

Farthest and Deepest: Gilgamesh's Journey Beyond Grief

CC 101 Professor Jorgensen

I. An Approach to the Strange Epic of Gilgamesh

- A. Some strange features: abruptness, repetition, symbolic action, written on clay
- B. A story over 4700+ years old; and on people's minds for thousands of years; why?
- C. A hero driven by personal grief and terror on a quest which leads beyond the personal
- D. **Approach the epic as a series of expanding circles:** hero, city, grasslands, cedar forest, gods; The Faraway; from which Gilgamesh returns

II. The Hero: Two-Thirds God, One-Third Human

- A. Two-thirds god: powerful, beautiful, unchecked, a stormy heart
- B. One-third human: capable of love; mortal

III. The City: Uruk

- A. Walls
- B. Cultivated Fields, grasslands
- C. Temple
- D. Contrasted With The Bible

IV. The Gods: Ishtar, Shamash

- A. Ishtar's not unfamiliar ways
- B. Gilgamesh's refusal and insulting of Ishtar central to the epic; pp. 30-32
 - 1. The chasm between gods and mortals
 - 2. Ishtar is unreliable technology
 - 3. Ishtar is fickle and dangerous; betrays and degrades
 - 4. Gilgamesh's reproaches contrasted with Book of Job; a preview of western history
- C. Sun-god Shamash, patron of G + E, pp. 10, 18, 19-20, 21-5, 27 (Cedar Forest), 34, 37, 39-41, 47, 50-2
- D. Polytheism

V. The Faraway and the Story of The Flood

- A. Two reactions to the grief and terror of death; insight and decision; a second journey
- B. Journey into cosmos or chaos: Wilderness, memory and absence, Scorpion beings, underground dark, jeweled garden, the ocean, Siduri, Urshanabi and his boat
- C. Utnapishtim, the Faraway, and the story of The Flood; contrasted with The Bible
- D. Water: pp. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 16, 18, 19, 19, 21, 22, 23, 23, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 39, 40, 42 (lack of water), 44, 45, 46, 47 (G does not offer water), 53, 54, 57-8, 60, 61-2, 64, 66-72, 73, 75, 76, 78, 78, 79-80, 80-1

VI. Return

- A. His wisdom is his story
- B. The city seen anew

Names and Terms:

Gilgamesh
Enkidu
Ishtar
Shamash
Utnapishtim
Ea
Akkadian
ziggurat
cuneiform
hierogamy
Uruk

Sayings

The depth and power we attain is measured by the expanse into which we dare to adventure and by the energy with which we find and maintain our center to which we return. --Hegel

You has no borders. [The other person] is no longer He or She . . He is You and fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing but He; but everything else lives in *his* light. --Martin Buber, I and You

If the Fool were to persist in his folly he would become wise. --William Blake

Because he sought the mate / of his physical divinity / Gilgamesh / let many usurp the missing one / and went / singly in his tragic excellence // At his going by / the men in mud and sweat / saw virgins yielding to his eyes / and turned to work with dreams / no virgin would ever give them.

–A. R. Ammons, “Gilgamesh Was Very Lascivious”

Go up on the wall of Uruk and walk around . . . did not the Seven Sages themselves lay out its plans?
--Epic of Gilgamesh, Kovacs translation

The Lord God planted a garden . . . and there he put the man whom he had formed. --Genesis 2:8

The god Marduk said "A house I shall build, I shall call its name Babylon, houses of the great gods."
--"Enuma Elish," Babylonian creation myth

Cain built a city, and called the city after the name of his son Enoch. --Genesis 4:17

The finery of Ishtar: the crown of the wide plain; curled hair along her forehead; rod of gold and lapis lazuli; rope of gold and lapis lazuli; necklace of small lapis lazuli stones; necklace of twin carnelian stones; the great gold ring of power; small gold and enamel rings called “the bright”; bracelet called “the pure”; breastplate called “come, man, come”; the long garment of ladyship; eye-shadow called “let him come to me.” --From "Hymn to Inanna"

Sayings (continued)

“My lady goddess, here is no cause for anger. / My quiet Penelope--how well I know--would seem a shade before your majesty, / death and old age being unknown to you, while she must die. Yet it is true, each day / I long for home, long for the sight of home.” --Odysseus to Kalypso, Odyssey V

I conclude thus that since Fortune varies, it is better to be impetuous than cautious because Fortune is a woman; and it is necessary if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly.

--Machiavelli, The Prince, Ch. 25

“The last or furthest end of knowledge . . . [is] a rich storehouse, for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man’s estate.” --From Sir Francis Bacon’s Proficiency and Advancement of Learning

The revealing that rules through modern technology has the character of a setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging-forth. . . . Regulating and securing become [its] chief characteristics . . . [D]oes not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing-reserve? The current talk about human resources . . . gives evidence of this. --Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”

The good man is related to his friend as to himself, for a friend is another self.

--Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, IX.4

Without friends no one would choose to live. --Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, IX.1

“To grieve: it’s to die and be alive at the same time; consciousness of unconsciousness. Grief causes you to leave yourself. You step outside your narrow little pelt. And you can’t feel grief unless you’ve had love before it.” --Ruth Ray in Philip K. Dick’s Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth . . . So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

--Genesis, 6:5-8

“We do not conceive of sudden, radical, irrational change as built into the very fabric of existence. Yet it is.” --Ian Malcom, chaos theorist in Michael Crichton’s Jurassic Park

And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. --Genesis, 1:2

“Because you have seen the truth about fair, just, and good things, the city will be governed by us and by you in a state of waking, not in a dream as many cities nowadays are governed by men who fight over shadows. So you must go down to the common dwelling of the others.”

--Socrates in Plato's Republic

Sayings (continued)

Would he follow [Siduri's] advice now, it would be a regression, because then he would be coming back more or less the same as he had been before. That is always the seduction; why not just live naturally, like the flowers in the fields, and so on. But that too is nature which drives man to consciousness, and *that* is what he has to follow. But if he just wants to jump out and be divine instead of human, it will never work. Therefore he does not reach immortality on his terms. . . . You cannot have divine life without accepting real life. —Rivkah Schärf Kluger, The Archetypal Significance of *Gilgamesh*

What
do they think they will attain
by their ships
that death has not
already given
them? Their ships
should be directed
Inward upon . . . But I
—William Carlos Williams, “For Eleanor and Bill Monahan”

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
—T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”