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# GANZ – NOTES ON THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

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“The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is an epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia and among the earliest known literary writings in the world. It originated as a series of Sumerian legends and poems in cuneiform script dating back to the early 3rd or late 2nd millennium BCE, which were later gathered into a longer Akkadian poem (the most complete version existing today, preserved on 12 clay tablets, dates from the 12th to 10th Century BCE). It follows the story of Gilgamesh, the mythological hero-king of Uruk, and his half-wild friend, Enkidu, as they undertake a series of dangerous quests and adventures, and then Gilgamesh’s search for the secret of immortality after the death of his friend. It also includes the story of a great flood very similar to the story of Noah in Bible and elsewhere.”

What is an “epic” literary form?

## **Six Elements Of The Epic**

([https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/engl257/General%20lit/six\\_elements\\_of\\_the\\_epic.htm](https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/engl257/General%20lit/six_elements_of_the_epic.htm)):

1. Plot centers around a Hero of Unbelievable Stature. The epic hero completes what everyone only attempts. In ancient epics, the hero often is either partially divine or at least protected by a god or God.
2. Involves deeds of superhuman strength and valor. Accomplish feats no real human could.
3. Vast Setting. The action spans not only geographical but also often cosmological space: across land, sea, into the underworld, or thru space or time etc.
4. Involves supernatural and-or otherworldly forces. Gods, demons, angels, time/space travel, cheating death etc.
5. Sustained elevation of style. Overwritten. Overly formal, highly stylized (poetry, lyricism (singing), exaggeration)
6. Poet remains objective and omniscient. The narrator sees and knows all and presents all perspectives.

The text never questions Gilgamesh's human-king status. Sasson suggests this could make the epic an affirmation of Gilgamesh's humanity, allowing audiences to reflect on themselves and, in turn, **empathize with Gilgamesh as he endures his mortality** (Sasson, "Literary Motifs"). This interpretation aligns with the motif of the masculine ideal as presented throughout ancient and contemporary literature (Resic, "From Gilgamesh to Terminator"). **Gilgamesh's realization and acceptance of mortality reinforces that the king and citizens ultimately share the same fate: death**.... The *Epic of Gilgamesh* reflects the intimacy that ancient people saw between religious practice and their lives. Gilgamesh wrestles with concepts of fate and the divine role in issues that both average citizens and cultural elites faced each day. This has led Ziolkowski to view the epic as a form of ritual or religious drama (Ziolkowski, *Gilgamesh Among Us*).... The epic's stark male/female binary and links between sexuality and social acceptance illuminate potential sociocultural allusions. Male sexual promiscuity does not hinder Gilgamesh's legacy in the text and among interpreters, but scholars often point to Shamhat and the innkeeper as figures whose behavior should be avoided or shunned (Bahrani, *Women of Babylon*).<sup>1</sup>

Nothing in ancient literature matches the generative and integrative powers of this poem, as it prepares the audience to expect the extraordinary: deeds eliciting pain and suffering, but also conferring illumination and wisdom, abound, and mysteries about the Flood and the Netherworld are resolved. The poet's exercise is not just pedagogic, however, for in disclosing Gilgamesh's ultimate achievement—the building of Uruk's defenses—is within **human ability**, the poet accords the audience a standard by which to measure Gilgamesh's triumphs or failures and instills in it an ironic vision by which to evaluate flaws **when he acts beyond human capacity**.<sup>2</sup>

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF MESOPOTAMIAN LITERATURE

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These remarks taken from the Reed College Magazine, the article written by Randall Barton:<sup>3</sup>

Achilles is in. Odysseus is out. And Hum 110 will have a new syllabus in the fall, beginning with two texts focused on Mesopotamia: the *Code of Hammurabi* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

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<sup>1</sup> Jason C. Kuo and Jonathan D. Redding, "[Gilgamesh, Epic of](#)," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Sasson, "[Gilgamesh Epic](#)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1025.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.reed.edu/reed\\_magazine/june2013/articles/eliot\\_circular/gilgamesh.html](http://www.reed.edu/reed_magazine/june2013/articles/eliot_circular/gilgamesh.html)

The revised syllabus recognizes the importance of the Greco-Roman experience in our intellectual heritage, according to professor Robert Knapp [English 1974–], but also explores some of the extraordinary civilizations that influenced the Greeks.

Consisting of 282 Babylonian laws inscribed on a stone stele and various clay tablets, Hammurabi is one of the oldest deciphered writings of significant length in the world, and was recovered by archeologists in 1901.

“The *Code of Hammurabi* provides some insight into the organization of one of humanity’s earliest, and most influential, complex, sedentary civilizations,” says professor David Garrett [history 1998–], who will deliver the lecture. **“It introduces a central theme in the study of human society generally, the co-evolution of political authority and attempts to shape behavior through formal legal codes.”** Hammurabi is no stranger to Hum 110—it was actually a mainstay of the syllabus in the early 1940s, when Reed’s foundational humanities course first took shape.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* predates Homer by 1,500 years<sup>4</sup> and is perhaps **the oldest written story on earth**. Discovered in 1853, it is a poem about a Sumerian king, Gilgamesh, who may have lived around 2500 BC in Mesopotamia.

In the last 50 years, says Knapp, scholarship has made it clear that the Greeks cannot be understood without considering the Mesopotamian influences on them.

“Nathalia King [English 1987–] was a very vigorous proponent of doing *Gilgamesh*,” Knapp says. **“As she puts it, it is a poem that makes the case that in order to become human, one must accept being mortal. I don’t think there’s any doubt that *Gilgamesh* influences Homer.”**

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<sup>4</sup> No one knows for sure when Homer lived and wrote, but a common guess is that he was born around 800 BCE and lived for a hundred years, until 701 BCE.

## THE WRITING AND TABLETS

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The recently discovered Tablet V – Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the Cedar Forest

Play the audio recording of Professor Karl Hecker reading Old Babylonian Version (Akkadian) of Tablet II, Enkidu meeting Gilgamesh (*Soundcloud*).

What is of such importance is the fact of stories whose first source and identity lies in their **orality** now started to become **written**.

The *Star Trek: the Next Generation* episode when Captain Picard, an enthusiastic archaeologist, is on the hunt for DNA strands - “The Chase” is the 146th episode of the syndicated American science fiction television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, the 20th episode of the sixth season, which aired on **April 26, 1993**. It is directed by series cast member Jonathan Frakes (Commander William Riker). The following from the *Wikipedia* article:

After studying the ambiguous number blocks for hours, the discovery is made that these fragments are compatible DNA strands which have been recovered from different worlds all over the galaxy. **The crew eventually believe that they have discovered an embedded genetic pattern that is constant throughout many different species, and it is speculated that this was left by an early race that pre-dates all other known civilizations.** This would ultimately explain why so many races are humanoid.

Picard resolves that the answer to the 'puzzle' will be revealed when the remaining DNA samples are obtained, and so the Enterprise travels to a remote, uninhabited planet that Galen had mentioned was his next destination. They encounter *Klingon* and *Cardassian* ships that appear to be on the same trail as themselves. **These two groups believe, respectively, that the puzzle will yield the design of a formidable weapon and the secret of an unlimited power source.**

The Enterprise hosts representatives from the Cardassians and the Klingons, and they all agree to combine the DNA samples that they have found so far, **since all three parties have pieces of the puzzle that the others cannot find.** Using the shared information, they determine a pattern in how several planets were aligned millions of years ago and extrapolate the position of a final planet.

The Cardassians warp off ahead of the others, firing at both ships to disable them. However, Picard had already learned of the Cardassians' attempt to sabotage the Enterprise's defenses; the ship is fully functional, and he takes the Klingon captain to the last planet. Upon arrival, they discover that almost all life is extinct, but scans by the Enterprise detect residual lichens located on a fossilized seabed, and they beam down to investigate with their tricorders containing all previously known information. The Cardassians arrive, as well as an undetected *Romulan* force, creating a standoff. Reasoning that the seabed may not be completely fossilized (and thus still containing some DNA), Picard and Dr. Crusher (Gates McFadden) scan the sea-bed with their tricorder while the other parties argue.

They locate the final DNA fragment, which completes and runs the program. The program reconfigures the tricorder's emitter to project a holographic message. **The recorded image of an alien humanoid (Salome Jens) is projected to the assembled company, and it explains that its race is responsible for the presence of life in the Alpha Quadrant.** When the alien race first explored the Alpha and Beta Quadrants there had been no humanoid-based life other than themselves, and so they seeded various planets with their DNA to create a legacy of their existence after they had gone. **The alien ends its message by saying that it hopes that the knowledge of a common origin will help produce peace.**

I mention this here, because the translation of the Epic of Gilgamesh – some twenty thousand or more clay tablets – are scattered all over the world, in the hands of different nation's scholars. All are working together to reconstruct this common story.

## HERO

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The *Oxford English Dictionary* concerning the noun “hero” - *Classical Mythol. and Ancient Greek Hist.* “A man (or occas. a woman) of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favoured by the gods; esp. one regarded as semi-divine and immortal. Also in extended use, denoting similar figures in non-classical myths or legends.”

In Ancient Greece, heroes to whom a partly divine nature was attributed belonged to either of two categories: **deified human beings** (esp. historical figures) whose great deeds had raised them to a rank intermediate between gods and humans, and who were venerated or worshipped; and **demigods**, said to be the offspring of a god or goddess and a human. In practice often no distinction was made between the two categories.

It took me so many years to perceive the “trap” in **the heroic image of the self**. The “hero” is one who through natural or supernatural gifts, and unceasing diligence, *ascends* to the highest point among all of his or her fellow humans, distinguishing himself or herself as “**one of a kind**.” But what this wins for the hero is loneliness. Because a person who is “one of a kind” (like the “Earth-creature” first made from the dust of the ground by God in Genesis 2) is necessarily alone, no equal, but more importantly, no one greater than him or her towards which to reach.

**The true human journey is what in other places I have spoken about as the upside-down triangle.** The *Hero* ascends to the apex of the triangle, while all the rest of humanity scatters somewhere along the ascent towards the apex. But the *True Person* is one who begins the long ascent from a place of utter need, and the necessary selfishness of biological necessity – the baby before having any relationships other than with his or her mom and dad – into greater and greater relationship with others, into **the binding of his or her freedom** in his or her commitments in friendship and love with more and more people. The True Person is the one most related to all people.

Notice in the Epic of Gilgamesh we see a “heroic” Gilgamesh – peerless and arrogant ... and alone – “fall” into friendship with Enkidu. **This is a profound expression of the human journey towards full humanity.**

## THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

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Map from a course taught at Reed College, Portland, OR

**N.K. Sandars in his Introduction to his Penguin Classics translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* writes, pp. 15-16:** “One of the causes of the militarism of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium was economic. The southern part of Mesopotamia as far as the Persian Gulf was, and is, a flat, hot land of marsh and plain, very productive when drained, but, apart from the date-palm, altogether without timber and without metals. The demands of the rival cities [on the plain] on their neighbors in the surrounding highlands soon passed beyond the level of peaceful trade.... Here then the immemorial enemies of hill-tribe and plainsman were established; they provide the setting for a group of Sumerian poems which describe the troubled relations between Uruk and Aratta, a state in the eastern hills.”

## PROLOGUE

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*He had seen everything, had experienced all emotions, from exaltation to despair, had been granted a vision into the great mystery, the secret places, the primeval days before the Flood. He had journeyed to the edge of the world and made his way back, exhausted but whole. He had carved his trials on stone tablets...<sup>5</sup>*

Holocaust survivor and human rights activist Elie Wiesel (1928-2016) included one of my favorite stories about prayer and place, a Hasidic parable, as a Preface to his novel, *The Gates of the Forest*.

*When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.*

*Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer," and again the miracle would be accomplished.*

*Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.*

*Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient.*

*God made humans because he loves stories.*

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<sup>5</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 810-812). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, p. 69.

## BOOK ONE

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*Surpassing all kings, powerful and tall beyond all others, violent, splendid, a wild bull of a man, unvanquished leader, hero in the front lines, beloved by his soldiers—fortress they called him, protector of the people, raging flood that destroys all defenses— **two-thirds divine and one-third human**, son of King Lugalbanda, who became a god, and of the goddess Ninsun,...* <sup>6</sup>

In this “heroic” portrait of Gilgamesh, we can hear something of what **Psalm 8** in the Bible expresses about his awareness of the nature of human beings as created by God:

- <sup>5</sup> \*What is man that you are mindful of him,<sup>b</sup>  
and a son of man that you care for him?<sup>c</sup>  
<sup>6</sup> Yet you have made him little less than a god,<sup>\*</sup>  
crowned him with glory and honor.  
<sup>7</sup> You have given him rule over the works of your hands,<sup>d</sup>  
put all things at his feet: <sup>7</sup>

Even from this early in the human story, **the question of one’s parentage** stood forward as significant for people to know, so that all might have a means of interpreting the behavior of certain high-born among them, excusing them, making room for them, because of their status as high-born. So, in this case, for Gilgamesh to be the son of a human father – King Lugalbanda (who was deified) – and a goddess mother, Ninsun, a minor goddess of the city of Uruk, known for her wisdom – “excused” the arrogance of Gilgamesh.

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<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 819-822). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, page 71.

\* *Man ... a son of man*: the emphasis is on the fragility and mortality of human beings to whom God has given great dignity.

<sup>b</sup> Ps 144:3; Jb 7:17.

<sup>c</sup> Heb 2:6ff.

\* *Little less than a god*: Hebrew *‘elohim*, the ordinary word for “God” or “the gods” or members of the heavenly court. The Greek version translated *‘elohim* by “angel, messenger”; several ancient and modern versions so translate. The meaning seems to be that God created human beings almost at the level of the beings in the heavenly world. Heb 2:9, translating “for a little while,” finds the eminent fulfillment of this verse in Jesus Christ, who was humbled before being glorified, cf. also 1 Cor 15:27 where St. Paul applies to Christ the closing words of Ps 8:7.

<sup>d</sup> Gn 1:26, 28; Wis 9:2; 1 Cor 15:27.

<sup>7</sup> [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Ps 8:5–7.

they went to Anu, father of them all, protector of the realm of sacred Uruk, and spoke to him on the people's behalf: "Heavenly Father, Gilgamesh— noble as he is, splendid as he is— **has exceeded all bounds**. The people suffer from his tyranny, the people cry out that he takes the son from his father and crushes him, takes the girl from her mother and uses her, the warrior's daughter, the young man's bride, he uses her, no one dares to oppose him. Is this how you want your king to rule? Should a shepherd savage his own flock?"<sup>8</sup>

There emerges here the problem posed by the presence in the community of an especially gifted human being. The question is: **For what purpose is human strength?** At this point in the story, Gilgamesh acts without thought about it, using his exceptional powers to take what he wants, to strut, to be arrogant. His victims – everyone other than he – sense that exceptional power must include **responsibility** towards those who lack such power.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* about "**arrogant**" – "Making or implying unwarrantable claims to dignity, authority, or knowledge; aggressively conceited or haughty, presumptuous, overbearing. (Used of men, their actions, manner, etc.)"

The verb form "**to arrogate**" means – "To claim and assume as a right that to which one is not entitled; to lay claim to and appropriate (a privilege, advantage, etc.) without just reason or through self-conceit, insolence, or haughtiness."

*Anu heard them, he nodded his head, then to the goddess, mother of creation, he called out: "Aruru, you are the one who created humans. Now go and create a double for Gilgamesh, his second self, a man who equals his strength and courage, a man who equals his stormy heart. Create a new hero, let them balance each other perfectly, so that Uruk has peace."*<sup>9</sup>

**Aruru**, a female goddess, is here credited as the one who created human beings, both Gilgamesh (which clashes with the story that Gilgamesh is the son of **King Lugalbanda** [human] and **Ninsun** [minor goddess]) and now to create his equal, Enkidu.

What is striking is how the father of the gods, Anu, deposes Aruru, a goddess of creation, to create a human who is Gilgamesh's equal. Now this is worth thinking about. The gods chose the path of balance, rather than the path of excluding or erasing the existence of an extreme. **The choice is to create a balancing power**, and to do this **perfectly**.

Also, notice that when Anu commands Aruru to create the human who was Enkidu, he and Aruru create him for a purpose. **This also is something profound, that human beings even so far in our distant past knew/guessed that each one was here for a purpose, on purpose** ... or at least the "strong ones" among them.

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<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 830-834). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 836-838). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, p. 74.

*When Aruru heard this, she closed her eyes, and what Anu had commanded she formed in her mind. She moistened her hands, she pinched off some clay, she threw it into the wilderness, kneaded it, shaped it to her idea, and fashioned a man, a warrior, a hero: Enkidu the brave, as powerful and fierce as the war god Ninurta. Hair covered his body, hair grew thick on his head and hung down to his waist, like a woman's hair. He roamed all over the wilderness, naked, far from the cities of men, ate grass with gazelles, and when he was thirsty he drank clear water from the waterholes, kneeling beside the antelope and deer.*<sup>10</sup>

What is also striking is that Aruru will make Enkidu not an image of Gilgamesh, which is surely what we expected she would do. Rather, she makes Enkidu, the child of her own imagination but through the request of Anu, after the “stuff” of Anu – see N.K. Sandars translation here: “So the goddess conceived an image in her mind, **and it was of the stuff of Anu of the firmament....**”

Recall the text from **Genesis 1:26-27**, where we notice the we who creates humans, and after whose image they create them:

<sup>26</sup> Then God said: Let us make\* human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.

<sup>27</sup> God created mankind in his image;  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female\* he created them.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 839-843). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, p. 74.

<sup>1</sup> Gn 5:1, 3; 9:6; Ps 8:5–6; Wis 2:23; 10:2; Sir 17:1, 3–4; Mt 19:4; Mk 10:6; Jas 3:7; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10.

\* *Let us make*: in the ancient Near East, and sometimes in the Bible, God was imagined as presiding over an assembly of heavenly beings who deliberated and decided about matters on earth (1 Kgs 22:19–22; Is 6:8; Ps 29:1–2; 82; 89:6–7; Jb 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). This scene accounts for the plural form here and in Gn 11:7 (“Let us then go down ...”). Israel’s God was always considered “Most High” over the heavenly beings. *Human beings*: Hebrew *’ādām* is here the generic term for humankind; in the first five chapters of Genesis it is the proper name Adam only at 4:25 and 5:1–5. *In our image, after our likeness*: “image” and “likeness” (virtually synonyms) express the worth of human beings who have value in themselves (human blood may not be shed in 9:6 because of this image of God) and in their task, dominion (1:28), which promotes the rule of God over the universe.

\* *Male and female*: as God provided the plants with seeds (vv. 11, 12) and commanded the animals to be fertile and multiply (v. 22), so God gives sexuality to human beings as their means to continue in existence.

<sup>11</sup> [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Ge 1:26–27.

Notice how the natural order – a human child is born from a woman – is mirrored in the heavens where **the creator of humans is a woman** – Aruru.

*He [a trapper] went to his father. “Father, I have seen a savage man at the waterhole. He must be the strongest man in the world, with muscles like rock. I have seen him outrun the swiftest animals. He lives among them, eats grass with gazelles, and when he is thirsty he drinks clear water from the waterholes. I haven’t approached him—I am too afraid. He fills in the pits I have dug, he tears out the traps I have set, he frees the animals, and I can catch nothing. My livelihood is gone.”*<sup>12</sup>

Notice how Enkidu, far unlike Gilgamesh in his human and urban world, **lives in harmony with the other beasts with whom he identifies himself**. Enkidu, from the moment of his creation, is a harmony, not an unbalancing intrusion, on the animal world. Notice how his natural inclination is to protect his fellow animals – “he frees the animals.”

Concerning the singular identity of Enkidu as both created by a goddess from the mud of the Earth, but seen first in her imagination in response to Anu’s command to make a human able to balance Gilgamesh, I recall **Genesis 2:18-20** -

<sup>18</sup> The LORD God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.<sup>\*k</sup> <sup>19</sup> So the LORD God formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each living creature was then its name.<sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; **but none proved to be a helper suited to the man.**<sup>13</sup>

In this scene given us in Genesis 2, **the human is among the animals**, and **it is to the human that God gives the animals**. Yet, even with all of the animals among whom to live, the human was lonely, lacking someone who was his equal. Notice how this insight about humans – to have an equal – is echoed in Gilgamesh who has no one who is his

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<sup>12</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 846-849). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, pp. 75-76.

\* *Helper suited to him*: lit., “a helper in accord with him.” “Helper” need not imply subordination, for God is called a helper (Dt 33:7; Ps 46:2). The language suggests a profound affinity between the man and the woman and a relationship that is supportive and nurturing.

<sup>k</sup> Tb 8:6; Sir 36:24; 1 Cor 11:9; 1 Tm 2:13.

<sup>13</sup> [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Ge 2:18–20.

equal, but who does not perceive a need for such (the citizens of Uruk see the need for someone who is equal to Gilgamesh!).

*He made the journey, he stood before Gilgamesh in the center of Uruk, he told him about the savage man. The king said, "Go to the temple of Ishtar, ask them there for a woman named **Shamhat**, one of the priestesses who give their bodies to any man, in honor of the goddess. Take her into the wilderness. When the animals are drinking at the waterhole, tell her to strip off her robe and lie there naked, ready, with her legs apart. The wild man will approach. Let her use her love-arts. Nature will take its course, and then the animals who knew him in the wilderness will be bewildered, and will leave him forever."*<sup>14</sup>

This is a remarkable paragraph. As it was a female goddess who created Enkidu, so now it will be a priestess of the Temple of Eanna (of Ishtar and Anu) who will re-create him, transforming him from animal to man, from forest dweller to city dweller ... but all of this without him losing his central strength to stand as Gilgamesh's equal.

*She stripped off her robe and lay there naked, with her legs apart, touching herself. Enkidu saw her and warily approached. He sniffed the air. He gazed at her body. He drew close, Shamhat touched him on the thigh, touched his penis, and put him inside her. She used her love-arts, she took his breath with her kisses, held nothing back, and showed him what a woman is. For seven days he stayed erect and made love with her, until he had had enough. **At last he stood up and walked toward the waterhole to rejoin his animals. But the gazelles saw him and scattered, the antelope and deer bounded away.** He tried to catch up, but his body was exhausted, his life-force was spent, his knees trembled, he could no longer run like an animal, as he had before. **He turned back to Shamhat, and as he walked he knew that his mind had somehow grown larger, he knew things now that an animal can't know.***<sup>15</sup>

We cannot help but feel that something real and valuable is being lost when all of the animals are suddenly afraid of Enkidu, running from him. We feel present here the "fall from paradise" – **a fundamental alienation between human beings and the animals** associated with the gaining by human beings of a knowledge that the animals do not have.

What was the nature of the *knowledge* that Enkidu now had because of his week-long time with Shamhat, which "an animal can't know"? The animals certainly know all about sexual activity. Is the knowledge something about **subduing**? Shamhat approaches Enkidu as an animal, but with her "love-arts" and her higher purposes in using them,

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<sup>14</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 852-856). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, pp. 76-77.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 862-868). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, pp. 78-79.

subdues Enkidu's two-thirds animal, and makes him completely human – a man from which the animals now will flee.

Shamhat catalyzes Enkidu's human transformation from (1) born of the Earth, in the wild and harmonious among the wild animals; (2) learning how to work the land – the pastoral tasks; (3) learning how to be a city-dweller.

*Enkidu sat down at Shamhat's feet. He looked at her, and **he understood all the words** she was speaking to him.*<sup>16</sup>

This encounter with Shamhat gives to Enkidu the power of language! He “understood all the words”. How striking is this insight that one must first love at least one representative of a language group before one finds the motivation to want to understand his or her language. I recall my difficulty learning Italian, while living in Rome, stemmed from how little I liked the Romans, those living in that hard city in which the citizens enjoy taking advantage of visitors. Their cruelty in this way activated within me **a deep resistance to become like them**, and so I never committed to learning well their language.

*“Now, Enkidu, you know what it is to be with a woman, to unite with her. You are beautiful, you are like a god. Why should you roam the wilderness and live like an animal? Let me take you to great-walled Uruk, to the temple of Ishtar, to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king, who in his arrogance oppresses the people, trampling upon them like a wild bull.”*<sup>17</sup>

How interesting it is here that Enkidu, so recently an animal, is civilized by Shamhat (and according to the instructions from Gilgamesh), so that he can return to Uruk to civilize – to balance – **the animal-like behaviors of Gilgamesh** – who is “trampling upon them [his people] like a wild bull”. Only a man who was formerly an animal has the capacity to balance a “civilized” man who has become animal-like.

*She finished, and Enkidu nodded his head. **Deep in his heart he felt something stir, a longing he had never known before, the longing for a true friend.** Enkidu said, “I will go, Shamhat. Take me with you to great-walled Uruk, to the temple of Ishtar, to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty*

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<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 869-870). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, pp. 79-80.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 870-872). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, p. 80.

*king. I will challenge him. I will shout to his face: 'I am the mightiest! I am the man who can make the world tremble! I am supreme!'"*<sup>18</sup>

This surely must be one of the most significant lines in all of world literature, especially because of its sudden appearance – an epiphany of enormous power – in the awareness of this human being who has begun the journey towards full humanity.

One of the most compelling and interesting aspects of the character of “**Data**” in *Star Trek: the Next Generation*, is how he found within his “sub-processor” self a desire to become more than he was, something greater than “merely a machine.” **His life-long quest was to learn how to become human.**

*“Come,” said Shamhat, “let us go to Uruk, I will lead you to Gilgamesh the mighty king. You will see the great city with its massive wall, you will see the young men dressed in their splendor, in the finest linen and embroidered wool, brilliantly colored, with fringed shawls and wide belts.”*<sup>19</sup>

Shamhat describes in historically useful detail the kind of experiences were there to have in a “great city” such as Uruk. **Yet the reader wonders what Enkidu would have thought of such a description** – something so intensely like cities: the noise, the leisure, the crowded streets – after having lived wild and free in the wilderness where stillness is, and much room to move is everywhere.

*Gilgamesh the mighty king, the hero destined for both joy and grief. You will stand before him and gaze with wonder, you will see how handsome, how virile he is, how his body pulses with erotic power. He is even taller and stronger than you— so full of life-force that he needs no sleep. Enkidu, put aside your aggression. **Shamash, the sun god, loves him, and his mind has been made large by Anu, father of the gods, made large by Enlil, the god of earth, and by Ea, the god of water and wisdom. Even before you came down from the hills, you had come to Gilgamesh in a dream.**”*<sup>20</sup>

Gilgamesh’s pedigree is now revealed, favored by all of the highest of the gods.

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<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 872-876). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, pp. 80-81.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 876-878). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 881-885). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, pp. 81-82.

The significance of dreams is already understood so far back in human history. And, it is understood also that one's own dreams are one's that typically one cannot comprehend. **The Dreamer must seek out someone wise who can tell him or her what the dream means.**

*The mother of Gilgamesh, Lady Ninsun, the wise, the all-knowing, said to her son, 'Dearest child, this bright star from heaven, this huge boulder that you could not lift— **it stands for a dear friend, a mighty hero.** You will take him in your arms, embrace and caress him the way a man caresses his wife. **He will be your double, your second self, a man who is loyal, who will stand at your side through the greatest dangers. Soon you will meet him, the companion of your heart.** Your dream has said so.' Gilgamesh said, 'May the dream come true. May the true friend appear, the true companion, who through every danger will stand at my side.'"*<sup>21</sup>

Notice how the “stirring” in Enkidu’s heart that was earlier written in this book is matched by a desire rising in Gilgamesh for a friend and an equal.

But notice how **Gilgamesh has no access to this desire for a friend and equal because of his arrogance and lack of self-awareness.** The only way that this desire can be kindled in him is through an obscure image of a “huge boulder” that he cannot lift, received in a dream that he was unable to understand, but which his goddess mother, Ninsun, interprets for him. **It is she, the Lady Ninsun, who opens the desire in her son Gilgamesh to want “a dear friend, a mighty hero.”**

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<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, Stephen (2010-05-11). *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Kindle Locations 889-894). Atria Books. Kindle Edition, pp. 83-84.