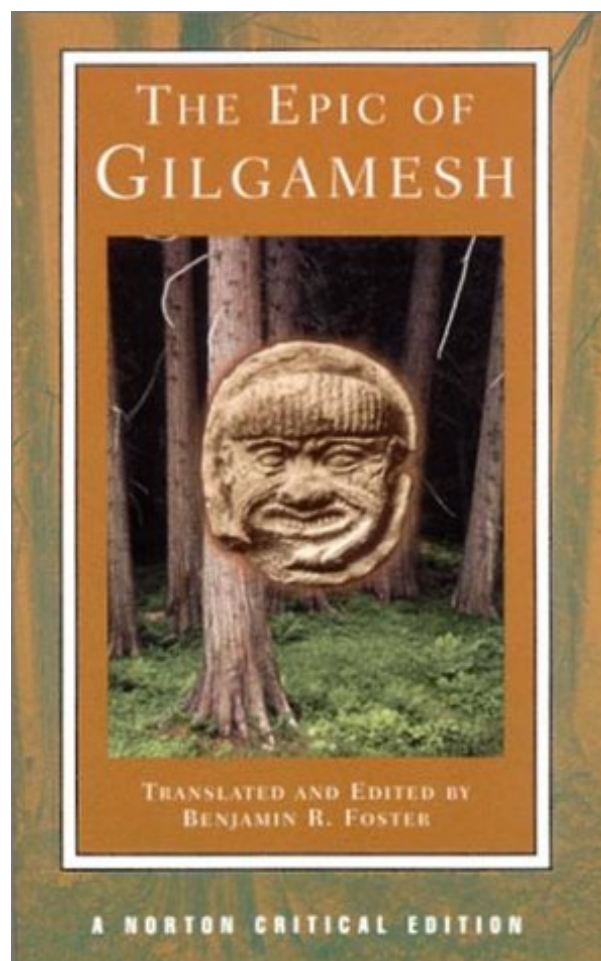
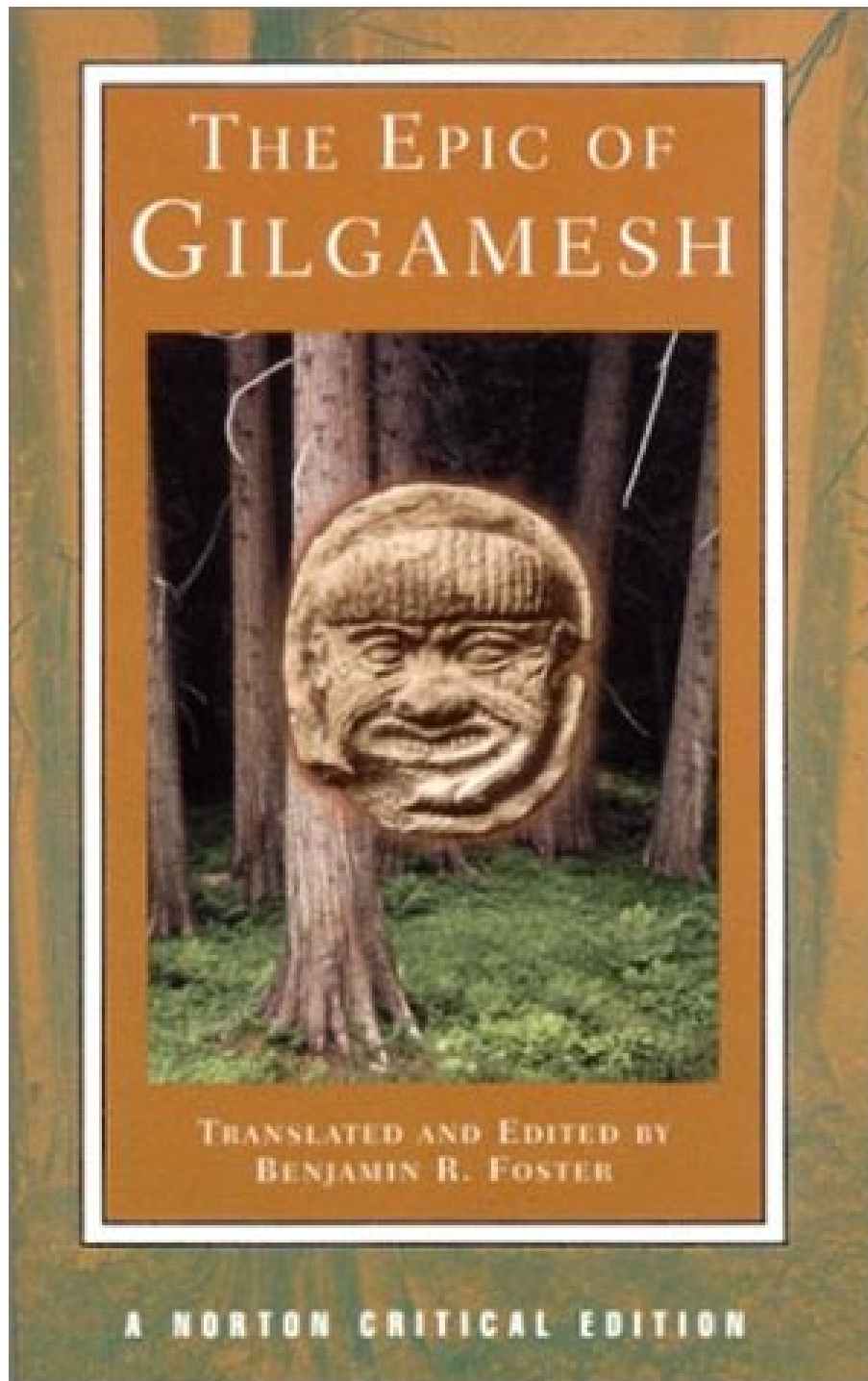


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- Sales Rank: #31936 in Books
- Brand: Foster, Benjamin R. (EDT)/ Foster, Benjamin R./ Frayne, Douglas (EDT)/ Beckman, Gary M. (EDT)
- Published on: 2001-04-23
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.40" h x .60" w x 5.10" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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An excellent tool for understanding the ancient epic

By Scott Richardson

Norton Critical Editions are known for providing authoritative texts or notable translations of important texts, and their edition of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is no exception. The translation is easy to read without being simplistic, and is heavily (and helpfully) notated.

Where this edition really shines, though, is in providing a context for the work, not only in providing a variety of other Gilgamesh poems and critical interpretations, but in the excellent introduction on how to read the work. The introduction answers questions readers may have about the historical basis for the character of Gilgamesh, the history of the text itself, and provides general information on its style (such as why it continually repeats itself).

This version also includes a number of additional Gilgamesh stories from several different cultures, many of which are close parallels to the epic itself. Perhaps the most interesting (and certainly the weirdest) of these is Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld, in which Gilgamesh loses his prized ball-and-stick game and Enkidu goes down to the Netherworld to get it.

If you're looking to get the most out of your Gilgamesh experience and understand the epic in a larger context, this edition is definitely for you.

51 of 57 people found the following review helpful.

Scholarly, wonderful, and unreadable for the lay person

By A Customer

This edition is perfect for teachers, serious students, and advanced courses. It is fantastic and for the person who wants the best scholarship, this is the place to go. But it is not for the person who simply wants to enjoy the tale or for introductory courses. I would suggest using this book as a resource along with one of the more readable prose versions.

42 of 47 people found the following review helpful.

New Translation

By Dave\_42

The Norton Critical Edition of "The Epic of Gilgamesh" is a fairly recent translation of what is currently the oldest known epic. The epic was translated by Benjamin R. Foster. The book also includes "The Sumerian Gilgamesh Poems", translated by Douglas Frayne, and "The Hittite Gilgamesh", translated by Gary Beckman. In addition, there is "The Gilgamesh Letter", several essays discussing the epic, and an Introduction section which helps those who are new to the Epic with their first reading. The translation uses the "standard version" associated with Sin-leqe-unninni as its base, and supplements it with parts from other versions where there are gaps. There are also comments in the text to help the reader follow the passages easier.

An area of weakness of this book was in the area of editorial comments. For example, Mr. Foster states in the introduction:

"There is no evidence that The Epic of Gilgamesh began as an oral narrative performed by bards or reciters and coalesced into a written text only later. In fact, the poem as we now have it shows many signs of having been a formal, written, literary work composed and perhaps performed for well-educated people, especially

scholars and members of a royal court."

This is in sharp contrast with other opinions which I have read regarding the origins of the Epic. While it may be that there is no conclusive proof one way or another, there clearly is some evidence to support the theory that it did begin as an oral narrative, just as there is evidence that it may not have. If Mr. Foster completely disregards the evidence on the other side of the argument, then one is left to wonder if there are other "facts" provided by the editor that are equally suspect. When comparing this translation to those by Alexander Heidel and Stephanie Dalley, one can see significant differences at the start of the epic where the other editors use as evidence which suggests that this was an oral narrative originally. Mr. Foster's translation though is worded in a way that does not suggest an oral origin.

On the whole, this was a very readable translation of the Epic. The supplementary material included is also very good. While I may disagree with some of the editor's opinions about the history of the work and the way he presents the evidence, this is still a good choice to read.

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