

The issue of immortality in "the epic of gilgamesh" and the "beowulf"

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



In The Epic of Gilgamesh, the character Gilgamesh exemplifies the value of immortality in the Babylonian culture. Similarly, in Beowulf, Beowulf portrays a different idea regarding immortality and how immortality can be achieved. The only way that Gilgamesh can be able to achieve immortality is through the works of cultural accomplishments. These being things such as what he has built, which will last long after his death. Rather than searching the earth on a journey to find something that will grant immortality, Beowulf attempts great deeds such as performing heroic acts of bravery or displaying exceptional physical ability. By performing these acts, Beowulf receives a generous amount of recognition which will be glorified and remembered in songs and stories long after he is gone. These differences in ideology highlight major variations between Babylonian and Anglo-Saxon cultures and how a hero exemplifies the value of his culture. Gilgamesh and Beowulf are very different heroes from different cultures.

In the beginning of The Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh is a power-hungry and arrogant tyrant. Although he is a hero, which is defined as " a figure in whom the gods take a special interest" Gilgamesh is also very flawed. He abuses his people, beats up men and rapes women. His people can't bare him any longer and pray to the gods for relief. Anu commands the goddess Aruru to create an equal for Gilgamesh: Enkidu. Gilgamesh meets Enkidu before he is about to rape another woman. Enkidu wrestles him to stop him and they quickly become friends. Gilgamesh civilizes Endiku. The author of The Epic of Gilgamesh writes, " But Enkidu knew nothing about these things, so he sat and stared at the cooked food and the beer for a very long time, not knowing what to do. Then Shamhat, the harlot, the temple prostitute, said: ' Enkidu,

this is the food and drink men eat and drink. Eat and drink your fill.' So Enkidu ate his fill of the cooked food, and drank the beer. Seven jugs of the beer and he was suddenly joyful, and sang aloud. Then he washed his hairy body, anointed himself with oil, and dressed his body in new clothes, so that he looked as beautiful as a bridegroom." When the Bull of Heaven attacks Gilgamesh's city of Uruk, he and Enkidu team up to kill it. Not only does this show strength and courage on Gilgamesh's part, but there is also no further mentioning of his abusive behavior now that Enkidu has come into his life. However, the gods kill Enkidu by making him sick as punishment. Gilgamesh mourns his lost friend and admits to himself that he is afraid of death. He then goes on a journey to find immortality.

Beowulf, on the other hand, is much less of a bad role model at the start of Beowulf. " So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness. We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns." This passage is from the first few lines of Beowulf. It is clear that courage is central to the idea of greatness for Beowulf. This ultimate form of greatness is something that Beowulf immediately tries to achieve. What these heroes exemplify about their respective cultures is their different views on immortality. The Babylonians designate a strong emphasis on the importance of culture and civilization over the wild and unknown nature. The outside world is a strange and mysterious place to the Babylonians. This is because they had no way of knowing what was really out in the outside world. This same idea translates into their view and perception of death since it was outside their control. Gilgamesh says, " I am going to die!-am I

not like Enkidu?! Deep sadness penetrates my core, I fear death, and now roam the wilderness-I will set out to the region of Utanapishtim, son of Ubartutu, and will go with utmost dispatch!" This is a perfect instance where he admits his fear of death, which illustrates this central idea in Babylonian culture. However, civilization is something that is controllable and therefore understandable to the Babylonians. Moreover, it is something that they are able to develop which gives them a sense of dominance.

In The Epic of Gilgamesh, there is a authority of culture over the wilds of nature. The building of cultural achievements, which last long after one has deceased, is the most important form of immortality to the Babylonians. It advances their culture and is something that they have physical control over. The idea of the afterlife, as held the Anglo-Saxons, is hard to determine since there is little evidence left. Yet from the hero Beowulf in Beowulf, we know that it differs greatly from the Babylonian culture of The Epic of Gilgamesh. In Beowulf, the idea of lof translates into "glory" or "praise". In Beowulf, "Lof indicates what people say about a person once that person dies." It is very significant to the Anglo-Saxons because it was through the acts of glory and heroic deeds that one would be remembered long after they are death. Unlike the Babylonians who seemed to fear the unknown of death, the Anglo-Saxons seem to fear about being forgotten once they died. This also differs from the Babylonian idea because rather than being remembered through deeds, the Babylonians would be remembered through great cultural works.

Although both heroes in these different cultures seem to differ in the how they obtain immortality, both Babylonian and Anglo-Saxon cultures were

engrossed with the concept of not being forgotten by generations long after they have passed.