

ONLY THE GODS LIVE FOREVER:

The Importance and Themes of the Search for Immortality in the Epic of Gilgamesh

Bachelor's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Gilgamesh-eepos on yli 4000 vuotta vanha aikaisen kirjallisuuden teos, jolla on vieläkin paikka nykymaailmassa. Teosta on tutkittu monella tavalla, joko historialliselta kantilta tai teosta itseään on tutkittu kirjallisuuden työnä. Tästä huolimatta eepoksen mielenkiintoisimmasta ja miuis-tetuimmasta tarinakaaresta ei ole tehty merkittävää tutkimusta.</p> <p>Tässä tutkimuksessa analysoidaan Gilgamesh-eeoksen viimeistä tarinakaarta, jossa päähenkilö Gilgamesh lähtee matkalle etsimään kuolemattomuuden salaisuutta, kun hänen ystävänsä Enkidu kuolee tuskallisesti. Tämä tarinakaari on tärkeä lukuisista syistä. Ensinnäkin, päähenkilö Gilgameshin hahmokehitys on paljon huomattavampi ja suurempi kuin tarinan alkuosissa; röyh-keä ja mahtaileva kuningas kohtaa tekojensa seuraukset, vajoaa epätoivon ja pelon valtaan, ja lopulta, lukuisten vastoinkäymisten, epäonnistumisien ja merkittävien kohtaamisien jälkeen, nousee pelkojensa ylle ja muuttuu nöyräksi, sisäisen rauhan saavuttaneeksi mieheksi.</p> <p>Tarinakaaren merkittävimmät teemat, kuolemattomuuden turhuus ja kuoleman väistämättö-myys, heijastavat eepoksen tarinan aiempia tapahtumia ja luovat tärkeitä viestejä. Utnapishtim, kuolematon mies, jota Gilgamesh etsii, edustaa täydellisesti sitä, kuinka kuolemattomuus loppu-jen loppuksi ryöstää elämästä jännityksen ja ilon ja kuinka lyhytikäiset ihmiset eivät kykene kä-sittämään sen taakkaa. Enkidun kuolema osoittaa, kuinka kuolema tulee väistämättä jokaisen luo eikä sitä voi välttää.</p> <p>Tärkein asia, minkä viimeinen tarinakaari tarjoaa koko narratiiville, on Gilgameshin ongelmien ja kamppailujen inhimillisyys. Suuri koskematon kuningas laskeutuu ihmisen tasolle ja kamppailee oman kuolemanpelkonsa, ystävänsä kuoleman aiheuttaman surun ja omien tekojensa seu-rausten kanssa. Nämä asiat tekevät Gilgameshin hahmosta ja hänen kamppailustaan inhimilli-sen, mikä tekee tarinan viesteistä opetuksia, johon moni voi samaistua.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a work of literature that has survived the test of time. It is one of the first major works of literature in the world, starting off as separate poems revolving around the same protagonist before being gathered into one unified epic. Despite being over 4000 years old, the Epic, depicting the adventures of the king of the city state of Uruk are being read, studied and translated even to this day. However, the adventure Gilgamesh is most remembered by is his quest to discover the secret of immortality and eternal youth. This part of the Epic is the part of the story most people remember or even know about it. Our protagonist, Gilgamesh, has more than anything been remembered as the man who wanted to break the limits of his human self and gain something extraordinary. Thus, there must be something extraordinary about this story arc itself, and that is what I wish to explore in the present study.

The Epic has been studied before from a variety of perspectives in the past. While most studies have been about the historical aspects of the Epic, some have analyzed the Epic as just another work of literature. However, there have been no significant studies focusing solely on the importance of the latter story arc of the Epic itself. This is interesting, because in my opinion, the story arc about the protagonist's journey to attain immortality, which is also his last adventure in the Epic, is a crucial part of the story worth looking into more deeply. On account of that, the research problem of the present study is: what is the importance of the latter arc, and what does it provide to the Epic of Gilgamesh as a whole, from themes to character growth?

The purpose of the present study is to more deeply look into the latter story arc of the Epic, where our protagonist leaves for a journey to become immortal, and study its importance to the development of the characters, the most important and prevalent themes in the arc, and its importance to the Epic in its entirety. The present study analyzes and studies the themes presented in the arc, as well as looks into the character development of the protagonist Gilgamesh in the aforementioned story arc, where he goes on a journey to find the secret to immortality after the death of his friend.

2 BACKGROUND

In this section, I introduce some background to the present study. Firstly, I talk about the history of the Epic and its relevant developments over the years. Next, I will talk about some of the relevant research I found had been done related to the Epic. Finally, I will talk about the present study and why it should be considered important.

2.1 History of the Epic

The history of the Epic began in 2100 B.C. in the form of five separate poems (Ziolkowski 2011: 285), and the first surviving version of the combined Epic, more commonly referred to as the “Old Babylonian version”, dates back to the 18th century B.C., and is titled “Surpassing All Other Kings” (Ziolkowski 2011: 295). Later “standard” versions of the Epic, titled “He who Saw the Deep” or “He who Sees the Unknown”, date back to the 13th and 10th centuries BC. The protagonist of the poems and the Epic, king Gilgamesh of the city state of Uruk, was supposedly a real person with his rule having been recorded in history, but the legends and stories that were recorded as poems – and which eventually became the Epic – are clearly highly fictionalized stories.

While the stories about Gilgamesh were most likely popular during their time, the Epic eventually fell into obscurity. It was in the 1850’s that the Epic would truly resurface and interest in its story would be born in the Western world, when stone tablets containing pieces of the narrative were discovered (Ziolkowski 2011: 336). The first modern translations of the Epic into English were made in 1875 and 1876 by George Smith (George 1999: 11), and the Epic would start to truly gain popularity and interest in the international community after the Second World War. Since Smith’s first English translation, the Epic has received multiple other English translations, such as Andrew George’s famous and well-known version from 1999, and the newer translation by Stephen Mitchell from 2006. Of course, the Epic has received translations in other languages, such as two Finnish translations in 1943 and again in 2000.

2.2 Relevant research

Due to the Epic’s long-standing history and interest in it rising ever since the 1800’s, many researchers have studied and analyzed the Epic from a variety of perspectives over the years. As

mentioned in the introduction, Theodore Ziolkowski has studied the history of the Epic and the ways it has affected popular culture in modern times in his book *Gilgamesh Among Us: Modern Encounters With the Ancient Epic* (2011). Jeffrey Tigay has studied the development of the various versions of the Epic, its plot events and the evolution of its themes from a historical context in *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (2002).

While these particular topics of research are mostly focused on the historical side of research, some research has been about the Epic's literary side. Susan Ackerman has taken an approach more closely related to literary, studying and analyzing the relationship of protagonist Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu, and drawing upon historical symbolism and the ways the two interact (When Heroes Love, 2005). Liesbeth Korthals Altes has studied the narrative structure, narrative objects and goals of the narrative in their article *Epic in Gilgamesh and the Power of Narration* (2007), which provides some crucial insight to the narrative structure of the Epic and determines the ways it affects the way the story is perceived. This article is also particularly useful material in the present study.

2.3 Importance of present study

It is an undeniable fact that the Epic of Gilgamesh has generated generous amounts of research over the years. However, despite the amount of research I have managed to find, I have not found research that study the themes and character development of the latter story arc of the Epic. This story arc is not only interesting to read, but it is a big contrast to the mood of the story events that come before it. Where the beginning half of the Epic is about a grand king going on equally grand adventures with his friend, slaying fearsome monsters and defending his people, the latter half – which is the focus of the present study – is a sad, long and tiring journey for the protagonist, who struggles to find a treasure not even someone like him was meant to have: immortality and escape from death itself. Despite everything this arc has to offer from a literary standpoint, and the fact that this very old story about finding eternal life is still relevant in the modern world, I could not find any kind of major research done specifically about this part of the Epic. I believe this part of the Epic is the most important part of it, and it deserves to be looked at from a mostly literary study-related viewpoint. As the cultural origins and developments of the Epic have already been studied, I wish to look into it purely as a work of literature.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this section, I talk about the present study on a general level. In the first part, I talk about the aim and the research question of the present study. In the next section, I introduce the data, such as the exact version of the Epic and some of the other works I use in this study to help me analyze the Epic. Finally in the last part, I explain the methods of analysis I use in the present study, and what exactly I study and analyze in the present study.

The aim of the study is to analyze the Epic of Gilgamesh. More specifically, the present study primarily focuses on the story and plot of tablets 7 to 11, where the character Enkidu dies and Gilgamesh begins his journey to find the secret of immortality. This arc of the Epic will be referred to as the “immortality arc” in the present study, due to the major quest of this arc focusing around that concept. The research question of the present study is: how is the immortality arc important from the viewpoint of character development, the viewpoint of themes, and to the Epic as a whole?

The version of the Epic I use for the purposes of the present study is the 2006 English translation of the Epic by Stephen Mitchell, more specifically the 2011 re-release. I also take advantage of Mitchell’s notes about the Epic contained with his translation, at the beginning of the work. Other books, studies and materials I use in the present study are Theodore Ziolkowski’s *Gilgamesh Among Us: Modern Encounters With the Ancient Epic* (2011), Jeffrey Tigay’s *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (2002), Liesbeth Korthals Altes’ study *Gilgamesh and the Power of Narration* (2007), and Aaron Smuts’ study *Immortality and Significance* (2011). I also refer to Andrew George’s introduction to his translation of the Epic (1999), as his notes provide certain key observations about the Epic, as well as other useful facts.

I will be approaching the Epic from a point of view similar to archetypal literary criticism. As described in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by M. H. Abrams (1999), the goal of this critical approach is to find and understand the purpose and significance of archetypes in the work; archetypes can be the themes of the story, the characterization of characters, certain character types, or repeated actions or patterns in the story. This method of literary criticism has been discussed by psychologists like Sigmund Freud and others in the sense that the symbols and archetypes we use

in literature have not only a deeper meaning on the narrative, but also reflect on the mind and what the presence of certain archetypes themselves tells about the work. However, I do not go into these psychological aspects of this type of criticism. I will be looking into the themes and characters of the Epic and find their significance from a purely literary perspective: By taking note of important reoccurring motifs, themes and events, I look into how they affect the Epic and the parts they play in the story. I also study the protagonist Gilgamesh and his journey, and see how the events of this arc affect his character, as well as compare how his character develops compared to the earlier parts of the Epic.

4 ANALYSIS

This section of the present study is used to analyze the Epic and its events. It begins with a concise summary of the entire Epic's plot, as the events in the immortality arc are a result of things that happen in the earlier parts of the Epic, and it is necessary to understand, or at least be aware of, these events to make sense of the developments of the immortality arc. The next part looks deeper into the character development of Gilgamesh, as he goes through his journey and faces various successes, failures and people. The following part focuses on the thematic importance of the immortality arc and the themes it provides, and why these themes are important. Finally, the last part of the analysis focuses on the importance of the immortality arc to the Epic on a general level, and what it brings to the whole of the work in other ways.

4.1 Plot summary

In order to make sure everything is clear in the present study, I shall provide a short summary to the Epic's plot. Gilgamesh, the story's protagonist, is the king of the city of Uruk, and two thirds god by heritage. However, he is an arrogant king overworking the men and taking new brides for himself before their new husbands can have them, so people pray to the gods to do something about him. Thus, the gods create Enkidu, a man of equal power and standing to Gilgamesh.

While initially nothing more than a feral man, he is taught about human ways by a woman called Shamhat, who also tells him about Gilgamesh and his misdeeds in Uruk. Enkidu then sets off for Uruk, and when he finally arrives there and meets the king, the two fight each other, but end up

becoming good friends very quickly. Gilgamesh and Enkidu then go out on a series of adventures, first slaying the mighty beast Humbaba. Later they also slay the Heavenly Bull, which belonged to the gods, after the goddess Ishtar releases it upon Uruk after Gilgamesh rejected her proposal of marriage. After slaying the Bull, however, Gilgamesh and Enkidu mock and humiliate Ishtar, and the gods decide Gilgamesh has gone too far with his arrogance. Instead of laying their hands directly on Gilgamesh, they decide to kill Enkidu as punishment instead, hoping Gilgamesh will learn to respect them. After witnessing his best friend die over the course of multiple days due to an illness inflicted by the gods, Gilgamesh becomes afraid of his own inevitable death. Because he is one third human, he is still mortal. Thus, he leaves Uruk to find the immortal man, Utnapishtim, who supposedly survived a great flood a long time ago and gained immortality from the gods, along with his wife and child. They are, in fact, the only human beings in the world of the story who are not divine but still immortal, which makes their existence unique and something that leads Gilgamesh to hunt the man and his family down. After a long journey and many hardships, Gilgamesh finally finds Utnapishtim and his wife, who reveals how he survived the flood with guidance from the god Enki himself and tells the king how he granted him and his family immortality as a reward for following his instructions. After spending time with Utnapishtim, he finally reveals what could give Gilgamesh what he wants: a divine plant at the bottom of a certain lake that would, when eaten, would restore his youth and make him immortal. Gilgamesh goes on to retrieve the divine plant from the lake, but it is stolen by a snake when Gilgamesh sets it down and becomes distracted. He is initially disheartened, but as he thinks back on his journey, he realizes he does not need eternal life and becomes content, knowing that his adventures and work in Uruk will make people tell stories of his life for years to come. At the end of the story, Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, without the immortality he was looking for, but content with himself, not fearing death anymore.

4.2 Importance in character development

Gilgamesh's character archetype is very similar to the heroes of other ancient stories, like Heracles. Both are men of divine descent, both are capable of superhuman feats, and both embark on grand quests where they face many an obstacle. However, where Heracles' quest, his twelve labors, were an effort to pay back for his misdeeds and eventually gain his rightful place with the gods, Gilgamesh's motivations are different.

Most of Gilgamesh's character development occurs in the immortality arc, after the untimely death of his best friend Enkidu. At the beginning of the story, Gilgamesh was only "pursuing hedonistic pleasures to excess" (Tigay 2002: 213) and personal valor with the slaying of Humbaba and the Heavenly Bull. These things can be clearly seen in the early parts of the story with the aforementioned actions, but none of these things brought him satisfaction. Even after Enkidu is introduced in his life, Gilgamesh does not change much; he does become more patient ruler for his people, but he still seeks wild adventure with his new companion. He is someone who life has provided with only pleasure and luxuries, and who does not realize how truly lucky he is, with his incredible power as a partially divine human and his luxurious life and privileges as the king of all of Uruk.

He appears to understand he is mortal, however, as he explains to Enkidu during their travel to find Humbaba, as he says "we are mortal men. Only the gods live forever" (*Epic of Gilgamesh*: 92). Thus, he wants fame to "stamp [his] name on men's minds forever" (*Epic of Gilgamesh*: 94), because he understands he will one day pass away and wants people to remember him. This desire to escape death is another reoccurring archetype that repeats throughout the plot in various ways. However, Gilgamesh's motivations and actions are very selfish. Despite Humbaba being a "figure of balance and a defender of the ecosystem" of the forest he lives in, as Mitchell states (Mitchell 2010: 30), Gilgamesh still goes to hunt him down and kill him purely for the sake of fame. His reasons for killing the Heavenly Bull, a divine being belonging to the gods themselves, are just the same: to create fame for himself, without considering what may happen afterwards. He does not care about the consequences or how his actions may have affected or even humiliated Ishtar. He is a man who simply lives to have fun, selfishly without worrying or even thinking about how his actions affect others.

After Enkidu's death, however, finding immortality becomes Gilgamesh's main goal and the main plot point of the story from that point on. As the gods need to teach Gilgamesh he went too far by killing Humbaba and the Heavenly Bull, they have him face the consequences of his arrogance and kill his best friend, just to punish him and show him the gods are not to be taken lightly. This appears to be the first time Gilgamesh has received a punishment of this magnitude. Gilgamesh stays by his friend's side until he dies, watching as he grows weaker over the course of twelve days, pained and lamenting his life and mistakes. This clearly affects Gilgamesh, and

gives birth to a great fear of death in him. Before, he only wanted to be remembered by people for his so-called great and heroic deeds, but after Enkidu dies, he wants to become immortal in the literal sense. He is now terrified of death and his own mortality, cursing the fact that immortality is a privilege for only the gods. He becomes afraid he will suffer like his friend, slowly and excruciatingly. In addition, he vocalizes his thoughts as he consults his mother, Ninsun, after Enkidu's death, saying: "Must I die too? Must I be as lifeless as Enkidu?" (Epic of Gilgamesh: 159). This signifies that the sight of his friend's lifeless body and slow death haunts him. He is stripped of the person closest and most dear to him, his equal that the gods created for him. In his grief, he starts breaking down.

Gilgamesh's entire quest to find Utnapishtim and find out the secret of immortality is important for his character, as Gilgamesh goes through many hardships and great loss to even start his journey. His actual journey is even more perilous. It is a long, grueling quest, which just shows how difficult it is to actually gain something so grandiose. It is a test of Gilgamesh's will and determination, and he certainly comes through. Towards the end of his journey, when he meets the alewife Shiduri, who would end up guiding him to Utnapishtim, he is, as Shiduri and even himself point out, "worn out and ready to collapse" (Epic of Gilgamesh: 166), but he is still moving onward, still very much haunted by his friend's death. Even after he is reprimanded by Utnapishtim for trying to become immortal, he remains persistent and keeps asking for his help. Even after Gilgamesh fails the physical test Utnapishtim makes him go through, to prove how he would never be able to handle something of such magnitude and divinity as eternal life, he keeps insisting he must have that power. His pleas eventually make Utnapishtim give in and tell him where he can find the plant which can grant him immortality. By this point, Gilgamesh has already lost significant amounts of his previously overwhelming pride and bravado and underneath, a humble and persistent man has appeared; a man who would stop at nothing to see his journey to the end. Prior to this quest, Gilgamesh had not gone through a journey as grueling and long as this, but even without Enkidu, he is able to travel incredibly far and overcome himself in a way not seen anywhere else in the Epic. His developments make his character feel much more real and someone readers can see themselves in, as he struggles to cope with loss, his new fears and his unrelenting realization about his own mortality. This is quite a change from the unbelievably powerful, arrogant and thrill-seeking king he used to be, who feels more like something people are meant to admire.

Of course, Gilgamesh does not become immortal in the end; as he retrieves the divine plant from the lake it grows in, he sets it down only for a snake to appear and steal it when he is distracted. He gives chase, but only finds the snake's now-shed skin. However, instead of storming off to Utnapishtim to complain or completely fall into despair, he thinks back on his journey. He remembers the advice the people he met gave him, Utnapishtim's tests and all his achievements in Uruk, and realizes he does not need the divine plant's power. In the end, when he returns to his people in his home city, he is no longer haunted by the inevitability of death or his friend's slow and painful demise. He has gained patience in his journey, and realizes that living forever is not what he wants. He finally remembers that he only wanted people to remember him, and he decides to treasure his city. Through a long and painful journey, we see him overcome a fear that very much took over him and see him transform into a man who now understands the gravity of his actions, and how much he has and still can affect the people and the world around him.

4.3 Thematic importance and important themes of the arc

There are some very important themes present in this arc of the narrative, and as one can deduce, they all are related to the matters of immortality and death. Death and the search for immortality are common plot archetypes even in modern works, but these archetypes are very important in this story arc. The reason for this is that the main quest and plot of this entire arc revolves around death and immortality. Admittedly, it can be said that death was relevant in the first parts of the Epic, but this was in a different sense. In the first half, the archetype of death was relevant only to Gilgamesh's motivations, as he wanted his memory to live on past him, while in the immortality arc, the archetype of death is an overhanging theme that initiates the entire journey to escape from it. Immortality, specifically related to literature, has been studied by Aaron Smuts in his article *Immortality and Significance* (2011). He states "an immortal life for those of fixed ability will inevitably result in endless frustration" (Smuts 2011: 134) and that "our actions would be without a crucial form of significance" (Smuts 2011: 148). These notions mirror the key themes presented in this part of the Epic of Gilgamesh.

The first of the biggest themes overshadowing the entire arc about finding immortality is, ironically, the pointlessness of immortality. This forms the basis for another plot archetype: the archetype that humans should not attempt to strive to be close to gods. There is an overarching point

in the immortality arc that only the gods, the divine are immortal, and only the divine can truly carry the burden of eternal life. It is the fact that humans aren't allowed to have this so-called privilege that frustrates Gilgamesh and causes him to start his journey. However, many characters Gilgamesh meets during his journey try to talk him out of his quest, symbolizing the notion that immortality is pointless to chase after and is not even meant for humans. For example, the alewife Shiduri, a woman who Gilgamesh meets and who eventually ends up guiding Gilgamesh to Utnapishtim, tells him he "will never find the eternal life that [he seeks]" (Epic of Gilgamesh: 168) and that instead of desperately pursuing something only the gods could possess, he should spend his life doing things that make him happy and savor the little joys of life. Utnapishtim, from whom Gilgamesh wants to learn the secret to eternal life, represents the pointlessness of immortality more than any other character and expands upon the points Shiduri made earlier in the story. He only tells Gilgamesh he should not spend his time looking for it; it will not bring him happiness, and in the end, life will lose its meaningfulness. Because life is, in fact, short, humans should and are able to enjoy it to the fullest, but Utnapishtim has already lived so long, he has experienced everything people enjoy, to the point it no longer brings him any joy. At this point, Utnapishtim's immortality appears more like a curse than a divine gift.

As Gilgamesh finally meets the man he's looking for, Utnapishtim tries all he can to discourage Gilgamesh from his quest, fully knowing the ultimate results of having an immortal life as a human. After the two finally meet each other in person, the immortal man immediately starts by quite harshly reprimanding the king for even leaving on his journey in the first place, saying that he should see how fortunate he is, the way even the gods doted him since his birth, and calls his journey "ceaseless striving" and how it is only prolonging his own grief (Epic of Gilgamesh: 176). He forces Gilgamesh to go through a test – telling him to simply stay awake for seven full days – but Gilgamesh fails immediately and he falls asleep the moment he sits down. Utnapishtim does this to show Gilgamesh his own limits and how foolish he is for even trying to pursue immortality, as he cannot even prevail against sleep. Eventually he does give in, but only due to Gilgamesh's pleading. However, when Gilgamesh finally obtains immortality, only for it to slip from his very grasp, he comes to terms with himself and realizes he does not need it after all. The search for immortality eventually did not lead him to obtain his original goal, but something else: peace with himself. He realizes he is no longer afraid of dying nor does he even want immortality anymore. He is no longer haunted by the sight of his friend's death. In the end, he

realizes he does not need to be physically immortal to be immortal - as long as people remember him and his achievements, and keep passing on those stories about him, he will forever be immortal.

Another important theme present in this part of the story is the inevitability of death. The first obvious event where this theme emerges in the narrative is when Enkidu dies; despite being of divine origin and Gilgamesh's best friend, equal in power and most trusted companion, he dies like any other human being. Gilgamesh looks for immortality because he, too, will die like his friend, and is just human enough to be mortal. He wishes to escape this inevitability and his own demons by resisting nature and going on a journey that would end up wearing him out completely, physically and mentally. However, even after all his trouble, Gilgamesh fails to become immortal, and even before this, it is as if fate interferes with his intentions. He ends up destroying the two Stone Men that would allow him to cross the water of death safely and reach Utnapishtim, forcing him to work his way around his mistake. He fails Utnapishtim's test and falls asleep immediately. Finally, when he finally thinks eternal life is in his grasp, his journey is permanently ruined by a passing snake. It goes to show that in the end, nothing will stop death, and there is no point in trying to change this fact of life. It is what makes all humans equal, from kings to common folk.

4.4 Importance of the story arc as a whole to the Epic

The immortality arc in its entirety can be considered important to the entire Epic in general. As stated and demonstrated in the previous parts, the character development Gilgamesh goes through in the arc is immense, and he has more character development during this arc than in any of the earlier parts of the Epic. Also, the themes presented in the immortality arc are highly impactful and put further meaning to the events that played out in the earlier parts of the story. Looking further into it, though, there is much more to it.

As Altes points out, the narrative object of this arc is much different to the earlier parts of the Epic (Altes 2007: 188). Where Gilgamesh chased after fame and power in the first half, the object is now conquering eternal life itself. However, Gilgamesh's realization and motivations reflect back on his motivations of the first half of the Epic. He wanted to achieve great things, like

slay Humbaba, to stay immortal in the hearts of men. Eventually he comes to desire true immortality, but at the end comes to remember he only wanted to be remembered. It brings the entire Epic together in a magnificent sense, making it a single man's desperate attempt to escape mortality. George calls this "universal theme" something that unites the entire Epic together (George 1999: 13). In a sense, this journey is a culmination of Gilgamesh's life. In his journey to find immortality, as Altes puts it, he is "himself his main opponent" (Altes 2007: 188), due to his redundant and even counterproductive actions, such as absent-mindedly destroying the Stone Men that would have allowed him to reach Utnapishtim much faster, immediately falling asleep after starting Utnapishtim's test, and even allowing a snake to steal the divine plant that would finally give him what he had been searching for so long, due to his own easily distracted nature. At first, he expectedly despairs over this loss, but then stops, thinks back on his experiences, and realizes he is content the way he is now. The immortality arc is, as Andrew George states, a story of a man's journey to wisdom and said man is formed through his successes and failures (George 1999: 12). After all of his failures and the few successes he had over his journey, Gilgamesh finally remembers what he wanted in the first place: not an immortal life, but to be remembered.

The final important aspect of the arc that relates to the Epic as a whole, is that its narrative brings a powerful demigod and a king to the level of an everyday person and makes his struggles relatable to anyone. Prior to the immortality arc, Gilgamesh was a pompous, untouchable king looking for adventure and fame. This character archetype is something many characters achieve at the end of their journeys, like Heracles who joined the gods only after his death. However, with Gilgamesh, he is already an embodiment of the vaguely divine king archetype. His adventures in killing legendary beasts and divine bulls belonging to the gods were grand, exciting and certainly entertaining to read about, but it cannot be said that an average person could identify with these adventures and quests. However, when Enkidu is taken away from Gilgamesh, he is, in a certain way, taken to the level of a mere human. His entire character archetype is deconstructed. As a human, his actions have consequences and he too must die like all other humans. This makes the story more approachable and its lessons feel much closer to heart. George calls this even an examination of humans' longing for eternal life (1999: 13). Gilgamesh's fear of death and dying and his desire to leave a mark on the world is something many people can relate to, no matter their social standing. The advice Shiduri gives Gilgamesh, to live his life the best he can and enjoy even the little things, as well as Utnapishtim's words about being thankful of the good things

in one's life and not forgetting about them is advice that anyone could use. They are valuable lessons, and also the Epic's most powerful messages. Because life is short, no matter what our social standing may be, we should live it by doing the things we enjoy and remember the good things we have in our lives, no matter how bad things may get. It is a lesson we all can and should learn from, and the most powerful lesson the Epic of Gilgamesh has in its entirety.

5 CONCLUSIONS

From everything previously discussed, it can be said that the immortality arc is indeed thematically one of the most important parts of the Epic. While the method of studying the story from the point of view of archetypal literary criticism at first seemed somewhat difficult, it did provide me a starting point and help me with my analysis. I was not able to use it as much as I may have wanted to, but it provided a good base of thought to start my analyses from.

As for the importance of this part of the story, the most important themes of the entire story emerge from this arc. Immortality is something mankind has seemingly always been curious about, but its burdens are something we cannot truly comprehend with how short our lives are. Utnapishtim is a living example of this notion, as he tries to remind Gilgamesh to remember what good there actually still is in his life, having lived for so long he has already experienced everything he could possibly enjoy, being unable to feel true joy and excitement anymore. Also important is the inevitability of death explored as a theme in the Epic; Enkidu's death and Gilgamesh's constant mishaps and failures throughout the story enforce this idea that everyone will come to die eventually, and there is no point in trying to change it. On a more positive note, however, Gilgamesh's encounter with Shiduri reminds him that even with his divine heritage, his life is still short and he should have all the fun he can. Because the human life is so short, we can find enjoyment and excitement in things, and thus, Gilgamesh should not dwell in his misery by staying on a journey doomed to fail and instead enjoy things that make him happy and bring joy to his existence.

Most of Gilgamesh's character development also occurs during the latter arc, as the untouchable, powerful and spoiled king who only desires glory, becomes a believable, relatable character who

finds patience and inner peace through his journey and everything he encountered during it. The arrogant, thrill-seeking king of Uruk changes through his loss, learning the gravity of his actions and finally being humbled by his failed quest to gain eternal life. It is the most he develops throughout the entire plot of the Epic, and the immortality arc is also his most well-known adventure, for a good reason. It is a grueling journey where Gilgamesh faces many shortcomings and obstacles and truly has to come to terms with his limits. However, he returns to his home with his mind at piece, finally having gotten over his excessive need to prove himself and his fear of dying. He recognizes his own accomplishments, and realizes they are enough. He has reached a level of peace and humility even Enkidu, his equal companion created for him by the gods, could not give him.

The immortality arc is important because it turns Gilgamesh and his issues into something very human. It deals with loss, coping with the sorrow that stems from it, and the fear of death and dying. The mighty demigod king of Uruk is brought down, in a sense, down from his throne as an untouchable king as he realizes that even he is not free of consequence. It tells us that no one is free from loss, and that we can and have to learn from it, whatever way we can. However, it also tells us that everyone is afraid to die, but the shortness of our lives is exactly why we should try to fill it with joyous things. Gilgamesh's journey to escape his mortality and his eventual failure is a lesson anyone can learn from. It may have taken entirely too long for Gilgamesh to realize he could not attain or even need immortality, but the concept of life without death is something most people have been curious in. A very significant thing, however, is that Gilgamesh's realization at the end of the story came true; the Epic of Gilgamesh is still being read, researched, translated, and reinterpreted into new stories all the way to this day. Even if it is not in flesh, for thousands of years, the king of Uruk has truly stayed immortal.

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