

# Importance of dreams in the epic of gilgamesh essay



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In the Gilgamesh story, dreams have been given great prominence especially since they play a critical part in explaining the unfolding of events. The two main characters Gilgamesh and Enkidu constantly dream about things and events which contribute positively to their lives as well as help give meaning to the story. In the period of the story, the Mesopotamians held the common belief that dreams were a method of communication between human beings and their ancestors.

In the dream where a meteor dropped from the sky, Gilgamesh's mother, Ninsun, interpreted it as a sign of the arrival of a powerful person who would seek to challenge Gilgamesh's authority (Shin-eqi-Unninni 15). She also said that after Gilgamesh fails to take down the assailant an interpretation arrived at from Gilgamesh's revelation that he " tried to lift it but it proved too heavy.

All the people of Uruk came round to see it" (Shin-eqi-Unninni 15). Ninsun also claimed that they (Gilgamesh and the stranger) would combine forces to become a formidable team which would live up to their greatness. This interpretation came to pass when he (Gilgamesh) meets with Enkidu in the duel at the wedding banquet.

As it happens, the two struggle with each other before they eventually agree to become friends. The importance of the dream in this instance was to prepare Gilgamesh for the event. As far as the development of the plot is concerned, this dream and its subsequent interpretation, help create a sense of anticipation. The reader finds him/herself pushing through the story hoping to find out whether the dream came to be true or not.

Enkidu dreams about his own death in a vision that depicts him in front of a council of gods. In the dream, Enkidu believes that Shamhat is the one responsible for his weakened state but later, at the intervention of Shamash, he is able to see things in a broader perspective and blesses the woman (Shin-eqi-Unninni 26-27).

In line with the dream, Enkidu falls sick for twelve days and eventually passes on, urging Gilgamesh not to forget him. By the time this dream appears in the story, the reader is already aware that it is bound to come true, but one reads on hoping that Enkidu would somehow find a loophole that would take him away from the fate predicted by the dream.

The prophetic dreams that both Gilgamesh and Enkidu have are used to show the weaknesses of man in front of destiny. This is because, even as powerful as the two individuals are, they cannot change tragic events that lay in their life paths. These dreams become some sort of satire as the two individuals have the strength to handle most of life's unexpected challenges but they cannot summon enough authority to handle things that they are sure are coming.

Enkidu tries to find a scapegoat by blaming the lady Shamhat for his own shortcomings in his pre-death premonition (Shin-eqi-Unninni 27). His disappointment at dying a weak man's death is evident from the story and one would be tempted to blame him for not responding to earlier challenges adequately.

Dreams have been used repeatedly in the epic story with an aim of

emphasizing the Mesopotamian cultural and religious beliefs. It is less likely <https://assignbuster.com/importance-of-dreams-in-the-epic-of-gilgamesh-essay/>

that the dreams would have had great significance to individuals from different cultural backgrounds and the reader is also left wondering whether the events in the story would have come out the same way had the interpreters given different explanations. This means that the dreams could also have been used to create some form of rhetorical questioning in the minds of the readers.

Shin-eqi-Unninni. "Gilgamesh". *The Norton Anthology of World Literature, Vol A: Beginnings to A. D. 100*. Eds. Sarah Lawall et al. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 10-41. Print