

# The epic of gilgamesh research paper



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Gilgamesh, the King of Uruk, was a tyrant and a leader who greatly oppressed his charges. He considered himself to be God which led to the fact that he perceived himself much superior to others.

Enkidu, another man who is also depicted in the Epic of Gilgamesh as having a power in terms of how he treated his companions, meets King Gilgamesh in some of the scenes in the epic ensuing their unrivalled friendship later.

The theme of love can be traced in the behavior of these two friends as well.

As a sign of platonic love for his new-found friend, Gilgamesh offers Enkidu a portion of his treasures and shares his power with him. These two themes become very evident and obvious when Enkidu dies.

On realizing that he can never have again his great friend by his side, the king cries in grief and embarks on a journey to achieve his immortality.

The ancient Mesopotamian societies depicted love and power in many areas. Most recorded stories have shown that people in power proclaimed themselves as deities in an attempt to show superiority to others. Another notable attribute of the male rulers is their oppression of women.

Women were usually given the role of doing house chores and making sure that their husbands are attended to. This form of male chauvinism shows similar traits among the rulers of the present day society and those in the Mesopotamian society.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is perhaps one of the oldest epic poems that were ever recorded. It tells the story of Gilgamesh, the King of Uruk, who ruled the empire between 2750 and 2500 BCE.

The epic portrays how Gilgamesh, an arrogant and oppressive leader, met and made friends with a savage called Enkidu who had in turn a tremendous impact on his life.

This paper seeks to discuss how the themes of love and power permeate the poem. It also makes parallels between the Mesopotamian society and the modern one in terms of both themes under discussion.

Love is seen as a major theme in the Epic of Gilgamesh. This theme motivates changes within the characters. An example of such a change is evident in Enkidu who was believed to be an introvert formed from clay and siliva by Aruru.

At first, Enkidu is portrayed as a very wild man who was brought up by animals. He knows very little about other human beings and their way of life. Later on in the poem, he interacts with human beings and starts to get used to the new environment.

There occurs a turning point in Enkidu's life. He drew closer to civilization by interacting with human beings and this climaxed in wrestling match with Gilgamesh.

This friendship with Gilgamesh makes Enkidu shun his wild character and embrace a nobler demeanor (Damrosch & Pike, 2009).

The platonic love visible between these two men also changes Gilgamesh's character from being a dictator and tyrant to the one of a hero and a role model. Gilgamesh slowly shuns away his arrogance and Enkidu is hence able to accomplish the goal he was set out to achieve.

The strong friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu continues to flourish and the king makes Enkidu his constant companion in all his adventures until Enkidu meets his tragic death. This loss instills a tremendous grief in Gilgamesh being the sign of how strong their love was for each other.

He further continues looking for ways of making himself immortal. His efforts are, unfortunately, futile and he resumes his kingship on Earth (Lockard, 2007).

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, there are two kinds of power that can be traced through the poem. One type is the power that is based on culture and knowledge that Gilgamesh represents. The other type of power is the one exhibited by Enkidu.

This is the wild power of the dignified savage (Fox, 2011). When both enter into a discussion on the issue of powers, there seems to develop a paradox. In the earlier stages of the poem, Gilgamesh starts out as the powerful dictator who possesses a great amount of knowledge about everything.

He is the proclaimed lord of wisdom and even seems to know the secrets of life before the Flood. This power makes him a feared ruler, a king full of valor who even slays monsters. He also conquers other kings and takes over their kingdoms making him famous and feared far and wide.

The paradox is seen in the fact that although Gilgamesh claims to be such a powerful and wise ruler, his way of ruling is considered inept and unbecoming.

He mistreats his subjects and his actions as a leader make them feel offended. Since Gilgamesh is partly a God, perhaps his vengeful and lustful demeanor can be attributed to the nature of most of the gods as portrayed in the poem.

The power in the poem is also inherent in the character of Enkidu. Before his interaction with Gilgamesh and the rest of mankind, Enkidu lives alone in a forest and his behavior is similar to his animal counterparts.

Through Enkidu's joint living and socializing with animals, one can regard Enkidu as the one who exercises power since he leads the animals in most of the activities they perform together (Fox, 2011).

An example of his superiority is in the scene when he leads his animals to the watering place. After meeting his loving friend Gilgamesh, Enkidu transmits his power to be a good king's companion.

He accumulates Gilgamesh's treasures and adapts to the king's lifestyle, the one that is very different from the savage life he has used to.

After Enkidu has met his tragic death, there is a paradoxical shift of power as Gilgamesh changes from his arrogant character to the one of a savage.

He does so in an attempt to live like Enkidu in order to gain more knowledge about death trying to acquire immortality (Lockard, 2007).

The aspect of love has been portrayed in most stories that relate to the Mesopotamian society. An example is the story of Inanna, the Sumerian Goddess's love of war and Dumuzi, the mortal shepherd and the king's kin.

The courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi has often been seen as the source of Solomon's love song to Sheba. As Inanna seeks for advice on how she should get ready to tell lies to Dumuzi, she runs to her mother Ningal who anoints her with sacred oil before Dumuzi.

The reason for carrying out such an activity consists in the fact that this oil contains vital elements that cleanse the body. These are air, water, earth and fire.

This shows how the ancient Mesopotamians viewed intimacy being a sacred activity which needed one to cleanse his or her body before engaging in a sexual intercourse.

Power in Mesopotamia was closely related to religion. Most kings in this region were wholly divine with Naram-sin of Akkad being an example. Naram-sin was the first ruler of Mesopotamia to declare his divinity.

He was sure in his popularity truly believing that people of Akkad wanted him to be the god of their city. This period of self-deification by the king of Akkad led to notable changes of religion which saw the proliferation of the cult of the Ishtar, the goddess of war and love.

Ur, the king of the Third Dynasty, is another ruler who declared himself divine with an aim of uniting the empires he has inherited from his father.

Other kings such as Hammurabi of Babylon and Rim-Sin of Larsa seemed to declare themselves as deities in an attempt to consolidate their empires.

Therefore, a conclusion can be reached that most leaders in Mesopotamia made an effort to transform themselves into gods in order to make their empires stronger and appear to be more powerful in the eyes of their charges and those of other kingdoms.

In regards to the way women were generally treated in Mesopotamia, it must be noted that their roles were strictly defined. The only women who acted outside their roles of mothers and wives were either deities of wives or daughters of kings.

From their childhood, women were trained to stick to their traditional roles of being wives and keepers of their houses. As soon as a girl reached puberty, she was considered ready for marriage and a suitor was searched for her.

It was then the obligation of the groom's family to cater for marriage expenses. Once engaged, the woman was no longer considered as part of her father's family but she was now a member of her groom's.

If for any reason the man she was to marry passed away, she would be married off to one of the groom's brothers or any other his relative. This depicts men's power over women and how they were treated as property.

There are various similarities of love and power in the Mesopotamian society as compared to the present day society.

Love in the Mesopotamian between the man and the woman was about deep emotions for each other and engaging in social activities that make their bond stronger.

Romantic love in modern society is similar to that of the Mesopotamian society. In some instances, it is depicted with some eroticism between spouses and at the same time, where the man and the woman strive to obtain the values that enable them to maintain faithfulness in their relationship.

However, the modern society demands couples to exhibit more of eroticism in order to consolidate emotional commitment.

Couples in the present day society need to engage in behaviors that bring excitement in the relationship. This is what Turner (2011) refers to as the ‘commercialization and democratization of love’.

The oppression of women is also common in the modern society as it was in the ancient Mesopotamian. As noted earlier, a female child was trained on how to play her role as the housekeeper and her main purpose was to obey to her husband’s desires and orders.

This is though also evident in the present society. In most capitalist states, women are never given a chance to rule or involve themselves in decision making whether at home or at public meetings.

This situation is also experienced in non-capitalist societies who mostly justify this by patriarchy (Marinetto, 2007). Since most communities view man as the head of the household, the woman should submit to him and be the second in command.

Religions such as Christianity also confirm the belief that the woman should not be given the chance to lead at the expense of a male counterpart.

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In some societies, the oppression of the female is associated with the economy of the country. Marinetto (2007) adds that some systems concentrate on bringing up a healthy and energetic workforce that will help in building the economy.

Since men are considered to be more energetic as compared to their female counterparts, more resources will hence be offered to them as a means of making sure that the country has a strong economy.

Love and power are two themes that permeate the Epic of Gilgamesh. At first, Gilgamesh is a powerful dictator with an oppressive attitude towards his charges.

After meeting Enkidu, he shows unrivalled platonic love for his new friend who helps him get transformed from being a savage who lives with animals to a civilized human being living in the society.

Enkidu also changes the character of Gilgamesh and the king improves on his demeanor of being a tyrant.

The aspect of love and power as portrayed by rulers of ancient societies shows great similarities with the way the rulers of modern societies perceive it.

Men and women in the present day society also strive to make great efforts in maintaining their relationships in an attempt to make their bonds stronger.

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