

The epic tale of gilgamesh essay sample

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The story of Gilgamesh is a Babylonian epic poem, which is collection of Sumerian legends and poems about the mythological hero-king Gilgamesh, ruler in third Millennium B. C. It is known as the earliest surviving epic poem along with Homer's "Iliad" and Odyssey," Virgils "Aeneid" as well as "Beowulf" and has the staying power to fascinate readers in the 21 Century. Much like "Beowulf" Gilgamesh is about a king whose main goal in his life is to establish his own eternal fame. Gilgamesh is a child of a goddess and priest and we are told how he becomes king. We are told how he is lonely because he has no friends who are worthy of him and he is driving the citizens of Uruk crazy, with his great energy and enthusiasm. The people ask the Gods to send down a companion for their king. The god's listen and tell Gilgamesh, to send a prostitute so he can seduce Enkidu, a wild man who communes with the animals in the forest and acts like them. Enkidu, is considered the "good savage" without any civilization stain. It is strange to think that this story is supposed to be written as an ancient memory of people's life in the pre-civilization times.

The prostitute Gilgamesh, sends to seduce Enkidu succeeds and makes Enkidu fully human which results in the animals rejecting Enkidu. This is a metaphor of the civilization process, which we experienced in a memorial age. In the process Enkidu learns how to drink milk from a jar and not from an animals breast. He learns how to wear clothes, and to sleep on a bed. This is reminiscent of Huckleberry fin, when Huck Fin has to throw away his wild boys ways to Order#31115462 The epic of Gilgamesh Pg. 2 learn to be civilized to live "normally" in this world. Enkidu and Gilgamesh fight showing Gilgamesh his strength and courage, which later make them an inseparable

pair. It becomes apparent at this point of the book that the story is mostly about the deep friendship between the king and wild man. Both live exclusively for one another, without any peers and or equals. It is only after this friendship is formed, is when Gilgamesh feels he should leave a legacy in this world before he dies. This is a humanizing feature in the character of Gilgamesh because he is showing he is fully cognizant of his own morality and future which leads the two friends to depart for the woods; namely current Lebanon (The cedar Forest) where Ancient Mesopotamians got their timber, which is so scarce in Gilgamesh's and Enkidu's country.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu have to kill the giant Humbaba, who is the guardian of the woods, to conquer the woods. Humbaba, is an incarnation of Evil and is on record as the first reference of the Devil in literature. Both men infuriate the gods, except one and one of them must die. This makes Enkidu get sick and die in excruciating agony. This turns out to be devastating for Gilgamesh because it confirms his own inevitable death. Greatly affected by Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh sets out on journey to escape his mortality. Gilgamesh travels to the East, over mountains to the country of "Sun." He tries to cross the Sea and reach the land of Dilmun, which is a preserved Garden of Eden) where Utnapishtim lives. He is the only human to have survived the Flood and was granted immortality from the gods. It is chilling to think, as I write this that this reference to Cataclysm, was written centuries before the bible. Gilgamesh reaches the "garden of Eden," where a young woman vineyard tender lives. She tells Gilgamesh he will never find what he is looking for, because death is inevitable. It is the human's fate, however it has also been attributed to the possibility of human's

happiness. The girl advises Gilgamesh to “ fill your belly with good things.... have fun and rejoice.”

“ Wear clothes, bathe in fresh water, caress your children and embrace and make your woman happy,” for that is the fate of man.” Gilgamesh doesn’t give up and convinces the oarsman to take him to Dilmun. Utnapishtim, is puzzled however receives him and tells him he will be able to live forever, if he can stay awake for six days and seven nights. It turns out Gilgamesh, can not do this and wakes Utnapishtim, to tell him the story of the Flood which is surprisingly similar to that one told later in the Hebrew Genesis. Gilgamesh, makes a final effort by tearing the bottom of the sea the “ plant that gives you your youth back” however later, while he is bathing in a well, a snake steals the plant, changes skin and leaves. Gilgamesh is inconsolable and returns to Uruk to die. The paring of devoted friends is common in other ancient epics, however in Gilgamesh, it is the intensity of the homosocial bond that is rare. Gilgamesh and Enkidu, quest is a search to find their highest purpose in the pursuit of eternal life, which appears because of Gilgamesh relationship with Enkidu. Morality is the timeless overarching theme, which intersects the drive of science, pseudo science, and magic throughout human history.

Most notable of the epic Gilgamesh, is the stylized repetition of phrases. Especially in conversation, between Gilgamesh and Enkidu and from two or more characters one notices a similar sentence changed a little, even at a relatively distance Order#31115462 the epic of Gilgamesh Pg. 4 from the exact text. This demonstrates the oral beginnings of this epic. The repetition

though tiresome after a while, draws the reader into the story. It forces the reader to pay close attention to the significant dialogue as well as the important numbers 7 and 12, which appear constantly in the text with images. Gilgamesh and Enkidu amongst other gods, beasts and natural forces are compelling characters and interesting reading. There are parallels between ancient Mesopotamian epic and Judeo- Christian biblical stories written before it as well as the story of Hercules in Greek mythology. N. K. Sanders's narrative is very detailed giving the history of the region surrounding Uruk.

The history of the epic of Gilgamesh itself, how it is read by others, collected, and is studied today provides excellent background on the complicated mythology of ancient Mesopotamians. The historical and literary importance of this work is just as epic as the poem since its span is a collection of all that is human: Civilization, glory, and the conscious of immortality. The poem is the process of going out of the African plains, and cities in search for supplies and the fear of the beasts of the forests. The story of the Flood confirms the memory of the cosmic catastrophes that are a part of our remote past which have left an indelible mark upon us humans. -Works Cited- The Epic of Gilgamesh by Anonymous: An English version with an introduction by N. K. Sanders; Penguin Classics. Copyright © N. K. Sanders, 1960, 1964, 1972. All rights reserved. This translation first published 1960.