

The epic of gilgamesh analysis essay



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The epic of Gilgamesh is one of the oldest poems written from Mesopotamia, a country that is present day Iraq. It is a story of two legends, Gilgamesh and Enkidu who were the greatest of friends. In the story, Enkidu who was created to be wild is meant to counteract the oppression of King Gilgamesh on the inhabitants of the Uruk territory.

They become legends while working together and the number of dangerous encounters they conquer causes the gods to be unhappy with them.

Together they make a sojourn to the wild mountains of Cedar and concertedly kill Humbaba who was the monster guarding the mountains. The wrath of the gods becomes evident when the two comrades put the Bull of Heaven to death; goddess Ishtar had sent this bull to check the excesses of Gilgamesh. It was an abomination to kill the messenger of the gods.

Displeased by their actions the gods in turn kill Enkidu and this incident marks a turning point in the life of Gilgamesh. The death of his close confidant sends him to embark on a quest to discover immortality. The remaining part of his life, he spends trying to seek the solution to cheat death.

The concept of immortality comes out more clearly when he sets out to meet Utnapishti who is considered an immortal hero but he breaks his heart when he announces that the gods during creation give only death but retain with them eternal life. This ideally ends his perilous search for eternity and indeed justifies the preposition that it would have been difficult for Gilgamesh to change if Enkidu would have remained alive. Enkidu's death therefore changed the life of Gilgamesh.

The entire epic can be rightly divided in two halves, the beginning essentially exploring the exploits of the two legends working together. Heroism is explicated from their conquests of the giant Humbaba and the messenger of the gods (the Bull of Heaven).

Their friendship and togetherness (unity of purpose) is fundamental as they support each other to destroy a common enemy (Humbaba and the Bull). In this excerpt “Hurry up, step up to him, do not let him go. Climb to the woods, do not be afraid.” (Tablet IV, Column V, 43-44). We see how the two collaborate and “They cut off the head of Humbaba” (Sandars, 47).

This death infuriates the gods who now vow to destroy Enkidu. Enkidu finally dies and this marks the turning point in the life of Gilgamesh, he is worried and is forced to change his antics, his lifestyle and convictions, he now realizes that he was mistaken to imagine that he would live forever.

The gods intentionally decide to take away his closest companion in order to warn him that one day soon, he too shall die. Confused and worried by the truth, Gilgamesh is in a state of denial. With the corpse of his colleague before him as per (Tablet VIII, Column II, 15-16) it says, “I touched his heart, it does not beat”

He embarks on a quest to find immortality and reverse death, “me! Will I too not die like Enkidu? Sorrow was come into my belly. I fear death; I roam over the hills. I will seize the road; quickly I will go to the house of Utnapishtiti offspring of Ubaratutu. I approach the entrance of the mountain at night. Lions I see, and am terrified. I lift my head to pray to the mood god sin: For a dream I go to the gods in prayer... preserve me!” (Tablet IX, Column I, 3-12).

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Death is permanently inevitable and man can never attain eternity.

Gilgamesh finally realizes this though late in the epic. A legend previously portrayed as a hero and conqueror of many now cannot conquer immortality, his entire lifestyle changes from a brave and confident warrior to a fearful personality in complete denial of the facts of life.

His initial life of bravery was useless as he finally discovers in the final sections of the text. The response he receives from Utnapishtim deflates his ambition and brings him back to earth. “ Never has a mortal man done that Gilgamesh” (Tablet IX Column III, 8).

The death of his colleague humbles him as he had initially placed himself on the same status with the gods not knowing that he was a mortal man. “ The fate of mankind overtook him... in fear of death I roam the wilderness.... Me shall not lie down like him, never to move?” (Tablet X Column II, 3, 8, 13-14) it finally dawns on him that “ From the beginning, there is no permanence” (Tablet X, Column VII, 32).

In the beginning, the great warrior king Gilgamesh had acquired great amount of wisdom and experience s in combat. In the end however, he is unable to translate his prowess in war and battle to conquer immortality, this indicates a significant shift in his life from a hero to a defeated warrior, it illustrates that however strong, one cannot conquer himself

In the beginning also Gilgamesh was seen as a king who put his subjects under an oppressive regime, that is the reason the gods sent Enkidu to help counter his oppressive regime but instead they collaborate with Enkidu to destroy and kill the messenger of the gods, the gods are unhappy and want

to communicate to him that he cannot conquer immortality; they however do this indirectly by killing Enkidu and this manages to instill fear in his life. Thus his oppressive regime on the outset finally comes to haunt him in his latter years.

He was oppressive to his subjects but now the thought that he too shall finally die oppresses him too and puts him at the same level with the people he ruled. No one is special in life; death is for everyone and makes all people equal, king or servant, warrior or subject.

From the beginning, the warrior king is seen as being adventurous, self righteous and one who is motivated by fame. Had the partnership between him and his comrade Enkidu persisted, he would never have changed his lifestyle and convictions; however the death of his accomplice makes to seriously contemplate his purpose for living.

He begins to ask questions about his own morality, he fails to accept the truth and tries to disapprove it but realizes that his efforts to justify himself are futile, this is what caused the king's wander dangerously in search for morality and personal growth (Sparknotes, 45).

In essence the epic of Gilgamesh emphasizes the significance of a simple life. It is important for one to live within their means without struggling to achieve what is impossible or unachievable. Life itself is limited to mortality and an understanding of this fact shall lead to living it honestly and morally.

It teaches us the importance of humility and demonstrates how difficult it is for one to achieve greatness and fame with humility. Human beings are

encouraged to strike a balance between greatness and humility in as much the two are in opposition to each other. King Gilgamesh by being a great legend in battle lost his human perspective of morality and humility. He was too full of himself and wanted to place himself next to the gods because he had forgotten that he was a mortal being.