

Fatalism in gilgamesh and sophocles essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Two stories that come out of ancient civilizations include Sophocles' *Antigone* and the Epic of Gilgamesh. *Antigone* is a Verse Narrative, edited by Herbert Manson. These two books contain ruthless and stubborn leaders, Creon and Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh tells the story of the king of Uruk and his quest for immortality. While on this quest, Gilgamesh changes and returns to Uruk as an appreciative and fair king. *Antigone* tells the story of a king named Creon, who clouded by his own power and laws, loses everyone close to him. Ruthless and stubborn tyrants are often changed by their life experiences. Initially, Gilgamesh was viewed as a tyrant by his people. They saw him as a careless and ruthless king. Gilgamesh displayed his tyranny by ". . . demand[ing], from an old birthright, / the privilege of sleeping with their brides before the husbands were permitted" (Manson, 15). Gilgamesh, who considered himself two parts God and one part man, overworked his citizens. Gilgamesh made his people build great walls around his city, but then would let the walls decay. While Gilgamesh was tyrannical, he was also careless. He was unappreciative of the hard work of his people, " and then without an explanation/ let the walls go unattended and decay, / and left his people dreaming of the past/ and longing for a change" (Manson, 16). With no checks and balances, Gilgamesh had no reason to be any different in his approach as a ruler. No one had a say in what Gilgamesh did. Gilgamesh treated his people as a careless tyrannical king; however, he was also stubborn and reckless. Upon becoming equals with Enkidu, Gilgamesh told Enkidu, " we go to kill the evil one, /Humbaba" (Manson, 27). Enkidu was very unsure of this plan. Enkidu attempted to talk Gilgamesh out of it.

All Gilgamesh could think of were the ways to defeat Humbaba. He totally ignored Enkidu's request to not attempt such a foolish challenge.

Gilgamesh's stubbornness paid off, however, as he defeated Humbaba. Once Gilgamesh's mind was set, he would never back away from a challenge.

Gilgamesh was a very careless, reckless and stubborn tyrant. Upon defeating Humbaba, Gilgamesh was faced with a new challenge, to battle the bull of heaven. Gilgamesh was thrown into this battle because he denied the hand in marriage of the city's patroness, Ishtar. Thus, he denied his kingdom the peace she promised, and his stubbornness threw him into the battle.

Gilgamesh's characteristics as a leader were in some ways similar to those of Creon. Antigone placed the divine law of burying her brother, Polynices, above Creon's law that stated he shall not be buried. Antigone, disregarded this law and proceeded to bury her brother, Polynices, against the law of Creon. When Creon's son, Haemon, speaking for the people who feared being labeled a traitor, pleaded with Creon to spare Antigone punishment for burying Polynices, Creon stated, " for, having her caught in the act, alone/ Of the whole city disobeying me/ I will not publicly bely myself/ but kill her" (Sophocles, 25).

Haemon stormed out of Creon's office never to see Creon again. The blind prophet, Teiresias, arrived and advised Creon that the gods did not approve of his actions. Creon did not like his power questioned. He remained steadfast that his law ruled over all. His stubbornness got in the way as he followed through with the execution of Antigone. Even the most ruthless and stubborn tyrants can change as a result of life's journey. Gilgamesh began

his journey in grief and in search of eternal life. He was determined not to suffer the same fate as Enkidu, death!

Gilgamesh sought Utnapishtim and his wife, who were the only humans granted eternal life by the god's. Utnapishtim and his wife were the only ones who survived the great flood. Gilgamesh's journey took him across a mountain and the sea. Battling numerous creatures including his inner thoughts. Gilgamesh stated, " I am so tired, so tired. I have/ Killed bear, hyena, stag, ibex for food/ And clothes. I barely crossed the sea of death" (Mason, 73). Gilgamesh now knew what it was like to struggle. Before this journey, Gilgamesh was unaware of the tiring work without pride that his people faced on a daily basis.

When working so hard on something, people should obtain pride, pride in themselves and pride in their work. When the man in charge showed that he did not care about the work or his people, they lost faith in their leader and in themselves. Gilgamesh's journey restored faith in himself that he could share with his people upon his return home. Gilgamesh felt as though he had failed in his journey when he was awoken from his seven-day slumber. He felt as though he had come to the right place to find eternal life. Utnapishtim advised him that he did not have anything to save Gilgamesh.

Utnapishtim saw a lot of himself in Gilgamesh. Once Utnapishtim's wife made him realize how he had experienced grief in the past, and how it took control of him, Utnapishtim advised Gilgamesh of a special plant in the river. Upon obtaining this plant from the riverbed, Gilgamesh allowed himself some relaxation by a pool, leaving the plant on the ground unguarded. While

Gilgamesh was in the pool, a snake, smelling the plant's aroma, devoured it. Gilgamesh now felt like this entire journey was for nothing. He had no eternal life for himself or for Enkidu.

Upon arriving back in Uruk, Gilgamesh "looked at the walls/ awed at the heights/ His people had achieved/ and for a moment-just a moment-/ All that lay behind him/ Passed from view" (Mason, 92). Gilgamesh realized that upon returning that no one knew his struggle. No one knew that his best friend had died or what had happened in the forest. Upon returning, Gilgamesh was a changed man. Gilgamesh's journey was able to turn him into a more appreciative leader. Similarly, Creon's life experience changed him as well. Creon finally realized his mistakes.

After receiving the warning from the prophet, Teiresias, and the chorus, Creon finally began to listen. Now terrified of his actions and the repercussions, Creon rushed to the tomb where he had sent Antigone to starve to death. "I am thus minded, other than before/ I who did bind her will be there to loose;/ for it misgives me it is best to keep/ the old appointed laws, all our lifelong," (Sophocles, 41) Creon stated. However, he arrived too late. He not only found the body of Antigone but also, his son, Hameon; they had taken their own lives.

Creon was distraught, realizing his own pride and stubbornness had cost him his child. Creon's wife, Eurydice, was so taken aback and upset that she took her life too. Creon realized now that he had lost everything. He left the tomb, a broken man. The order of rule and law that Creon valued so highly remained, but he had angered the Gods. Creon realized that punishment

produced wisdom, " Wisdom first for a man's well-being, / ' Maketh, of all things. Heaven's insistence/ Nothing allows of man's irreverence;/ And great blows great speeches avenging, / Dealt on a boaster, / Teach men wisdom in age, at last" (Sophocles, 52).

This punishment made Creon a better man. Creon realized that losing everything meant he needed to change his ways. While laying down laws and enforcing them was primary, there were circumstances in which the laws might need to be bent or adjusted for specific circumstances. The journeys these two ruthless leaders took in Antigone and the Epic of Gilgamesh changed how they acted and thus how they were viewed by their people. At the beginning, both rulers were considered ruthless and stubborn tyrants. Both experienced life's journey that change them and how others would view them.

At the beginning of the books, both leaders are looked at as ruthless, and tyrannical. Creon was viewed as friendlier to his people while strictly enforcing the laws. Gilgamesh was viewed as a reckless and careless leader, who built great things, but did not maintain them. Challenges through life can either make or break you. Gilgamesh's journey resulted in him becoming more compassionate and respectful. Creon's journey taught him that family should come before everything. So, Gilgamesh and Creon's stories show that life experiences can change one's deeply rooted ways.