

History of the epic of gilgamesh philosophy essay



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Humanization responds to a necessity to complement the extremes that converge in the nature of the human being, by which the process of achieving a balance in life can be realized as these extremes shorten its distance and be able to assimilate and associate within the condition of being human. In the epic of Gilgamesh, this is how this complementarity is set between the relationship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, beings of opposite natures. They will find their human condition under the direct influence that one have over the other. In the vast path they will manage to perform great tasks and adventures, which will further enhance their ties of friendship and loyalty.

On one hand, Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, was shown to be a haughty, tyrant and an arrogant character. He is son of Lugulbanda, king of the first dynasty of Uruk and his mother Ninsun, who was a minor goddess. The gods created him with a perfect body. “ The bigger part of him was made in heaven and the smaller part somewhere on earth.” (Jackson 21)

The almost divine sublimity of Gilgamesh makes him not be considered human, and in his mind he does not consider the idea of death as a real possibility as for the rest of the human beings. What magnifies his tyranny and arrogance makes him be feared among the people of Uruk.

On the other hand, Enkidu, created by Aruru to be the counterpart of Gilgamesh, was born as an animal. He grew up in the woods, raised by nature with a wild personality. He did not know of people and lived with gazelles. “ Enkidu, the boy who walked on mountains, who eats the food of the beasts and, like the beasts, comes down at will to drink from the watery

hole” (Jackson 23). Enkidu was seduced by a prostitute named Shamhat and this being his rite of humanization. “ She let him see what a force a girl can have, and he stayed with her scented bush for seven nights” (Jackson 23). “ The friends he has from on wild will exile him if he presses his person” (Jackson 23). Due to this fact, Enkidu starts to build awareness and reason, so he finally acquires the courage to go in search of Gilgamesh. The prostitute said to him “ Please come with me and be my love at the immaculate domicile” “ and there we will see Gilgamesh, the powerful” (Jackson 24).

The closer these poles, the greater the possibility is of creating a balance between them. “ I pray for fortune and for fate to send me such a one that I may have a friend who’s as kind and patient as a brother.”(Jackson 26). He manages to lose his arrogance and a process of humanization begins that makes him leave behind his tyranny. That is why Gilgamesh forges ties of friendship with Enkidu. “ Enkidu and Gilgamesh joined in sacred friendship and sealed their solemn bond with a noble kiss.” (Jackson 28).

Both showing different types of forces complement what they represent and go humanizing constantly to each other. Enkidu worries about how he will die; being as a wild animal when raised in the woods he never had thought about the real meaning that death could have. Moreover, for Gilgamesh, the death of his friend Enkidu marks a turning point in his life. From there on, he achieved assuming his human condition, and therefore mortal.

Two systems can be found between the world that is ours, imperfect, and the divine world. The imperfect world is the world of Gilgamesh in which there is

suffering. The Divine world where Enkidu comes from is a world where there is no suffering, where there is immortality. The story is based on tragedy as the two protagonists break the rules established by the gods.

Aristotle stated that the person who does not dwell within the human limits is either a beast or a God. He defined the limits of the human field with divinity in one end and animal nature in the other. The Gods differ from humans by their immortality, for these beings, death is something impossible. On the other hand, the animals lack the awareness of death and it is something unthinkable. Against these impossible and unthinkable aspects man is aware of his death. This awareness is what marks the limit of the human, the divine and the animal. Taking it to the case of Gilgamesh, believed that being a demigod he was immortal. For him it was impossible, but to witness the death of his friend Enkidu. He realizes death and led him to consider the subject of death and above all to fear it. For Enkidu, being in a primitive and animal state he was not aware of death. His state of irrationality was not able to understand that one day he will die.

The death of Enkidu is the destination to which he must return, because he is the god of the underworld. His destiny was to return to the chaos. On the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh does not support the idea of being without his beloved friend and much less the idea of dying, but failing in his attempts to attain immortality, accepts resigned and becomes a wise man and returned to his life of ruling in Uruk.

Gilgamesh undertake a tireless search to achieve immortality; in the same way as other mortal have done it, the distant Utnapishtim found it through

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the gods. “ I’ve come to ask directions to Utnapishtim, who lives so free beyond death’s deep, deep lake. Where can he be?”(Jackson 52). During his voyage, disappointment and discouragement take over him and makes him a man consumed by sadness. “ God, has your heart forgotten me?” (Jackson 61).

The characters are relatively free because when they go to some of their adventures, specifically when hunting Humbaba, is it totally their decision to let the monster live or kill him. The uncertainty and fear they had to face when fighting Humbaba against his strength and armor. Even with the protection of the god Shamash, weapons, intelligence and physical power there was no guarantee that they came out victorious in the battle. “ Though Shamash intervened for us, saying we had slain Humbaba and the bull with his consent” (Jackson 39). At the end when the snake steals the plant of youth, it was not a plan of the gods but simply an event of bad fortune.

Gilgamesh is the representation of the essence of the man, since it has strengths, fears, ambitions and flaws that every human being has. During the story, powerful emotions, such as love that Gilgamesh and Enkidu felt in their friendship, the pain of a loss in the hands of death, and the revenge of the gods to see the glorious tasks of the two friends. “ I greatly love my friend who was always there for me. I loved Enkidu who was always there for me.”(Jackson 50) The desperation of Gilgamesh to reach immortality, which for him was something unattainable, and the fear of death can also be noticed. Finally the comfort that feels Gilgamesh arriving at his beloved city understanding the issues that have been big concerns in the history of

human evolution, these being the meaning of life, the fear of death, and the search for immortality.

The instincts of Gilgamesh and Enkidu lead us to a state of balance between the natural and the divine. This state can be found between the supreme and the animal and every human being has it. Gilgamesh lowers his attitudes of demigod and tyrant, becoming a being fearful, passionate, and filled with human feelings. Furthermore, Enkidu goes from an irrational position to a rational and emotional one. The two characters need each other, because they would never have reached the stage of humanization without the complementation of both.