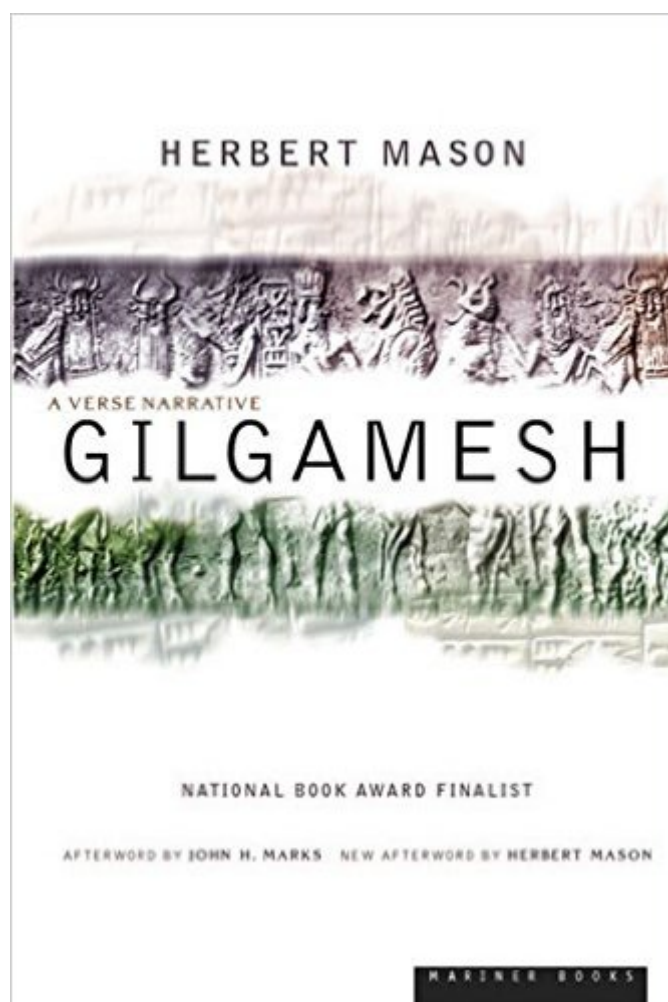


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Gilgamesh: A Verse Narrative



Synopsis

Herbert Mason's best-selling *Gilgamesh* is the most widely read and enduring interpretation of this ancient Babylonian epic. One of the oldest and most universal stories known in literature, the epic of *Gilgamesh* presents the grand, timeless themes of love and death, loss and reparations within the stirring tale of a hero-king and his doomed friend. A finalist for the National Book Award, Mason's retelling is at once a triumph of scholarship, a masterpiece of style, and a labor of love that grew out of the poet's long affinity with the original.

Book Information

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books; 1 edition (July 8, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0618275649

ISBN-13: 978-0618275649

Product Dimensions: 0.2 x 5.5 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (54 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #29,336 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #41 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Themes & Styles > Epic](#) #43 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Ancient, Classical & Medieval > Ancient & Classical](#) #118 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > United States](#)

Customer Reviews

The well meaning Mr. Mason does not represent the Epic of *Gilgamesh* well in his verse narrative. In fact, it is not a translation of the Epic, rather has he cooked up his own version of somebody else's translation. He did this in times when few knew much about *Gilgamesh*, and made many novices believe it was the Epic. I have even heard of a small country where the most prominent philosopher translated Mason's narrative into the native language. The literature professor entered it into the curriculum for early literature and everyone thought they were reading the Epic of *Gilgamesh*. Mason's verse narrative is strikingly purged of place and time specific references. In his hands this complex monument of Babylonian literature has become just "an old story... that can still be told" about friendship, loss and human mortality. In Mason's popular retelling, the character *Gilgamesh* has been reduced to a sentimental simpleton, who cannot deal with the facts of life. Such a retelling can be recommended for children, but it is too full of anachronistic references to

"thoughts" (unheard of in early texts) and other modern phenomena to deserve the attention of grown-ups. From Mr. Mason's recreation of the poem alone it would seem unlikely that the Epic of Gilgamesh had held the fascination of generations of writers and scholars, ever since it was rediscovered in the 19th century. One former reviewer states: "If this wonderful epic were familiar to everyone in our culture, as it was to the Babylonians who made it their national epic back in the third millenium B.C., we would be the richer for having a wealth of images to sustain us as we encounter our tragedies and walk through our dark valleys.

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