter (III 8), and a threat to even the lions of the wild (II 207). The goddess Aruru creates his body . . . to be a wild man (*lullu*) and a warrior (*quradu*), with a dash of the war god in his nature (*kisir Ninurta*) (I 86–87).”
25. As a folkloric element, the motif of failure to perform the simplest task, Gilgamesh’s immediate lapse into sleep resembles Enkidu stumped by what to do with bread and ale (II 44–46, P 90f.). Both are strangers in strange lands, and for both the nature of the “test”—implicit in one case, explicit in the other—is figurative of the transformation they will (successfully or unsuccessfully) undergo. On sleep as a metonym for the death Gilgamesh vainly hopes to overcome, see, e.g., Jacobsen 1976: 217.
beast. The homology between Gilgamesh among the immortals and prelapsarian Enkidu on the threshold of human culture is a strong one in the narrative. A simple but compelling analogy holds: As was wild man to trapper, so is Gilgamesh to deity; the ontological distance between the terms in each pair is measured by the shock and revulsion caused when beast and hero are the focalized objects of another’s view.

The representation of Gilgamesh as a desperate, dangerous creature is thus the effect of a tactic of focalization; it is conditioned mainly by the narrative construction of a series of gazes that make him their object. These are gazes diametrically unlike the ones that earlier construed him as a paragon of kingship (I 29–62), as an alpha-male conspicuous in strength, grace, and beauty (I 234–39), and as the embodiment of the deeply erotic appeal or *kužbu* that drew down Ishtar’s longing eye on him (VI 1–9). Here instead he is seen, by Siduri, Ur-Shanabi, Uta-napishtim, Uta-napishtim’s wife, as much if not more than he actively sees others, and the repetition of the formulaic litany of questions (X 40–45 ~ 115–18 ~ 213–18) adverting to his face and comportment by each who beholds him, as well as to the disfigurement of his body by matted hair (cf. I 105) and dirty hides (XI 250–58 ~ 263–70), only emphasizes his alterity. He is not quite the same species, and inspires in them a mixture of piety, fear, and disgust.

In the eyes of Siduri and Uta-napishtim, this strange intruder, a jarring *bricolage* of pelt, divine flesh, and human despair, even verges on the monstrous. His narcissistic grief has disfigured him far more than the travails of his long journey, the sleeplessness, hunger, and the burning by sun and frost. “His face was like [one who has travelled] distant [roads]” (X 9 ~ I 121). Like the trapper before him, Gilgamesh has seen something that transfigures him into an emblem of grief, an icon or planned likeness, and also a cautionary sight for all others to see. Similarly, for Gilgamesh too the face is a transparent medium to what lies beneath; it is at one and the same time *un visage médusé*, a frozen expression (I 117; Bottéro 1992: 70), and also a kind of mirror of the heart.

The hollow cheeks and sunken countenance, the wasted features are outward signs of the sorrow within, indices of the foreknowledge of death, that “woe in the vitals” (Foster 2001: 74), that sits uneasily within his godlike flesh and underneath the lion’s filthy hide. Death is what he has seen—Enkidu’s death, and hence his own—and his malaise over that sight is precisely what marks him as an unwelcome alien among the serene population at the ends of the earth.

In the trapper’s case, the trajectory of his gaze was first promised but then withdrawn and replaced instead by the sight of his estranged look in response to what he saw across the water-hole that day. This reflexive movement (as I have suggested) might be understood as

28. See Walls 2001: 69f. on the contrast between how Gilgamesh looks to others before and after Enkidu’s death. He compares the desirous gaze of Ishtar in Tablet VI with Siduri’s opposite reaction to the sight of him, and remarks: “While the beauty of Gilgamesh’s body attracts the immortal gaze of Ishtar and kindles her desire for him in Tablet VI, Siduri’s gaze upon his haggard form arouses within her only fear and revulsion . . . Looking through the eyes of Siduri and Utnapishtim, then, the epic replaces the erotic gaze of Tablets I–VI with the vision of Gilgamesh’s repulsive appearance.” On the distressed reaction of others to both Enkidu and Gilgamesh, see Anderson 1991: 77.
30. It is true that both trapper and Gilgamesh have “sorrow in the heart”; this line indeed seems to belong together with “his face was like [one who has travelled] distant [roads]” (I 120f. ~ X 8f., 42f., 49f., 115f., 122f., 215f., 222f.), thus giving rise to a formulaic couplet that associates grief and existential anguish, not simply physical exhaustion, with long travel. Whereas the trapper’s inner life is accessible to us through the view provided by the extradiegetic narrator, however, in the case of Gilgamesh all the *embedded* characters he meets in Tablets IX and X directly see what lies within him.
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A kind of prophylaxis, namely as a narrative device disguised as a way of protecting us from the naked sight of primal man, as if it were somehow possible to seem him immediately and unfiltered by literary tropes, as the trapper presumably did. What Gilgamesh has seen, on the other hand, though now likewise reflected in his looks, nonetheless stays fully within narrative sight during the final episodes of the story. There is little if any disguise here. Everyone—Siduri, Ur-Shanabi, Uta-napishtim, the audience, and most of all Gilgamesh—can see it very clearly: It is death.

The death of Enkidu, it is worth recalling, was initially recounted in small part from the detached and extradiegetic standpoint of the narrator (cf. VII 254–67), but for the most part in the form of an intricate web of embedded focalizations by Enkidu and Gilgamesh, alternately, all weaving almost liturgically in and out of dreams, wakefulness, delusion, and epiphany. On several occasions in Tablet X, that death is retold and therefore also refocalized by Gilgamesh himself, in the formula that constructs his reply to those equally formulaic questions about the devastation others see in his face. Gilgamesh, here both focalizer and narrator, openly tells what he himself has seen (X 57–60 ~ 134–37 ~ 234–37):

“[the doom of mankind overtook Enkidu,]
[for six days and seven nights I wept over him,]
[I did not give him up for burial,]
[until a maggot fell from his nostril.]”

The sight of that body infested with maggots, the flesh of Enkidu turned into worms’ meat and clay (X 68f. ~ 145f. ~ 245f.), has become a fixation for Gilgamesh, a nightmare image as it were etched permanently on his retina. This points to another shift in the interplay of seeing and being seen. Here Gilgamesh as The One Who Sees (cf. I 1f.) has not only become instead The One Who Is Seen—the object exposed to the superior and coolly sympathetic gaze of Siduri and Uta-napishtim—but also and more critically The One Who Is Bound By What He Has Seen. His focus is fixated. At one time long ago the masterful subject of vision, he is now controlled by his object; the focalizer has come to be dominated by the focalized. Death fills the entire field of his sight, afflicting him with a kind of existential blindness, just as it fills his heart with the inconsolable grief that initially makes him deaf to Siduri’s measured counsel. The expression on his face, “like [one who has travelled] distant [roads],” is that of despair and desolation in the sight of his own death.

There is perhaps even a subtle switch to be noted here in the sense of the analogy that underlies that formula. In the trapper’s case, I have suggested that the reference of the simile “his face was like [one who has travelled] distant [roads]” was more than likely to the traveller come home physically altered by what he has seen abroad, as well as by the vastness of space and the exhausting length of the journey undertaken there and back. The mere sight of the natural monster Enkidu—once, twice, three times at the water-hole—transfigures a previously familiar face into an image of despondency. When the same formula is predicated

31. The narratological texture of Tablet VII is the focus of a forthcoming study.
33. See Jacobsen 1976: 217: “When he loses his friend, Gilgamesh for the first time comprehends death in all its stark reality. And with that new comprehension comes the realization that eventually he himself will die. With that all his previous values collapse: an enduring name and immortal fame suddenly mean nothing to him anymore. Dread, inconquerable fear of death holds him in its grip; he is obsessed with its terror and the desirability, nay, the necessity of living forever. Real immortality—an impossible goal—is the only thing Gilgamesh can now see.”
34. Her response is excised from the SV version. See Abusch 1993a and 1993b on the lament of Gilgamesh and the nature of Siduri’s response in the OB version of the story.
of Gilgamesh in Table X, however, the different setting and situation of the episode evoke for it a perceptibly different connotation. What in the trapper’s case was figurative is in his instead quite literal: Gilgamesh the distraught hero and roving savage has indeed “[travelled] distant [roads]” to arrive now at the very edge of the known world, the threshold between human and divine space on earth.

Thanks to the shift in focalization, the traveller himself is now the one who is foreign, not the returning son but on the contrary the one who arrives for the first time in a remote and possibly inhospitable new land. There, in the penetrating gaze of all who see him, his appearance is rather an index of the fact that he is indeed a stranger, displaced and disturbing and “[imbued with] menace” (X 6).\(^{35}\) Unlike the trapper from the wilderness, the hero Gilgamesh has not returned to his own kin, as he himself perhaps would hope, shocked and tired and visibly estranged by his long trek through this world, but rather (and much more like Enkidu) he is himself the strange one stumbling into a land that can never really be his home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


35. Note George’s alternate translation (1999: 76) of X 6 as “fearful [to look on],” along with Anderson 1991: 77.


