The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the oldest epics in the world (Mark). The oldest written version was written a little over 4700 years ago and originates from ancient Mesopotamia where the epic spread across world (Norton 33). The epic disappeared almost completely, but was rediscovered in the 1850s and included into the canon of world literature where, once again, it spread worldwide and was translated into different languages, spanning various cultures and mediums (Norton 37). Much like other epics, such as Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, Gilgamesh has oral roots and was later transcribed into the written word (Mark). The Epic of Gilgamesh has also been translated into various art forms throughout history to include modern-day film, with the Toy Story series being at the forefront, even if Gilgamesh is not a recognized source for the films’ story.

At first glance, it appears that none of the Toy Story movies could possibly be, in any way, related to The Epic of Gilgamesh. After all, the Toy Story trilogy is made for children (Toy Story). They are films about the lives of toys, with a particular focus on Cowboy Woody and Space Ranger Buzz Lightyear, who, in the first installment, fight over the status of being Andy’s favorite toy. Eventually, through strenuous circumstances, the two toys overcome their differences and develop a lifelong bond. Together they go on to defeat Sid, the Destroyer of
Toys. It is through Woody and Buzz’s relationship, from beginning to end, that the first steps to establishing the *Toy Story* trilogy as a modern day translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* begins.

As a pair, Woody and Buzz mirror Gilgamesh and his friend, Enkidu, respectively. Gilgamesh is an arrogant and oppressive king who terrorizes his citizens to the point that the gods feel the need to intervene by creating Enkidu, his equal, to humble him. Woody, who, although not oppressive, is an arrogant leader and is dismissive of the other toys. This can be seen during Andy’s birthday party when all the other toys in the room are completely and utterly panicked about being replaced, and Woody, intending to calm them down says, “I’m not worried. You shouldn’t be worried” (Whedon). This has no effect whatsoever on the toys and solicits a reaction from Mr. Potato Head, “Of course Woody ain’t worried! He’s been Andy’s favorite since kindergarten!” (Whedon). This is indicative of just how oblivious Woody is to other toys’ plight and how his telling them not to worry is inconsiderate and arrogant. Buzz was not sent from the gods like Enkidu. Although Buzz is a Space Ranger, it can be said that he did descend from the heavens, and he does knock Woody down from his pedestal by, temporarily, taking Woody’s place as Andy’s favorite toy.

Upon meeting each other there is animosity. In *Gilgamesh*: “Gilgamesh and Enkidu grappled each other, / Holding fast like wrestlers” (Foster 47). There is no clear winner to the fight. Thereafter, “they kissed each other and made friends” (Foster 47). In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, this meeting takes place over a single stanza. In *Toy Story*, Woody and Buzz compete for Andy over the better half of the movie and it is not until Buzz comes to the realization that he is a toy, for he is completely unaware of this fact, and goes into a deep depression, that he and Woody’s friendship truly begins. The battle between Woody and Buzz begins when Woody tries to knock Buzz behind Andy’s desk, so that Andy will take Woody to
Pizza Planet with him instead of Buzz. Unfortunately, he ends up knocking Buzz out of the window and into the bushes that line the house. Andy does take Woody to Pizza Planet although it is clear, from his disappointed expression, tone and body language, that he wanted to take Buzz. Just before Andy and his Mom leave for Pizza Planet, Buzz comes out of the bushes and climbs aboard the van, and when they stop for gas he confronts Woody. A fight ensues that knocks the two toys outside of the van and, they are so preoccupied with themselves, that they are left behind. At this point, it would make sense for the duo to “kiss and [make] friends,” but the two are bent on not getting along (Foster 47). They do end up at Pizza Planet, and almost make it back to Andy, but, instead, are taken home by Sid. The child feared by toys because of his destructive tendencies. It is at Sid’s house that Woody and Buzz’s friendship begins.

When Woody and Buzz arrive at Sid’s house, they are still at odds with each other. It is not until Buzz has his earth shattering realization and Woody attempts to get Buzz out of his depression, that their animosity melts away. Buzz’s revelation begins when he and Woody make their first attempt at an escape and grab the attention of Sid’s dog, Scud. In an effort to hide, they separate. Woody ends up in a storage closet and Buzz enters a room with Sid’s sleeping dad and a TV. Once the coast is clear Buzz goes to exit the room when, from the TV, he hears “Calling Buzz Lightyear!! Come in Buzz Lightyear!! This is Star Command. Buzz Lightyear! Do you read me?!” (Whedon). Immediately Buzz flips up his wrist communicator to respond, but is interrupted by the child in the commercial, “Buzz Lightyear responding! Read you loud and clear!” (Whedon). Buzz looks up at the TV and watches the commercial confused. He sees children playing with other Buzz toys and, as the announcer goes through every feature, Buzz compares it to himself: “Pulsating laserlight!...Multi-phrase voice simulator…And best of all…To infinity and Beyond!” (Whedon). Included at the end of the commercial, is a shot of a store
aisle filled with boxes upon boxes of Buzzes and in small print: NOT A FLYING TOY
(Whedon). Buzz is in disbelief and, as a final reinforcement of his harsh new reality, he opens his wrist communicator far enough to see the “Made in Taiwan” logo. Although he has not seen it with understanding, it had been there the whole time.

Buzz walks dejectedly out of the room still trying to process the fact that he is a toy. He approaches the stairs in Sid’s house and sees an open window. Within his mind he hears Woody’s voice, “You are a toy! You can’t fly!” (Whedon) Poor Buzz hangs his head, defeated, but then, with determination in his eyes he climbs up onto the rail of the staircase. Still refusing to believe what he just saw on the television set he jumps, hoping to fly out the window across the way, but as the announcer said he is “not a flying toy.” He falls down the stairs in a slow and dramatic motion. The window is getting farther and farther way. By the time he reaches the bottom of the stairs, one of his arms detaches, landing right next to him, and he lays there, completely, and utterly, defeated. This is reminiscent of Enkidu. Upon dreaming that the gods have decided that he will die, “Enkidu was sick at heart, / He lay there lonely... The day he had the dream, his strength ran out” (Foster 69, 70) Unlike Enkidu though, Buzz has no one to cry out to or console him, and since he is a toy, he cannot actually die. He is left having to deal with his new life.

After Buzz’s failed attempt to fly, he is picked up by Sid’s sister Hannah, and taken to her room. At his point, Woody has yet to come out of the storage closet, but, when he does, he finds Buzz “dressed up in a frilly apron and fashionable party hat” (Whedon) and having a tea party. Hannah has dubbed him Mrs. Nesbit. Woody draws Hannah away. As he approaches and asks if he is okay, he is startled by Buzz’s sudden and dramatic reaction: “Gone! It’s all gone! All of it’s gone. Bye-bye! Woo-hoo! See ya!” (Whedon). Woody, confused about Buzz’s
detached arm, keeps trying to figure out what happens, but Buzz is oblivious and continues on with his break down: “One minute you’re defending the whole galaxy and suddenly you find yourself suckin’ down Darjeeling with Marie Antoinette and her little sisters.” Buzz is behaving much like Enkidu did when he awoke from his prophetic dream. Enkidu wakes up and begins cursing at the door of his bedroom. It had been made from a cedar tree cut down after he and Gilgamesh killed Humbaba, the fearsome guardian of the cedar forest. He then proceeds to curse the hunter that found him in the steppe, before he was civilized. Shortly thereafter he curses Shamhat, the harlot, responsible for taking his innocence. Upon hearing his curse on Shamhat, Shamash, god of the sun and oracles, calms Enkidu and convinces him to take back his curse on Shamhat and, instead, blesses her. Woody on the other hand calms Buzz down by slapping the Space Ranger with his detached arm. This only works temporarily, but it does cause Buzz to apologize for his ludicrous behavior, and explain that he is depressed. He is still convinced that he is just a phony and that all his life has been wasted.

Woody manages to get Buzz back to Sid’s room for their second escape attempt. Unfortunately, this fails as well. While Woody is dealing with the failure, he hears the mutant toys from Sid’s bedroom, and immediately sees them swarm Buzz. Thinking that they were going to eat him, Woody leaps to Buzz’s rescue and “attacks the mob with vengeance” (Whedon). This is Woody’s first selfless act towards Buzz. It is not until they back away from Buzz that Woody realizes they were trying to fix him, not eat him. His anger has subsided, but his relief is short lived. Sid comes into the room. Unfortunately, Buzz was not willing to hide, and Woody had to abandon him to protect himself. In his arms, Sid is carrying a box containing a rocket. He plans to attach the rocket to Woody, but, failing to find him, settles for Buzz. Fortunately, it begins to storm and Buzz’s fate has been delayed. It is after Sid goes to sleep that...
Woody, who at this point is trapped under a milk crate, tries to get Buzz to help him get free, so that they can again try to escape, but Buzz’s depression is too deep. Woody has to inspire Buzz and show him what it really means to be a toy:

Woody: Whoa, hey – wait a minute. Being a toy is a lot better than being a Space Ranger.
Buzz: Yeah, right.
Woody: No, it is. Look, over in that house is a kid who thinks you are the greatest, and it’s not because you’re a Space Ranger, pal, it’s because you’re a TOY! You are his toy.
Buzz: But why would Andy want me?
Woody: Why would Andy want you?! Look at you! You’re Buzz Lightyear. Any other toy would give up his moving parts just to be you. You’ve got wings, you glow in the dark, you talk, your helmet does that – that whoosh thing – you are a COOL toy.

(Whedon)

At this point Woody has his most humbling moment:

Woody: As a matter of fact, you’re too cool. I mean – I mean what chance does a toy like me have against a Buzz Lightyear action figure?...Why would Andy ever want to play with me, when he’s got you? I’m the one that should be strapped to that rocket (Whedon).

Now it is Woody, who has entered a depressed and dejected state. His back is to Buzz. He does not see the change that has come over Buzz, or how Buzz looks at the bottom of his foot where Andy wrote his name. He is delightfully surprised when Buzz begins pushing the toolbox that has trapped Woody under the milk crate. Every bit of animosity has melted away, and they have finally begun to work together.

In *Gilgamesh*, this moment is less dramatic, but speaks to the same volume: “Let the paralysis leave your arm, let weakness quit your knees, / Take my hand, my friend, let us walk
on together!” (Foster 58). Soon after Woody and Buzz defeat Sid, the Destroyer of Toys, who is reminiscent of Humbaba, from Gilgamesh and Enkidu’s first adventure. Together they make it back home to Andy, profoundly changed toys.

While Toy Story deals with the subject of friendship, and what it means to be human, or a toy, Toy Story 2 and 3 deal with mortality. Both are reminiscent of Gilgamesh’s journey to Utanaphistim, the Distant One, the only human to have survived the flood and be given the secret to eternal life. In Toy Story 2, Woody deals with the fact that he is fragile and that Andy is growing up. At the beginning of the movie, Woody’s torn arm becomes a symbol of his physical and emotional fragility. He eventually gets it fixed after being kidnapped by a toy collector who wants to sell him and the rest of his Round Up Gang to a museum. It is while he is with this new cast of characters that Woody begins to wonder whether getting back to Andy is what is best for him. He is faced with choosing a life behind glass, forever admired by children, or a life where Andy will grow up and where his life with him will end. After much turmoil, Woody does choose the life with Andy. He knows that he can’t stop Andy from growing up, but he “wouldn’t miss it for the world” (Stanton).

Toy Story 3 deals with the same subject matter as Toy Story 2, but with respect to all the toys. They face death together, literally. By the end of the movie, Woody, Buzz, Jesse, Bullseye, and several toys from the first film come very close to being incinerated. While facing the flames from the incinerator, they hold hands and accept their fate with dignity, but are, unexpectedly, saved, by “the claw.” Before they come to this though they endure a some hardships, specifically Sunnyside, a preschool where toys are treated like prisoners, by Lotso, the Lots-o-Huggin’ Bear. Unfortunately, none of the toys come to recognize Lotso’s dark side, or that Sunnyside is far worse a place then Andy’s attic, until it is too late. When compared to Gilgamesh, Lotso is very
similar to the scorpion that guards the gateway to the sun’s passage through the mountains and
the sun’s passage is very similar to Sunnyside. In order to reach the Distant One, Gilgamesh
must be allowed to pass. Lotso is the scorpion that must be passed in order to escape Sunnyside.
Gilgamesh has to pass through the tunnel before the sun enters lest he be burned. Sunnyside is
the tunnel that the toys must pass through before they can reach Andy. Ultimately, the toys do
make it back home, and are more than happy to live the rest of their days in Andy’s attic, waiting
for the day he has children of his own. Woody is set to leave for college with Andy, but at the
last moment, he writes Andy a note, telling him to donate them to a little girl just down the road.
Andy does donate them. The toys, after accepting their mortality, do achieve getting played with
by Andy one last time and everlasting life, but only through letting the life they had with Andy
go. This is much like *Gilgamesh*. Only through losing his opportunity to immortality does
Gilgamesh accept his own mortality. It is not until Gilgamesh’s reaches his city walls that he
realizes that he will live on through his achievements.

Even though there are roughly 4700 years between *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Toy
Story* trilogy, they are connected through the themes of friendship, mortality, and learning what it
means to be human, or a toy (Groff). Both were the first of their kind: *Gilgamesh*, the first
known literary work and *Toy Story*, the first fully computer animated film. Although *Gilgamesh,*
has established its universalism, *Toy Story* is well on its way to creating its own legacy. Although
there is a considerable time gap between the two works, the fact that they resemble each other so
much, illustrates that our past is not so far away. No matter the era, we all ask the same
questions, and writers, be they authors, film crews, painters, or the like, will always try to help us
find the answers.
Works Cited


