A COMPARISON OF THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH AND THE HOMERIC EPICS
THEIR PLACE IN HISTORY AND LITERATURE

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A Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Wesleyan University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Middletown, Conn. May 5, 1972
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank all the people who helped and encouraged me while I was writing this thesis and in particular the Department of Classics and my thesis advisor, Professor Kevin Whitfield.
In our age of comparative literature, in which Homer's influence on later works is so much studied, pre-Homeric poems are often neglected. It is true, that the importance of Homer's influence on subsequent literature can not be denied. Just as important, however, is the legacy which Homer inherited. Whether Homer knew Eastern traditions or not, I shall not endeavor to show in this paper. What I shall examine are the elements of the tradition which Homer inherited. I shall compare this tradition and how Homer handles it with the tradition and its use in the Gilgamesh epic.

In this paper, I have relied on two texts of the Epic of Gilgamesh. The translation by James B. Pritchard is used most frequently. However, in several places, particularly in the Humbaba story and in the last section on the death of Gilgamesh, I have relied on H. K. Sandars who describes these incidents in full detail because he has "departed from the more usual practice by employing the Sumerian sources alongside the Akkadian and Hittite. This is not only because of their priority and the fact that the Akkadian writers themselves drew on the Sumerian Cycle for the basis of most of the episodes in their Epic; but also because they fill important
Both because of the fragmentary state of the poems in the Gilgamesh cycle and because I am mainly concerned with the tradition and its use, I shall use both of these translations in studying the Gilgamesh epic. For the Homeric epics, I have relied on the Oxford texts of the Iliad and Odyssey. For any quoting in translation, I have used Richmond Lattimore's versions of the Iliad and Odyssey.

In this comparison of the Eastern and Western epics, I have relied mainly on the texts of the epics themselves. For the understanding of each epic itself, I have relied on the scholarship of many others and, in particular, the works of M. L. Webster, Cedric Whitman, Samuel Kramer and N. K. Sandars. In this comparison, I shall study the material within the epics and try to uncover the similarities and differences in the customs and mental attitude of the two civilizations as reflected in the epics.

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The literary genre of epic is one which has been much studied but by no means is this study complete. For the epic itself is so constructed as to embody a distinctive literary art form, in that complex and highly developed poetic embellishments are skillfully interwoven with the raw materials of society in the making. This intermingling of literary form with an historical representation of social concepts renders the epic a storehouse for literary and historical study. A comparison of epics of two different nations should reveal literary and historical similarities and differences of their respective civilizations. The similarities between the two civilizations produce two works of literature of the same recognizable form, the epic. Within this unity of form, particular historical similarities and differences appear. A comparison of the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Homeric epics is not only important for the reasons mentioned above, but also especially important because these epics, the oldest we possess, reveal both the beginnings of literary form and the first records of the development of society viewed as a whole.

In recent years, the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer have been viewed as epics of distinctive literary merit. The scholarship of men such as Cedric Whitman and T. R. L. Webster, have greatly contributed to the acknowledgement of these epics as
literature as well as historic narrative. Cedric Whitman views the Homeric epics as polished works of literature with a well developed and highly symmetrical construction. Moreover, the epics are of historic as well as of literary value. Their importance as a means of preserving a record of Mycenaean culture is demonstrated by T. B. L. Webster. The Homeric epics not only preserve memories of Mycenaean culture but reveal a synthesis of Eastern and Western culture preserved not merely by a king-list or census but in a literary art form.

Let us look briefly at the Homeric epics as refined works of literature. Cedric Whitman demonstrates the unity and symmetry of the Iliad through comparison with geometric patterns. He explains: "The principle of circularity, including concentricity, or framing by balanced similarity and antithesis, is one of the chief dynamic forces underlying the symmetry of Geometric vase design." He cites as examples of symmetry the framing devices such as ring composition (balance by similarity) and hysteron-proteron (balance by oppositès). An epic so constructed is the result of a conscious literary effort of a poet. Whitman's remarks on the Odyssey affirm


3Whitman, Homer and The Heroic Tradition, p. 255.
the literary merit of the Homeric epics: "For the Odyssey is no mere retelling of a traditional story. It is, like the Iliad, a profoundly original creation, a vast expansion of a controlling poetic idea."4

The epic of Gilgamesh similarly is no mere record of events or compendium of folklore. It merits the title of epic by its grandeur of subject and style. It is not a narration of events but a literary work in that it has a framework, both unified and symmetrical. It is invaluable for the detailed picture it presents of Mesopotamian culture. It is true that the poem is often viewed as a primitive, fragmented work. The fragmented state of the text sometimes prevents conclusive study of the literary value of the epic. Even so, it is possible to demonstrate the poem's unity. The poem is recognized by scholars as a poem of literary worth despite the condition of the text. Leo Oppenheim illustrates the distinctive and highly developed poetic qualities seen in the Gilgamesh epic when compared to other contemporary poems: "Only rarely - as in the isolated Old Babylonian Gilgamesh fragments - is some attention granted to the realities of a scene, an attempt made to render a non-mythological locale, or the personal reaction of the individual to the world around him. There is no scarcity of passages that do credit to the power of observation of the poet and his readiness to make use

4Ibid., p. 286.
of such observations in his imagery. Because of the conscious effort of the poet to create a picture of society in a poetic art form, the epic of Gilgamesh provides a significant record of literary and historical development.

The epic of Gilgamesh is a Mesopotamian poem centering around the life and adventures of a hero-king. Gilgamesh, the legendary king of Mesopotamian Uruk is the hero of a group of Sumerian poems describing the same period of history which the Book of Genesis describes. Samuel Kramer places the setting of the epic of Gilgamesh toward the end of the fourth and beginning of the third millennium B.C. These Sumerian texts have survived through the ages and were collected and translated into contemporary Akkadian in the seventh century at the palace of Assurbanipal, King of Assyria. The text was evidently well known even in the second millennium B.C. Versions have been found in the Babylonian, Hittite and Hurrian languages and in such varied parts of the contemporary known world as Anatolia, Palestine and Ras Shamra (Ancient Ugarit).

Most ancient texts are documents of commercial or historical nature such as business inventories or king lists. The epic of Gilgamesh, however, is literature, and its universal


appeal survives the ages. The story of Gilgamesh concerns the adventures of a human hero overwhelmed by the death of his friend and his own vain search for immortality. Within this plot structure, the epic deals with a wealth of themes - social, moral and political. It is a moving story climaxed by Gilgamesh's visit to the hero Utnapishtim to find the secret of immortality. It is the unaging struggle of the protagonist-man in conflict with the antagonist-death. The vain search of the hero unfolds in the denouement of the hero's resignation to death and bitter acceptance of his essence: to be a man is to be mortal.

Besides its importance in the realm of literature, the Gilgamesh epic has a particular importance because of its antiquity. The work employs the epic genre at least one and one half thousand years before Homer. The wide prevalence and fame of the Gilgamesh epic may very well account for some of the many similarities of the Homeric epics with their ancient predecessor. The fact that there is a possibility of the Mycenean Greeks having knowledge of the Gilgamesh epic does not make the comparison with the Eastern and Western epics seem totally absurd. Influence can be shown to be possible in two ways. The first approach is through literature. T. B. L. Webster examines pre-Homeric poems and finds similarities with these in Homer's epics. The second approach is

Webster, From Mycenae to Homer. The theories of Webster will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraph.
historical. Archaeological finds reveal actual Greek and Eastern contact through sea-trade.

First of all, let us review Professor T. B. L. Webster's theory that Greek borrowing from the East occurred early in history. The intermediary between East and West, Webster claims, are the Hittites: "Mycenean contact with the Hittites is proved by finds in Boghazkeuy, and Homer seems to have preserved some memories of the Hittites in this period, the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries." Webster continues to cite examples of Hittite influence in Homer such as the Bellerophon story (Iliad 6. 168 f.). The king of the Hittites wrote a letter concerning Bellerophon's warlike excursions from Lycia. Webster also suggests that the Chimaira may be a fourteenth century Hittite monster. The importance of the Hittites as an intermediary will be seen again in the study of the pantheon in Chapter II where we shall discuss the role of the Hittites more fully. Webster's theory of early borrowing is interesting and if true can explain the striking similarities between two literatures so far away from each other in time and place but so closely connected in content and style. Webster attributes the similarities not to recent borrowing of Eastern poetry by Homer but rather to early acquaintance of the Myceneans with Eastern poetry. Eastern elements, then are already incorporated into the traditional legends of Mycenean times before Homer inherited them.

8Ibid., p. 67.
Furthermore, both poems seem to reflect similar societies. The king in Mycenean civilization and the Eastern king are divine and through the intermediary of the kings, there is a relationship between god and man. The intermediary Hittite version of the genealogy of the gods and the kingship in heaven theme is cited\(^9\) as a possible explanation for the similar structure of the pantheon. In addition to similarities in content, there are common literary devices. For the moment, a brief inventory of the more striking similarities will suffice. Repetition, perhaps originating in court and prayer formulae, is seen in the epics in the form of epithets and repetitions of whole passages. The use of similes from nature often show man’s association with nature. Both poems also reveal the poet’s use of vivid and well-selected imagery. Myth often is intermingled with the imagery. These similarities both in content and style, reflect customs or myths of Mycenean times. Webster claims that "such borrowing is much more likely then (in Mycenean times) than later.\(^10\)

The theory of T. B. L. Webster showing the possibility of early Western and Eastern interaction is one way of explaining the similarities between the Homeric epics and the Gilgamesh epic. Professor Webster’s argument is built up from an in

\(^9\)C. Scott Littleton, "The Kingship in Heaven Theme," Myth and Law Among the Indo-Europeans, ed. J. Puhvel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 83-121. This also will be discussed in more detail in Chapter II.

\(^{10}\)Webster, From Mycenae to Homer, p. 84.
depth study of the poems themselves. Certain themes common
to both are inherent in both Eastern and Western epics. Those
ideas such as kingship which are shown to be Mycenean in
origin are early elements. If certain ideas even in Mycenean
times are already similar to Eastern ideas, it is likely that
borrowing was early.

A second way of explaining the possibility of Eastern
influence upon Greek epic is the archaeological approach. It
is shown with the help of archaeological evidence that the Greeks
were in contact with the East through sea-trade. Mycenean
pottery of the first millenium B.C. was found in Syria and
Palestine.\footnote{Alan Samuel, \textit{Myceneans in History} (Englewood Cliffs:
Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 111.} There is a probability that Myceneans could have
been acquainted with Eastern customs and myths through this
sea-trade. By Homer's time, trade with the East was even more
extensive. It is not an unreasonable conjecture to believe
that Homer may have known the story of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk.
After all, the east is not totally foreign to Homer since, in
the \textit{Iliad}, he writes about the Eastern city of Troy. The fact
that sea-trade was carried on between the Myceneans and the
East provides, at least, a possible avenue of early contact
between the two civilizations.

The fact that Crete plays a dominant role in this sea-
trade is interesting in relation to the epics we are studying.
Both the \textit{Gilgamesh} epic and the Homeric epics reveal customs
of Cretan society. The extensive sea-trade of Crete and the presence of elements of Cretan society in both Eastern and Western epics may show Crete as a possible intermediary between the civilizations, although it is important to note that the same customs of Cretan society are not seen in both. Cretan society has many customs similar to Eastern ones which are not popular on the Greek mainland. The epic of Gilgamesh shows some of these Eastern customs which are shared by Crete but not by mainland Greece. These elements are not seen in the Homeric epics. For example, both in the Gilgamesh epic and in Cretan civilization, bulls figure prominently in cult, ritual, and mythology, but do not play such a role in Homer. On the other hand, the Homeric epics and Cretan society reveal similar customs which are in no way Eastern. For example, Homer and Crete emphasize the sea and sea-trade but the poet of Gilgamesh looks at the sea in a different light. Crete, although assimilating many Eastern customs for herself, does not pass them on to Mycenaean civilization or if she attempts to bequeath an Eastern legacy to the mainland, the mainland does not accept it. Thus we see that both civilizations show contact with Crete. Crete is a mixture of Eastern and Western culture. A study of what Eastern-Cretan elements Greece failed to adopt reveals an essential difference between Eastern and Western mentality.

Before looking at these differences, let us look briefly at the historical role of Crete in sea-trade. Crete, as we
shall see, exchanged wares with both the East and the Mycenaean Greeks. Crete was settled during the Early Minoan period (2900-2100 B.C.). Minoan traders reached the Greek mainland, Egypt and the Near East by the middle of the Early Minoan period. A Babylonian seal of Hammurabi's reign was found in Crete. Alan Samuel speaks of very early Cretan trade with the eastern Mediterranean: "Cretans early in the second millennium B.C. carried on a thriving trade with the eastern part of the Mediterranean, and the wealth that flowed to the island formed the basis for their magnificent creative activity." Cretan contact with the East is earlier than that of Mycenae. During this time of peace at Crete, the island was able to borrow and give customs both to Greece and the East.

Crete and the epic of Gilgamesh share at least two common customs or modes of society. These are the bull leaping sport and the dominant role of the woman in society. In the epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu kill the "Bull of Heaven." Enkidu then performs a ritual leaping around the bull. Cretan frescos depict a similar bull-leaping sport. This bull leaping sport is not known to be practiced on the mainland nor is any such ritual mentioned in the Homeric epics.

12 Samuel, Mycenaens in History. I have relied heavily on this book for the description of Cretan trade.

13 Ibid., p. 33.

14 The ritual of bull-leaping and its use in the epic of Gilgamesh will be discussed in Chapter III.
The second point of similarity between the *Gilgamesh* epic and Cretan society is slightly more complicated. Both societies seem to give the women an important role in society. In the epic of *Gilgamesh*, it is a woman who tames the wild Enkidu. Ninsun, the goddess-mother of Gilgamesh, appeals to the sun god Shamash so that her son might be under his protection. Gilgamesh is always referred to as the son of Ninsun, and never the son of his father. In fact, there is an ambiguity in the epic concerning who the father of Gilgamesh is. Sometimes Gilgamesh refers to Lugulbanda, a semi-divine king of Uruk, as his "father." Later in the epic, Gilgamesh seeks the secret of immortality from his "father," the hero of the flood, Utnapishtim. In the *Gilgamesh* epic, the mother is the certain ancestor of the hero. In the Homeric epics, however, the hero is usually distinguished by his patronymic. Achilleus is Pelidus. Agamemnon and Menelaus are the Atreidae. On the other hand, the epithet, son of Ninsun, is continually applied to Gilgamesh. The epic of *Gilgamesh* assigns more importance to the women than do the Homeric epics.

Cretan society also gives a highly important role to the women. Statues of snake goddesses and mother goddesses found in Crete suggest the cult of fertility goddesses. The chief religious cult in Crete was that of the Great Mother Goddess whose symbol was the double axe. In Mycenaean times, however, although Hera and other goddesses are worshipped, the main religious cult gives Zeus the role of chief god and king. (It is true that the epic of *Gilgamesh* too, describes a religion
in which the male god, Enlil is the most powerful. Here, however, we are comparing Cretan and Mycenean civilizations and not Crete and the epic of *Gilgamesh.* And so we see that in Cretan religion, the woman is given a more dominant role than in early Mycenean religion. We have seen above, in comparing the epic of *Gilgamesh* with the Homeric epics, that the role of the woman is given a different value in the Eastern epic. The line of ancestry of Gilgamesh is given through his mother and not his father. We see then, that Cretan society (as opposed to Mycenean society) shares with the epic of *Gilgamesh* (as opposed to the Homeric epics) a similar regard for women which their opposites do not reveal.

Crete and the epic of *Gilgamesh* then, share the bull mythology and a quasi matriarchal society. With regard to the sea, on the other hand, Crete shares with the Homeric epics an outlook totally foreign to the *Gilgamesh* epic. Both the Homeric epics and Crete regard the sea and sea-travel as a means to progression and prosperity. The epic of *Gilgamesh,* however, looks upon the water as a destructive force. The causes for this major difference between the Eastern and Western epics will be examined in Chapter V.

However, let us look now, briefly at the homogeneous attitude of Cretan society and that portrayed by Homer for the purpose of likening Cretan society to Homeric society in regard to their optimistic outlook of the sea. Crete, as we have mentioned, relied on the sea for its livlihood. Cretans
imported and exported wares throughout the Mediterranean area. Their fondness for the sea is further illustrated by the abundance of sea animals, especially dolphins, in their frescos and on pottery. The Greek familiarity with the sea is evident in the *Odyssey*. The sea offers many obstacles to Odysseus' return home but the sea does not prevent his return. Odysseus survives the destruction of his ships and swims to safety. He is finally conveyed home to Ithaka in the ship of the Phaiakians. On his way home, Odysseus goes beyond the streams of Ocean to reach the underworld. He is making this journey to seek the advice of Teiresias whom he hopes will give him advice about his return home. Again the sea, symbolically here, stands for the road home. Teiresias tells Odysseus that he will die after he plants the oar among people who have no knowledge of the sea. His death, Teiresias tells him, will come from the sea. Again we see the ocean as a route home. This time, it is Odysseus' route to his final home after death. Thus for the Greeks, the sea, even though it may present obstacles or difficulties for the moment, is ultimately a route toward home and the resumption of normal peacetime activities.

For the heroes in the *Gilgamesh* epic, the sea has an ominous connotation. In the *Gilgamesh* epic, it seems that the same acquaintance with the sea which we saw in the Homeric epics does not exist in the *Gilgamesh* epic. Gilgamesh does not make his first expedition by sea. To reach the Country
of the Living, he journeys through the forest. The next major expedition of Gilgamesh is his search for Utnapishtim, who is far away from home and who has found eternal life, a quality not human. Here we may recall that for Odysseus the sea is a route toward home and toward death. On this journey Gilgamesh crosses the Ocean but with much difficulty. He is unfamiliar with sailing. Urshanabi, the ferry man, must give him directions before he can board the boat. Finally, after boarding the boat, Gilgamesh uses his hands for masts and his clothes for sails because he is ignorant of the technical instruments (masts and sails) of navigation. Gilgamesh's visit with Utnapishtim does not achieve its end. He does not find eternal life across the sea where he clearly does not belong as Utnapishtim tells him: "The man who comes is none of mine." Gilgamesh hears from Utnapishtim the story of the deluge in which water destroys almost all humanity. The final fight of Gilgamesh to do something super human (that is his attempt to be rejuvenated by the magic herb) again ends in failure through an incident involving water. His desire to drink water leads him to a pool where a water snake snatches away his magic herb. In the Gilgamesh epic, water represents a route to eternal life. But, it belongs to the gods, not to humans. Gilgamesh offers the sun god, Shamash, clear water to drink when he asks the god for protection. The god seems

to jealously possess water in its life giving aspects but to mankind is left the destructive power of water. Thus, water in the *Gilgamesh* epic is an aspect of nature which man cannot control. Furthermore, water operates more often as a detriment to man than as a life giving source. The epic of *Gilgamesh* contrasts the Homeric epics in this attitude toward water. This time, Crete seems closer to the Homeric epics rather than to the epic of *Gilgamesh*.

To return to Crete then, we see this island sharing both in customs and attitudes distinctively Eastern and in those distinctively Western. We have already seen that Crete's contact with the East was early. Judging from the antiquity of the mother-goddess figures, we can assume that this mother goddess cult was an early cult in Crete. If it was borrowed from the East, it was done so relatively early. Once Crete was in contact with the East, sea-trade naturally was already considered a means toward advancing their civilization. The sea was not a destructive force to the Cretans. The Cretans were sufficiently established in their own beliefs not to adopt the pessimistic attitude toward the sea which we consider to be an Eastern characteristic. Likewise, the Myceneans did not adopt this pessimistic attitude. It may also be possible to believe that the Myceneans were sufficiently established in their religious customs not to be totally overwhelmed by their acquaintance with new religious rites (the bull ritual and worship of mother-goddess) from
the East if they did learn about them. A difference in mentality does not necessarily mean that the two civilizations never mixed.

In this way, then, we can see that Greek contact with the East was quite possible. Similarities may be more than just coincidence. Even marked differences do not rule out the chance of exchange of ideas between civilizations. The Gilgamesh epic may then have had some influence, direct or indirect, on the Homeric epics. Beyond this point, I will not try to explain how an influence was possible or even where the epic of Gilgamesh influenced the Homeric epics since this is in no way possible to show conclusively. I have only pointed out that influence is possible.

In the rest of the paper, I will compare and contrast the Homeric and Gilgamesh epics and the attitudes of the Eastern and Western peoples as revealed in the epics. First, we shall study the structure of the theogony which each poem inherits. We shall find that these two theogonies have a common intermediary. Then we shall compare the role the gods play in each epic and their relation to mortals. Next, a study of the heroes will continue to reveal that the Homeric epics place much more importance on the individual. These epics reflect historical, religious and social customs of their civilizations but at the same time reveal the conscious effort of the poets to construct a work of literature. Both Eastern and Western poems merit the classification of epic.
I shall try to show that many of the similarities can be attributed to the genre of epic and the differences are acceptable variations within the genre. These variations are due to the national characteristics which are described in the epic. Hence, a comparison of these ancient epics reveals elements inherent to the genre of epic.
Perhaps the most striking similarity and at the same time, a distinct difference between the epic of *Gilgamesh* and the Homeric epics, can be found in a study of the gods. Two pantheons of similar structure form an integral part of each epic. Both have anthropomorphic gods organized in a hierarchy within which rivalry among the gods themselves sometimes occurs. Furthermore, individual characters in one epic resemble those in the other. The theme of the gods' immortality vs. human mortality is common to both. Gods take direct part in the plot in both epics. But the gods play a very different role in each epic. The Eastern epic portrays harsh gods against whom the heroes are constantly struggling. In the Western epic, the gods of the Greek religion are respected. Men offer sacrifice and pray to the gods. But, in addition to this religious aspect, the gods in the Homeric epics play another role. They descend to human level in that they take sides in battle together with men and fight the opposing army composed of both men and gods. Homer portrays the gods in this role in a much less serious vain than the *Gilgamesh* epic presents its gods. Although the Eastern and Western civilizations structured their pantheons along similar
lines, the attitude towards the gods has undergone a change. The *Gilgamesh* epic shows man struggling against gods who are not likely to be overcome. The Homeric epic shows gods and men fighting on the same level.

First, let us discuss the structure of the pantheon in each epic. A theogony centered around a king-god and the ensuing revolution by his descendants is common to both Eastern and Western tradition. Hesiod’s *Theogony* is the main source for the Greek version of the succession of the gods. This version is reflected in Homer. The *Gilgamesh* epic supplies us with a mixture of names of Hittite (Anu) and Babylonian (Ea) divinities. It has been demonstrated by C. Scott Littleton, that the Hittite-Hurrian theogony is similar to the Greek theogony. From here we can begin to see the Hittite Theogony as an intermediary between the Homeric epics and the *Gilgamesh* epic. The following chart shows the succession of the gods in the Greek, Hittite and Babylonian versions:

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2 Littleton, “The kingship in Heaven Theme,” *Myth and Law Among the Indo-Europeans*, ed. J. Fuhvel. p. 94. For the description of the similarities between the Hittite and Greek versions of the succession story, I have relied heavily on this source. The chart which follows is modeled on pp. 116-117 of Littleton.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
<th>Second Generation</th>
<th>Third Generation</th>
<th>Challenge to Authority</th>
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<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Ouranos</td>
<td>Kronos</td>
<td>Zeus</td>
<td>Typhoeus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hurrian- Hittite</td>
<td>Anu</td>
<td>Kumarbi</td>
<td>Teshub</td>
<td>Ullikummi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Babylonian</td>
<td>Apsu</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>Marduk</td>
<td>Tiamat</td>
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Alalu rules nine years until he is succeeded by Anu, who overthrows his father. Anu, a sky god, in turn, is succeeded by his son, Kumarbi. In the ninth year of Anu's reign, Kumarbi rebels. The first point of similarity between the Greek and Hittite mythology can be found in the fact that Ouranos, the first king of the heavens, is overthrown by his youngest son, Kronos. The emasculation of Ouranos by Kronos renders the father powerless and Kronos assumes the position of king. Similarly, the emasculation of Anu by Kumarki destroys the rule of the first generation and places Kumarbi, the second generation figure in authority. In the Greek version, Kronos is then overthrown by Zeus. This succession may correspond to the succession of Kumarbi by the weather god Teshub. There are further parallels between Zeus and Teshub in the fact that both control the weather. The foremost weapon of Zeus is the thunder-bolt. Teshub is known as a god of storm. The third generation remains in power. The authority of this generation is challenged by a monster figure. The third generation conquers the monster and thereby affirms its power. Zeus proves his power by defeating Typhoeus, the son of Earth, a challenge
to his authority. A test of Teshub's power is revealed in the Hittite "Song of Ullikummi." In this text, Teshub is challenged by Ullikummi but like Zeus succeeds in establishing his authority. Another member of the Hittite theogony and a main goddess in the Gilgamesh epic, is introduced - Ishtar, the sister of Teshub. She comforts Teshub who is distraught at the actions of Ullikummi. She also tries to enchant Ullikummi by music in order to help her brother overthrow Ullikummi. The Babylonian god Ea who plays a dominant role in the Gilgamesh epic, is also introduced in the "Song of Ullikummi." Ea helps to render Ullikummi powerless. As we see from the chart, a similar succession of gods takes place in Babylonian myth. The Babylonian god Ea is incorporated into the story in the Hittite poem just as the epic of Gilgamesh incorporates into its story both Babylonian and Hittite divinities. In the "Song of Ullikummi," we not only see that the Teshub-Ullikummi battle resembles the Zeus-Typhoeus conflict, but we also see several of the same gods appearing both in a Hittite poem and in the Gilgamesh epic. Thus the Hittite version of the theogony reveals a structure with elements common to both the Homeric and Gilgamesh versions of the pantheon.

3Hesiod, Theogony, xii, 820-1022.

Now that we have established the Hittites as a possible intermediary between East and West and have thus shown that there is some common ground between the gods of Eastern and Western tradition, we can now proceed to compare the gods in Homer and Hesiod with those in *Gilgamesh*. Although certain similarities exist between a particular Greek god and his Eastern counterpart, very often an Eastern divinity shares various functions and roles with several Greek gods. For example, Enlil is the father of the gods in the *Gilgamesh* epic. He presides over the council of the gods and it is he who declares the fate of Enkidu. In these respects he resembles Zeus, the father of the gods, who also, presides over the council of the gods. Enlil, son of Anu, is clearly the most powerful of the gods. Anu plays a minor role. Anu is mentioned but he is not the most powerful of the gods. Enkidu is made in the image of Anu, an idea which preserves a belief that heroes are created in the image of gods. This also gives the impression that Anu was once powerful in that it is a tradition that heroes are created in his image. Enlil overrules Anu's decision that Gilgamesh must die. This less prominent role of Anu, the god of the firmament, recalls the successive overthrow of father by son which we have seen in Hesiod and in the Hittite mythology. In any event, Enlil's supremacy in the *Gilgamesh* epic shows that Enlil was considered the most powerful god in Sumerian mythology at the time of Gilgamesh just as Zeus is supreme in the Homeric epics.
Another point of similarity is that Enlil is identified as a god of the mountain. Zeus resides on Mt. Olympus, the home of the gods. When Gilgamesh seeks Utnapishtim, who has won immortal life among the gods, he must pass the mountain range of Mashu. It seems that the mountain has a significance as a place sacred to the gods in both epics.

The goddess Ishtar, in the Gilgamesh epic, resembles at times the Ishtar in the Hittite "Song of Ullikummi." At other times, she seems to resemble goddesses in the Homeric epics. And again, the Ishtar of the Gilgamesh epic has qualities peculiar to this epic alone. First of all, we see the Gilgamesh Ishtar playing a role similar to her counterpart in the Hittite "Song of Ullikummi." The Hittite Ishtar, sister of Teshub, helps her brother to defeat the monster Ullikummi, a challenge to his power. She does this by enchanting Ullikummi by her music and thus rendering him powerless. The Gilgamesh Ishtar, the goddess of love, and daughter of Anu seems to assume a similar role of enchantress. She has magical powers. She entices men to accept her love and then changes them to animals. Gilgamesh who has just trespassed upon the Country of the Living, the territory of the gods presents a threat to the gods. Ishtar tries to entice Gilgamesh into living with her. This is a peaceful life relatively free from any adventure which would threaten the supremacy of the gods. Enlil later accuses Shamash of joining with Gilgamesh and helping him defeat Humbaba. Is Enlil
afraid of a threat to his supremacy when he sees Shamash and Gilgamesh join together in a common purpose? If so, Ishtar seems to be trying to deter Gilgamesh from his purpose just as the Hittite Ishtar tries to enchant Ulikummi to prevent him from attempting to overthrow Teshub.

The Ishtar of the *Gilgamesh* epic also, has several parallels in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In some respects she resembles Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Ishtar is the daughter of Anu, the god of the firmament. Aphrodite is the daughter of Ouranos, the sky god. Both Ishtar and Aphrodite are goddesses of love and fertility. Yielding to love's temptation results in a manifestation of love's opposite, hate in the form of war or destruction. Aphrodite, in the *Iliad* is responsible for the Trojan War. As the goddess of love, she organized Paris' abduction of Helen. Paris, yielding to the temptation of love, causes the Trojan War. We see the same love-destruction sequence in the *Gilgamesh* epic. Ishtar punishes those who yield to love's temptation by changing them to various animals.\(^5\) Ishtar tempts Gilgamesh also with her love. She offers him kingship and promises the fertility of his animals.\(^6\) When Gilgamesh refuses to love her, she calls a curse (the Bull of Heaven) upon Uruk as punishment for Gilgamesh's rejection of her love.


\(^6\)Ibid., p. 51.
Ishtar also resembles other goddesses in Homer besides Aphrodite. In the *Odyssey*, Kalypso and Circe seem to resemble Ishtar. Both try to detain Odysseus with offers of love just as Ishtar tempts Gilgamesh. Both Gilgamesh and Odysseus are able to resist. Circe, like Ishtar has magical powers which she uses to change her lovers into animals.\(^7\) We will discuss the effects of these goddesses on the heroes, Gilgamesh and Odysseus in Chapter III. For the moment, it is sufficient to point out that Ishtar resembles not one figure in the Homeric epics but several.

Ishtar is of special interest in *Gilgamesh* in that she is seen in this epic in her cruel aspect. This cruel nature of Ishtar is unlike that of her counterparts in the Homeric versions. Unlike Aphrodite, the Ishtar of *Gilgamesh* does not have a double aspect to her nature. Aphrodite both destroys and rescues from destruction. We have seen Aphrodite's destructive power in her instigation of the Trojan War. But Aphrodite also rescues her favorites, and constantly helps the Trojans oppose the Greeks. Ishtar in the *Gilgamesh* epic never rescues anyone. Unlike Circe and Kalypso who agree to help Odysseus after he refuses their love, Ishtar punishes Gilgamesh after he refuses her love. This wholly cruel aspect of Ishtar is seen in the *Gilgamesh* epic also.

Not even Sumerian mythology views Ishtar as entirely cruel. In Sumerian mythology, she is the goddess of love and fertility.

\(^7\)*Odyssey*, 10. 237-241.
and can be helpful to those honoring her. In *Gilgamesh*, besides sending down the "Bull of Heaven," she is described by *Gilgamesh* in terms of her cruelty: "Thou art but a brazier which goes out in the cold; / A back door which does not keep out blast and windstorm; / A palace which crushes the valiant."

Love seen as a destructive force contributes to the pessimism which pervades the epic. Ishtar is the temptation of love which *Gilgamesh* must avoid. We have seen that love is followed by destruction in the *Gilgamesh* epic. It contributes to a pessimistic attitude that all results in destruction.

The goddess' well-known cruelty to other lovers before *Gilgamesh* serves as a warning to the hero to flee Ishtar. She not only punishes her lovers but causes them to be lamented by others. For example, Silili, the mother of the stallion whom Ishtar condemns to gallop under the spur and lash, laments the fate of her son. Tammuz is another example. The whole world laments for Tammuz who has loved Ishtar. Tammuz is a lesser divinity in Sumerian mythology. His death is lamented by the Mesopotamians. It represents the seasonal death of the crops. Even though Ishtar is a goddess of fertility, she uses her power to destroy nature. It is this aspect of Ishtar that is so evident in *Gilgamesh*. Ishtar's victims are the

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9 Ibid., p. 51-52. All the above examples of Ishtar's cruelty to her lovers are listed here in the text of the epic.
shepherd-bird, the lion, the stallion, the keeper of the herd, the gardener of crops, all associated with nature. Later in the epic, Ishtar sends the "Bull of Heaven," a drought which destroys crops. Ishtar is seen merely in her destructive aspects. To this pessimism, a tone of despair is added. Even though Gilgamesh resists Ishtar's love, Ishtar still sends the Bull of Heaven as a punishment for Gilgamesh and all Uruk. It seems that the Ishtar of Gilgamesh is incapable of an act of voluntary kindness to mortals.

Let us now turn to a goddess in the Gilgamesh epic who does work in behalf of mortals. Ninsun, the mother of Gilgamesh resembles several goddesses in Homer. An obvious similarity is that of Ninsun and Thetis. Both Ninsun and Thetis are minor divinities. They are not important so much as goddesses who have a high place in the hierarchy of the gods as they are in the role they are given in the epics. This role consists in influencing their sons. We shall discuss the effect they have upon their sons in the next chapter. As goddesses, they both are reputed for their wisdom and have the gift of prophecy. The mother of Gilgamesh, "who knows all," interprets her son's dream and prophesies the coming of Enkidu. Thetis, too, knows her son's future and weeps for what she knows will happen to Achilleus. Apart from the

10 Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. J. B. Fritschard, p. 46.
11 Iliad, 18. 52-53.
parallels of the goddess-son relationship, there is an incident involving Ninsun that resembles one in the Iliad. Ninsun serves Shamash as a royal priestess. When Gilgamesh is about to make the journey to Humbaba, Ninsun begs Shamash to protect him. Her prayers are preceded by a ritual adornment to make herself beautiful and alluring to Shamash.\textsuperscript{12}

The adornment of Ninsun seems to be a ritual connected with the worship of Shamash by a temple priestess. In Gilgamesh, the incident is a religious matter, quite serious in nature.

This incident involving the goddess Ninsun reminds us of an incident in the Iliad involving another goddess, Hera. These incidents show the different attitudes toward the gods in each epic. The epic of Gilgamesh sees the gods only in their religious and awesome aspect. The Homeric epic is able to laugh at things divine as we see in the following incident. The goddess Hera in the Iliad also adorns herself to entice Zeus.\textsuperscript{13} She borrows a belt from Aphrodite and with it Hera assumes the role of a goddess of love, a role usually attributed to Aphrodite. Hera wishes to craftily divert Zeus' attention from battle. On the other hand, there is no indication that Ninsun is tricking Shamash. In the Iliad, the incident is light. It is amusing that Hera so easily tricks the almighty father of the gods and men by her womanly charms even if she

\textsuperscript{12}Epic of Gilgamesh, trans., N. K. Sandars, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{13}Iliad, 14. 185 f.
must borrow a belt from Aphrodite. The detailed description of Hera's adornment adds to the humor of the incident. It is true that a mere incident of a goddess' adornment for the purpose of charming another god does not necessarily show any influence. However, it does show a contrast between the Eastern poet's serious attitude toward religious ritual and the Western poet's light, almost jovial attitude. The Iliad scene may very well be a parody of a religious ritual.

So far in the Gilgamesh epic, we have seen an all-powerful father of the gods (Enlil), a goddess shown only in terms of her cruelty (Ishtar) and a mother goddess (Ninsun) who tries to help her mortal son through solemn religious rites. Indeed, there is a need for a god who can aid mortals. Shamash tries to fulfill this need. The sun god Shamash is a kind god to the people in Gilgamesh. He is honored and revered even by other goddesses such as Ninsun. The sun plays a dominant role in Gilgamesh because of his relationship to mortals. Many functions of the sun are united in the person of the sun god Shamash. His duties are many: the god of light, the one responsible for bringing the days by his daily return from his trip over the mountain, the friend to mortals. Shamash is kind to Gilgamesh and Enkidu and helps them in their endeavors. He helps humans even at the risk of incurring Enlil's wrath, for he is not supreme among the gods. He owns the Cedar Forest and helps Enkidu and Gilgamesh slay Humbaba, thus incurring Enlil's wrath. Even though this is
Shamash's own territory, the sun god still must answer to Enlil for this deed. Enlil is angry not only that Humbaba was killed but significantly that Shamash can descend to help mortals. He reproaches him: "Much like one of their comrades, thou didst daily go down to them." Shamash's kindness to mortals is striking because in the epic of Gilgamesh, the gods are presented in a pessimistic light. They are seen as hostile to mortals. Enlil, for example, is relentless in his decision that Enkidu must die. Ishtar, as we have seen, is portrayed as a destructive goddess who sends the Bull of Heaven to Uruk. Shamash, however, is truly the light in the darkness for mortals. Although not supreme among the gods, Shamash does have some forces under his control with which he helps mortals - the winds for example, which he sends forth to help conquer Humbaba.

In this role as comrade to mortals, Shamash represents the beginning of a transition from pessimism to optimism. In a conception of the cosmos as alien to mankind, Shamash attempts to be friendly to mankind. Shamash is a transition from a system of divine governance which shows no mercy for mankind to a system of justice. Because Shamash is not supreme among the gods, the transition can not be complete in him. The completion of this transition to the new system is left for Ea whom we shall discuss later.

14Epic of Gilgamesh, trans., J. B. Pritchard, p. 56.
A god similar to Shamash is notably absent in the Homeric epics. A god playing the role of Shamash is not needed in the Iliad or Odyssey because these works lack the pessimism we have seen in the Gilgamesh epic; Zeus is a just god who is concerned with men and heroes. Zeus unlike Enlil and Ishtar is not wont to punish unrelentlessly. Hera, on the other hand, is anti-human. Zeus constantly fights the anti-human attacks of his wife, Hera. The plot of the Iliad centers around this conflict: Zeus puts forth his plans and Hera and her friends oppose them. In the Gilgamesh epic, the struggle is not so equally balanced. The gods are directly opposed to and jealous of mankind. The conflict is between unequal contestants. There is a need for an equity figure such as Shamash.

There are several gods in the Iliad who oppose Zeus' divine plan. In the gods' game with Zeus, mortals sometimes suffer. These gods are quite different from the kindly Shamash who risks incurring Enlil's wrath for the sake of mortals. For example, Apollo is the antithesis of the kindly Shamash: "Shaker of the earth, you would have me be as one without prudence/ if I am to fight even you for the sake of insignificant/ mortals, who are as leaves are."\(^{15}\) Apollo has no concern for humans. They are like playtoys in his game with Zeus. Helios also is hostile to humans in that he

\(^{15}\) Iliad, 21. 462-63.
seeks vengeance on them. The antithesis between Helios and Shamash is even more striking when we realize that Helios and Shamash share the role of sun god. Like Shamash in his role as the Sun, Helios "brings joy to mortals." Helios too makes a daily journey to heaven and back to earth. When Odysseus' crew kill the sun god's cattle, Helios has no power to punish them on his own. He appeals to Zeus to avenge him and threatens to bring his light to Hades if Zeus does not avenge him. At this threat, Zeus agrees and the crew of Odysseus is destroyed.

Light imagery is used in both Eastern and Western epics but its significance is quite different in each. Light imagery supplies to poets a device for indicating a new day. In Homer, the coming of rosy fingered Eos, the sister of Helios, heralds a new day. The coming of Aya, the wife of Shamash, in Gilgamesh also heralds a new day. The passage of time is thus conveyed by the cycle of light-darkness. Except for the common function of heralding a new day, light has different meanings in each epic. The absence of light is ominous in the Gilgamesh epic but welcomed in the Homeric epics. The absence of light is frightening for Gilgamesh when he walks through darkness to arrive at the abode of Utnapishtim. Enkidu is frightened when Gilgamesh falls asleep after he fells the Cedar. Sleep is close to death.

16 Odyssey, 12. 269.
In the Eastern epic, the qualities of the friendly and compassionate god and judge are attributed to the one who delivers the world from darkness. To the Greeks, on the other hand, sleep can bring rest and peace. Darkness is not necessarily frightening. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus welcomes sleep and is refreshed by it most of the time. For example, when Odysseus lands at Phaiakia, he welcomes sleep as a respite and means of refreshing himself after his difficult labors.\(^{17}\) It is not surprising then, that the Greeks do not view the sun-god as the helper of mankind. In the same way, it is not surprising that the *Gilgamesh* epic portrays the sun-god as the one who is kind to men.

The role of Shamash as symbol of justice is superseded by the appearance of Ea. The god Ea appears only in the story of the flood told by Utnapishtim. The flood story in the *Gilgamesh* epic is preserved on a Babylonia tablet. Ea is a Babylonian divinity who replaces Enki in Sumerian mythology. The flood story itself is originally a myth of Sumerian origin. In the Sumerian fragment,\(^ {18}\) Enki the water god saves mankind from the deluge. In the Babylonian tablet of the *Gilgamesh* epic which contains the deluge story, the god Ea has taken the place of Enki. Ea represents a god friendly to mankind. The fact that Ea whose prototype is the water-god Enki is the one chosen to be the savior is significant. For the people of

\(^{17}\) *Odyssey*, 5. 491-3.

the Tigris and Euphrates river valley, water was the source of life. The rivers' silt deposit left the land fertile for agriculture. To these people to whom water was friendly and helpful, a deluge seemed too much to bear. It is certainly possible to see how a myth describing the deluge as the punishment of the gods could have arisen. It is natural for the water-god, who has always been the source of life to intervene in behalf of mankind. The flood story is a story within a story. In the deluge story, a god intervenes in behalf of a man when another god inflicts an unjust punishment. This is significant to Gilgamesh who feels that death is a punishment mankind has not merited. His appeal to Utnapishtim is not successful. Shamash is not able to save Gilgamesh. The story within a story has a happy ending but the story itself ends tragically.

The Odyssey presents exactly the reverse situation. Odysseus suffers throughout his travels. He is shipwrecked. He loses his companions. His homecoming is detained for many years. When he arrives at Ithaka, he endures the hostilities of the suitors. Odysseus is treated unjustly throughout the Odyssey. Athene realizes Odysseus is innocent. She appeals to Zeus to save Odysseus who has faithfully performed sacrifices in the god's honor.19 It is true that Odysseus offends Poseidon by wounding his son, Cyclops, but

19 Odyssey, 1. 60-63.
these wanderings are punishment enough for Odysseus. Through Athene's intervention, Odysseus is not deprived of homecoming. The story of Odysseus ends happily. He is given the chance to take revenge upon the suitors who deserve the punishment Odysseus gives them. Athene saves Odysseus and the suitor's families from further needless bloodshed. The mere command of Athene stops the battle. The words of Ea in the Gilgamesh epic immediately quell the wrath of Enlil. Enlil is accused by Ea of inflicting an unjust punishment just as Athene reproaches Zeus for Odysseus' needless sufferings. The epithet of Athene polyboulos 20 is similar to an epithet of Ea "who can devise plans." 21 The adventures of Odysseus are little episodes of injustices which are blotted out by the final imposition of justice by Athene.

It is interesting to note that the concept of justice as presented by Athene at the end of the Odyssey is not present in the Iliad. Agamemnon unjustly deprives Achilleus of his prize for valor and Achilleus retaliates by withdrawing from battle. The quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilleus is never really resolved by a code of justice superimposed by any outside authority. Achilleus does not accept any of the gifts which Agamemnon offers as retribution. The death of Patroclus is the real event that drives Achilleus to enter battle. He

20 Ibid., 16. 282.
aims to kill Hektor and thereby avenge the death of Patroclus. This revenge parallels the just revenge Odysseus takes upon the suitors. At the command of Thetis, Achilleus causes no more suffering to Priam and surrenders the body of Hektor to the old man. This noble action violates the "revenge at all costs" system upon which the Iliad is structured. This individual action of Achilleus is a progression toward humanism which is not clearly seen in the Gilgamesh epic.

The pictures of the underworld in the Odyssey and in Gilgamesh reveal an emphasis on humanity in the Homeric epic. In the beginning of Gilgamesh, humans seem to be created for the purpose of serving the gods. The emphasis on man's individuality grows somewhat as the epic continues. In Gilgamesh, the gods control men. Enkidu is created in the image of Anu. He is created by the gods to be a rival for Gilgamesh. His friendship with Gilgamesh is preordained by the gods. Before Enkidu dies he reveals his dream which is a vision of life after death. The description is grim. The House of Darkness is a place of no return. The "spirits" eat clay and are clothed "like birds, with wings for garments."22 The House of Dust is a little better. These people are seen roasting meat and leading a life similar to life before death. The residents of the House of Dust seem to be those who have

served the gods—the princes, "doubles of Anu and Enlil," high priests and acolytes and laver-anointers of the gods. Throughout the epic it seems man is destined to serve the gods and die. But, Siduri presents another aspect of mankind. Man can lead a happy, fruitful life before death and according to Siduri, this "is the task of mankind."²³

In the Odyssey, man seems to have a brighter future. Odysseus is not totally controlled by the will of the gods. His own actions are able to influence his destiny. His sacrifices to Zeus help Zeus decide to let him return home. Odysseus constantly defies control by others. He escapes Kalypso, Circe, the Cyclops, the Scylla and Charybdis, and the Sirens. Control by others is replaced by self-control. The individual plays an important part in Odysseus' trip to the underworld. The shades are mentioned by name and described in detail. Each has an individual identity beyond his identity as man. The seeds of humanism are found in the attention given to individuals and their accomplishments.

The individuals mentioned by name in Enkidu's vision of after-life are gods who reside in the House of Dust. Sumuqan, the god of cattle, is there. Ereshkigal is queen of the netherworld. Belit-Seri is recorder of the nether world. The remainder of this tablet is unfortunately lost. The list

²³Ibid., p. 64.
of gods seems to be the beginning of a catalog not of mortals but of gods. The only mortal in the list is a King Etana, king of Kish, who was carried to heaven by an eagle and merits after-life among the gods. Again, as in the Hittite "Kingship in Heaven" theogony, the idea of divine kingship is suggested. The idea of divine kingship is a popular belief in Mycenean civilization as well as in Eastern tradition. The interference of gods in mortal affairs is common in Homeric epics and in the Gilgamesh epic. Homer lives in a time many years after the Mycenean civilization. In Homer's age kingship is no longer viewed as divine. This may in part explain his humourous outlook in regard to the gods and religious rituals. The poet of Gilgamesh on the other hand has a serious attitude toward the gods. In his time, men evidently still hold strong beliefs in the gods' control of men. The oldest part of the Gilgamesh epic is the story of deluge. Here the poet looks back to a belief in a time when man was so close to the gods that he was capable of achieving immortality as Utnapishtim did.

The mortal individuals whose deeds are glorified in the Gilgamesh epic achieve recognition after death and are even given god-like status but not immortality. The epic seems to regard the gods as ideals which humans should aspire to emulate. Heroes resemble gods in their physical characteristics.

24Webster, From Mycenae to Homer, p. 69.
Enkidu is created in the image of Anu. Heroes are reputed for their strength and wisdom. Heroes even strive for immortality. Actually, they are striving to lose their essence of humanity. For Gilgamesh, there can be no happiness without loss of humanity. For Odysseus, there can be no happiness without his humanity. Odysseus declines Kalypso's offer of immortality. He is at rest only when he reaches Ithaka with his mortal wife and simple mortal pleasures where he will calmly await death. This greater respect for humanity helps to explain why Homer dares to take the gods much less seriously than the poet of *Gilgamesh* would ever attempt.

Utnapishtim, the man become god, is an example of a man who gives up humanity to become a god. He is envied by Gilgamesh who seeks Utnapishtim to find the secret of eternal life. Odysseus seeks Teiresias to find out how to get home and re-establish his identity as man, as king of Ithaka and wife of Penelope. Teiresias does not give him directions to help him get home. He does give him advice which confirms his humanity. He tells him he will reach home and then after a long journey death will come in an unwarlike way. Odysseus does not resist his fate. He accepts it without question or complaint. Utnapishtim reveals the story of the flood and gives indication that in obeying the gods, he chose to give up his humanity. He tears down his house, and gives up worldly possessions. The gods command him to seek life, an attribute

25 *Odyssey* 11. 135.
of the gods.\textsuperscript{26} Ea says that Utnapishtim perceived the secret of the gods. Enlil then declares his transition from human to divine: "Hitherto Utnapishtim has been but human. Henceforth Utnapishtim and his wife shall be like unto us gods. Utnapishtim shall reside far away, at the mouth of the rivers."\textsuperscript{27} He is forced to be separated from humanity. The rest of the flood story emphasizes Gilgamesh's humanity in spite of his eager desire for immortality. Gilgamesh is unable to stay awake. He is ready to deceive Utnapishtim by saying he had not slept at all. This attempt to deceive is called "human"\textsuperscript{28} by Utnapishtim. He can not find immortality. But Utnapishtim tells him how to find the plant which will make him young again. Gilgamesh loses even this through a human desire. He is attracted by the cool water. Gilgamesh does not give up his humanity although he expresses a desire to be immortal.

The gods in \textit{Gilgamesh} do not have as many human attributes as those in Homer. Homer's gods are like men except that they are immortal, live on Olympus, eat ambrosia and sip nectar. The gods in \textit{Gilgamesh} do not fight battles. Shamash helps Gilgamesh kill Humbaba but not by fighting. He sends forth winds. The gods keep themselves separated from humans

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Epic of Gilgamesh}, J. B. Pritchard, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., p. 71.

and seem to control them as puppets. Athens appears in close association to Odysseus as a comrade and helper. The gods in Gilgamesh are set apart from men. The humans are like gods. But the gods are never like humans. In Homer's Odyssey, Athene disguises herself as a human. In Homer, the gods descend to human level.

And so we see a divine-human conflict in the Gilgamesh epic. The inequality of the strength of the combattants makes the outcome of the battle certain. Furthermore, mortals seem unable to avoid clashes with the gods. This conflict provides a continual atmosphere of pessimism and despair for mortals. The tensions between man and god (Gilgamesh and Enlil, Enkidu and Ishtar) provides the setting for the epic. This same tension is recreated within the hero himself. The divine element in Gilgamesh sends him in search of mortality but the human element keeps him from achieving his goal. This tension within the hero provides the conflict for the drama which unfolds throughout the epic.
CHAPTER III

HEROES

It is clear then that there is some connection or exchange of ideas between the peoples of the East and West in the formation of the theogony as seen in the *Gilgamesh* epic and in the Homeric epics. Both theogonies reveal a similar structure and hierarchy of power. The gods play an important role in primitive epics. They are characters in the epics and greatly influence the action and outcome of the plot. Gods, however, are not essential to the epic genre itself. It is possible to write a work without including the machinery of the gods. This work may still be classified as an epic. The French epic *Song of Roland* is such an epic. The epic usually concerns itself with the fortunes and deeds of a single individual which gives the work its total unity. Although Homer's epics and the *Gilgamesh* epic contain elements of fantasy and folklore, they express a message through the success or tragedy of their respective heroes. It is this message and not the elements of fantasy and folklore which gives the epic its grandeur. Often these fanciful tales are employed to give the epic an air of grandeur. Hearing a fanciful adventure described with much detail and in a pompous style common to the epic genre instills the listener with awe. The modern reader may be distracted by
the grandeur of language and style which accompanies the
description of fanciful tales. The actions of the epic heroes
contain the clue to the real message of each epic. In order
to explore the meaning and message, let us examine the heroes
and their roles in the epics.

First let us examine in general and then in particular the
nature of the heroes. The conflicts of the heroes of the
Gilgamesh epic and the Iliad are essentially of the same type.
Achilleus and Gilgamesh are heroes in the ancient sense of
the word. In ancient times, the nature of the hero was closely
connected with religion. One was not a hero merely by virtue
of his strength but rather he was strong because, by nature,
the hero was part human and part divine. This partly divine
nature sets them apart from the rest of humanity. The Iliad
contains many heroes who are semi-divine such as Sarpedon or
Aeneas. Homer, however, concentrates on the hero, Achilleus,
the son of a mortal father, Peleus, and a goddess-mother, Thetis.
Achilleus, son of Peleus, is constantly reminded of his nature,
mortality. Achilleus, son of Thetis, is acutely aware of the
power in his god-like strength.

A series of events beginning with the imposed authority
of a mere mortal Agamemnon, is climaxed by the death of
Achilleus' other self, Patroclus. Achilleus envisages himself
as a warrior endowed with divine strength. With this power
he has contributed more than his share to the advancement of
the Greek position at Troy. When Agamemnon takes away Briseis, his prize for valour in war, Achilleus retaliates by depriving the Greeks of his divine-like strength in battle. Achilleus will not allow himself to be controlled by the authority of a mortal. In the case of Achilleus, the human-divine conflict within Achilleus' nature not only sets him apart from society but sets him in opposition to Agamemnon. Achilleus tries to prove his superiority by virtue of his divine strength. Agamemnon tries to affirm his authority derived from his leadership over the Greek army. Furthermore, this human-divine duality is a conflict within the hero himself. Patroclus, the close friend of Achilleus, symbolizes Achilleus' other self or his human half. When Patroclus dies, Achilleus realizes that he too as a human being must die. A pathetic denouement to this series of events is achieved by the appeal of Priam to Achilleus, mortal to mortal. When Priam appeals for his son Hector's slain body to be returned for burial, Achilleus gives back the body. He yields to Priam's plea but he would never yield to Agamemnon's authority. The conflict between Agamemnon and Achilleus, as we have seen, is a confrontation of divine strength pitted against human authority. The death of Patroclus makes Achilleus more aware of death and in particular the mortal essence of his human half. Achilles comes to a tragic realization that his divine half cannot completely overshadow his mortal half. Even if his divine-like strength sets him apart from man, his mortality
makes him no better than the common lot of man. The confusion between divine and human is set at rest at least temporarily when Achilleus identifies himself with humanity through his act of kindness to Priam. Thus we see the divine-human conflict manifested both inwardly within the hero and outwardly in the argument of Achilleus and Agamemnon.

This same conflict is seen in the character of Gilgamesh. He too has a dual nature which sets him in conflict with the world and produces tension within himself. His dual nature is revealed in this way. Gilgamesh, according to the narrative of the epic is two-thirds divine and one-third human. He is the son of the goddess, Ninsun. His conflict with the world is manifested in the following way. As a king with divinely invested authority, he tries to exercise his supremacy over his people. They are unhappy with their king whom they see as human. They see a human becoming more and more powerful and exercising almost divine and omnipotent authority. The people at this time are beginning to see their king as a human figure. It is significant to note here that in the Iliad, the heroes and kings are separate. In Gilgamesh they are one. The people of Uruk unhappy with the growing and insolent authority of their monarch appeal to the gods for a rival for Gilgamesh. The gods send Enkidu who becomes a friend to Gilgamesh. The people of Uruk in
conflict with the monarch-hero, divine-human Gilgamesh outwardly reveal the divine human conflict.

Like the *Iliad*, the divine human conflict is revealed within the hero through the establishment of a friend relationship. The conflict within Gilgamesh is manifested in this way. Gilgamesh believes he is partly divine and hopes for immortality, the fullness of a divine nature. His humanity, of course, prevents immortality since the essence of humanity is to be mortal. Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu, like Patroclus for Achilleus, symbolizes another self for Gilgamesh. Enkidu is like Gilgamesh in many ways. The death of Gilgamesh's companion brings him to an awareness of his own mortality. The divine part of Gilgamesh refuses to yield to the human. He continues to search in vain for immortality. The inner conflict of Gilgamesh (his divine desire to be immortal and to thus triumph over his humanity) is first expressed through the Enkidu-Gilgamesh symbolic relationship. His search for humanity occupies the rest of the *Gilgamesh* epic after the death of Enkidu. No such search for humanity occurs in the *Iliad*.

It is this second part of the *Gilgamesh* epic or the search which can be compared with our other Homeric epic, the *Odyssey*. The hero of the *Odyssey* is slightly different. He is not strictly speaking part human and divine. He is the son of mortals Anticleia and Laertes. In a sense, the character of Odysseus completes a progression in the concept of the hero. Gilgamesh is two-thirds divine and one-third human. Achilleus
is half divine and half human. Finally, Odysseus represents the completely human hero who is constantly aware of his identity as a human being. He fights to remain human. Odysseus, in his search for home, encounters many strange people who are different from ordinary humanity in some way. Kalypso and Circe are goddesses who try to keep him from home. Polyphemos, the cruel Cyclops is the antithesis of civilized man. The Thaïakians are a utopian society quite different from Odysseus' homeland. All of these people Odysseus must leave behind in order to reach home. He leaves behind all things that are not human. He even refuses Kalypso's offer of immortality. Odysseus knows he is human and knows his home is in Ithaka. He succeeds in his search for his home, a home which is not out of reach for a mortal. Even though the nature of Odysseus is completely human, there is still a divine-human conflict. The divine part of the conflict is now expanded to include all things in any way opposed to humanity.

The Iliad and Odyssey contain the adventures of many mortal men even though the epics are unified by one central character in each. Agamemnon, Diomedes, Ajax, Telemachos and Penelope become just as real as Achilleus and Odysseus. In Gilgamesh, there are only two humans who are referred to by name, Gilgamesh and Enkidu. The trapper and his father who discover Enkidu are not named and disappear from the epic as
soon as they have contributed their share to the development of the plot. The harlot who "tames" Enkidu is likewise unnamed and it is clear that she represents woman in general. Siduri certainly is a memorable character but her magical abilities show her to be essentially divine.

The Gilgamesh epic, like the Iliad and Odyssey, is a story of mortal men. Let us now examine the hero, Gilgamesh and his friend, Enkidu and see how the hero progresses throughout the epic. Through the hero, the epic is unified. Everything is related to the life of one man, Gilgamesh. The Iliad is also unified through the main character, Achilleus. The Gilgamesh epic centers around Gilgamesh and Enkidu and these characters are developed to the fullest. Gilgamesh is almost a god to his people. The epic begins not with an invocation to a poetic Muse but with the praise of Gilgamesh who has done great things for his people. It goes on to enumerate the many qualities of the hero. The introductory description sets the stage for a fairly coherent historical narrative which follows. The people of Uruk are unhappy with Gilgamesh's strong rule and appeal to the gods who in turn decide that Gilgamesh needs a rival. Enkidu is created and becomes the friend of Gilgamesh.

The narrative is dealt with in terms of the friendship of the hero. In primitive societies, the family was the first unit of friendship. All outside the family were foes. And so, when speaking of friendship, it is not unnatural to introduce
metaphors of the family. Similarly, the idea of kingship parallels the concept of the father as the authority figure in the family. In this way, family, friendship and authority are all interwoven. The meaning of the Gilgamesh epic then becomes clear. The epic studies a society at three different levels, the family, friendship and finally society in totality united under one king.

The friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu symbolizes a higher degree of civilization in that it is the beginning of a social relationship outside the family. Gilgamesh, before the creation of Enkidu, is beautiful, courageous and a prophet for his people. But he is a relentless ruler. He is not a man who can be touched by compassion until the arrival of Enkidu. The friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu symbolizes the merger of two important qualities of an ideal king - power and justice tempered by compassion. It is Enkidu who teaches Gilgamesh how to be a shepherd of his people rather than an authoritarian king.

And yet, Enkidu is created in the wilderness among the animals. He must be tamed and initiated into the civilization of men. After his initiation into civilization, he no longer desires to live in the wilderness. "Enkidu had to slacken his pace - it was not as before; But he now had wisdom, broader understanding."\(^1\) Enkidu has become civilized and no

\(^1\)Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. J. B. Pritchard, p. 44.
longer has strength enough for war or even survival among the wild animals. He is not introduced to a belligerent society but into a highly civilized society. Civilization has given too much power to its monarch. The king must be reintroduced to nature, or to Enkidu who comes from the wilderness. Civilized man goes back to a primitive existence where each man fares for himself. No one man is supreme. The pride of Gilgamesh must be subdued. In this way, Enkidu shows Gilgamesh that his power is not supreme. At the same time Gilgamesh has introduced Enkidu to power. Enkidu, infatuated by his newly found desire for power, will not let Gilgamesh honor the supplications of Humbaba.

The theme of supplication is present in both the Iliad and Gilgamesh. Humbaba supplicates Enkidu and Gilgamesh for his life. Achilleus is supplicated by the army for his help. If Achilleus returns to battle, he would, by his valour in fighting, reduce for his fellow Greeks the risk of being conquered. Gilgamesh recognizes the role of the mother as a sanctuary. Achilleus points out his role to protect his companions, a role which is similar to that of the mother bird. Compassion for the supplicant is linked with the mother in both the Gilgamesh and the Iliad. Let us examine the Humbaba incident of supplication and compare with it a similar image in Book IX of the Iliad. When Humbaba takes Gilgamesh and Enkidu into his house he appeals to his conquerers as a father
to a son. Humbaba plays on pity. He states that he knows no father nor mother and begs Gilgamesh for mercy. Gilgamesh answers with words which are strikingly similar to a simile used in the *Iliad*. Gilgamesh answers: "O Enkidu, should not the snared bird return to its nest and the captive man return to his mother's arms."² In the *Iliad*, Achilles envisions himself as a mother bird feeding his young: "For as to her unwinged young ones the mother bird brings back morsels, wherever she can find them, but as for herself it is suffering, such was I."³ Achilles uses an image of the family, the mother and her children, to evoke compassion from the warriors just as Humbaba does to appeal for mercy from Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh is ready to honor the plea of Humbaba. But Gilgamesh is stopped by Enkidu who is later punished by Enlil. It is Enkidu who recognizes Gilgamesh's power over his people and his supremacy in battle. He urges Gilgamesh to use this relentless power over Humbaba. But later he warns Gilgamesh not to abuse his power and to deal justly before Shamash. It seems right to Enkidu to conquer an enemy who represents evil for the king's people such as Humbaba does. But it seems that justice is untempered by compassion or mercy. The compassion of Gilgamesh is not able to conquer here. Gilgamesh has learned that his authority is not supreme through his

contact with the wilderness, as we have seen. At the same time, Enkidu has learned the power that the one in command can assert over his subjects or victims as in the case of Humbaba. The supplication theme in *Gilgamesh* reveals another instance of subjects trying to temper absolute authority. We have seen the first instance of this when the people of Uruk protested against the harsh rule of Gilgamesh. Thus we see that the supplication theme is linked with the theme of authority.

Another element is introduced to the supplication theme. In a reign of absolute authority, there is a need for an equity figure. Hence the mother is introduced into the Humbaba incident. As we see in the mother-bird simile, she represents the protector of her young and a refuge for captives. Both Gilgamesh and Enkidu, at alternating times take on the characteristics of the "mother bird." At first, Enkidu represents the mother figure and Gilgamesh the authoritarian king. Gilgamesh is attracted to Enkidu "as through to a woman" in his first dream. Later the roles are reversed. Gilgamesh becomes tempered by mercy and Enkidu takes upon himself more power than he should when he passes the life and death sentence upon Humbaba. The second dream of Gilgamesh heralds this reversal of roles. In this dream, Gilgamesh is attracted to Enkidu as though to an axe. Enkidu is now symbolically represented as a weapon which has the power to kill. This reversal

of roles is more concretely seen in the expedition to Humbaba.

Gilgamesh, as king, is doing a service to his people by fighting Humbaba. When he leaves, his mother and the counsellors entrust him to Enkidu. Enkidu acts as his shepherd. Enkidu, who knows the wilderness, leads Gilgamesh through the forest to the home of Humbaba. However, when they arrive at the gates, the situation is strangely reversed. Enkidu is afraid because he knows the awful power of Humbaba. Gilgamesh calms his friend and becomes the leader as he says to Enkidu: "forget death and follow me." He takes care of Enkidu as a mother cares for a son. When Enkidu dies he rages "like a lioness deprived of her whelps." Gilgamesh is now the mother figure. Achilleus is described by a similar simile when he loses Patroclus: "As some great bearded lion/ when some man, a deer hunter, has stolen his cubs away from him/ out of the close wood; the lion comes back too late, and is anguished." These are strange similes in the midst of descriptions of battles. Both Eastern and Western societies reflect a concern for family relationships.

A family relationship is also seen in the system of government. The very idea of kingship seems to resemble a

5Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. N. K. Sandars, p. 75.
7Iliad, 18. 318-20.
father-child relationship. The king exercises his authority over his subjects as a father does over his household. The father-king should rule with compassion as well as authority. Gilgamesh is not fulfilling this latter role. The people are disappointed when Gilgamesh does not live up to his role as shepherd of the people. Before the coming of Enkidu, Gilgamesh takes advantage of his role as king by infringing on the rights of his subjects. Among other rights, he violates the rights of the father of the family: "Gilgamesh leaves not the son to his father." The people then express the complaint to Anu: "Is this Gilgamesh, the shepherd of ramparted Uruk? Is this our shepherd, bold, stately, wise?" Achilleus in the Iliad is referred to as poimēn laōn (shepherd of the people). Achilleus, too, does not fulfill his role as shepherd of his people because his withdrawal from battle hurts the Greeks. We must remember, however, that Achilleus is not a king as Gilgamesh is. Achilleus holds no authority over the army. But his withdrawal from battle does hurt the army since he has it in his power to help them by fighting with them. The hero of

8These rights will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.


10Ibid., p. 41.
the Gilgamesh epic, however, is king. He not only is enabled to protect his subjects but is obligated to do so by virtue of his role as king and shepherd of the people. In the character of Gilgamesh the king, there must be a merger of authoritarian and protector. This merger is effected through the friendship with Enkidu. Both characters, as we have seen, alternately share the roles of the authoritarian and the equity figure.

The authoritarian and protector are fitting and necessary complements. The authoritarian does not exercise compassion. The mother figure or protector by herself has no authority beyond her ability to make compassionate appeals. This weakness is illustrated in the strong mother-son relationships expressed by Gilgamesh-Ninsun and Achilleus-Thetis. Both mothers are goddesses and seem to have foreknowledge of their sons' futures. Ninsun is able to interpret dreams. Thetis knows from Zeus what fortune awaits Achilleus. Both mothers have no power to control their sons' decisions or affect their fates, although they are ready to advise with words and appeal to others on behalf of their sons. Thetis knows she can do nothing to help her son overcome his grief after the death of Patroclus. She can only appeal to Hephaistos for armour for her short-lived son, "hèsi ekumorò."\(^{11}\) When Gilgamesh is determined to encounter Humbaba, Ninsun does not

\(^{11}\)Iliad. 18. 458.
attempt to stop him. Instead, she prays to Shamash to keep him from harm on the journey. Both goddesses must appeal to the authority figure to save their sons. Thus we see that compassion is of no avail unless coupled with authority.

This whole new concept of authority is formed through the human-divine conflict which we have seen in the beginning. Gilgamesh gets his authority from the gods. In ancient times, divine kingship was unquestioned by the people. But Gilgamesh, both human and divine, takes power beyond his rights and the people appeal to the gods. The gods provide a rival, Enkidu through whose friendship authority becomes coupled with compassion. Thus the conflict of the partly divine Gilgamesh and his human subjects provides the foundation for a new system of justice.

The human-divine conflict within the heroes, Achilleus and Gilgamesh, drives them to act in the way they do. They are seeking immortality in diverse ways. One way of becoming immortal is through being eternally remembered for outstanding deeds. Both Achilleus and Gilgamesh share a keen desire for everlasting fame. Gilgamesh is aware that he, a mortal, cannot live forever. But he is determined to leave behind a name that will live forever. It is this determination that drives him to take on grave battles without fear. The destiny of Gilgamesh is decreed by the god Enlil. He is king but not

an immortal. Gilgamesh can not be on a level with the gods but he must establish himself as supreme over all other mortals. By killing Humbaba, Gilgamesh is destroying an evil which is evidently endangering his people. He is also killing Humbaba in behalf of Shamash who encourages this expedition. Thus Gilgamesh achieves fame in the eyes of the gods and men.

Achilleus, when given the choice of a long inglorious life or a short glorious one, choses the latter. He, too, hopes to achieve eternal fame. Like Gilgamesh, Achilleus is aware of his destiny.

At first, neither Achilleus nor Gilgamesh seem to be afraid of death. They are resigned to it and only desire glory. It is not until each one is painfully introduced to death through the death of each one's "other self," that each is acutely aware of death as the common bond of all men. The conflict between human and divine in Gilgamesh is renewed by the imminent death of Enkidu. Enkidu is seized with terror when he realized through a dream that he is about to die. Even though he has helped Gilgamesh perform great deeds and has some claim to fame, he is still afraid of the oblivion which he imagines is sure to follow death: "O my brother, let some great prince, some other, come when I am dead, or let some god stand at your gate, let him obliterate my name and write his own instead."  

where he would achieve some fame, adds to his misery. The
death of Enkidu serves not only as a prefiguration of
Gilgamesh's death but is expanded to an affirmation of universal
human mortality: "for the dream has shown that misery comes
at last to the healthy man, the end of life is sorrow." 14
This pessimistic sentiment expressed by Gilgamesh that life's
end is worse than all the trials of life is much the same
sentiment that Achilleus expresses to Odysseus in the Odyssey:
"I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another/ man,
one with no land allotted him and not much to live on,/ than
be a king over all the perished dead." 15 The heroes seem to
be forgetful of their human half when they take upon themselves
dangerous deeds. They believe their fame will be eternal.
Both Enkidu and Achilleus come to a bitter realization that
fame is no guarantee of immortality. All their heroic god-
like deeds can not erase their mortal nature.

The song of lamentation which Gilgamesh addresses to the
counsellors of Uruk identifies Gilgamesh with Enkidu. Gilgamesh
is lamenting his own death as much as his friend's. He weeps
for Enkidu as his brother. Enkidu has no identity as the son
of any certain parents. He is the child of the wild animals.
This adds a universal dimension to his character. Next
Gilgamesh identifies himself with Enkidu: "the axe at my side;"

14 Ibid., p. 96.
15 Odyssey I. 489-91.
"my hand's trust," the derrk in my belt," "the shield in front of me," "my richest trimming." In the next part, the song, through a series of pastoral images, reveals all nature sympathizing with Enkidu's death. But Gilgamesh sees himself a part of the wilderness: "we who have conquered all things, scaled the mountains,/ who seized the Bull and slew him/
Brought affliction on Humbaba, who dwelled in the Cedar Forest." It is a type of paeon not of Enkidu's deeds but of the adventures of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. There is no such lament in the Iliad. Achilleus, the hero of the Iliad, is not the folk hero who seeks adventures as Odysseus does in the Odyssey. There are no deeds to enumerate in the Iliad. The friendship of Achilleus and Patroclus achieves the same purpose as its Eastern prototype, i.e. to bring the hero into a confrontation with the only thing that can conquer him - death. It is clear in the Gilgamesh epic that this is the purpose of the creation of Enkidu. The people of Uruk ask for a rival who could check the strength of Gilgamesh. The strength of Gilgamesh is checked by confrontation with one equally as strong as he. This friendship also checks the authority of the hero-king by reminding him of his mortality. If the divinity of

17 Ibid., p. 61.
Gilgamesh gives him the power to transcend his subjects, the humanity of Gilgamesh puts him on a level with his subjects. In both the *Iliad* and in the *Gilgamesh* epic, the divine human conflict is manifested through the friendship theme.

This friendship theme, although it serves the same purpose, is handled somewhat differently by the two poets. In the *Gilgamesh* epic, the friendship itself is the subject of the first half of the epic. Elements of folklore and adventure (such as the killing of Humbaba) are inserted in Gilgamesh to enhance the idea of the friendship. The friendship theme in the *Iliad*, is handled as a sub-theme. In the *Iliad*, which centers around Achilleus' quarrel and not merely a search for immortality, the poet gives the friendship a more subtle but hardly less important role. The author of the *Iliad* does not feel the need to elaborate on the friendship of Achilleus and Patroclus by relating a series of adventures. But still the Greek friendship is no less established. The theme of Achilleus' search for immortality is an important underlying sub-theme which is often camouflaged by the brilliance of the Greek and Trojan conflict and the initial quarrel itself. The divine-human conflict in the hero, the mother-goddess' inability to rescue the son from death, the friendship and death of the other-self, and the final recognition that all men are linked through death are all subordinated to the main theme of the quarrel of Achilleus.
and Agamemnon. But all such elements are vital to the Gilgamesh epic whose main theme is the search for immortality. The use of a sub-theme in the Iliad makes the psychological character study of Achilleus more subtle but basically no less important than the development of Gilgamesh.

In studying the Odyssey, we can see that another aspect of Gilgamesh's character, his love for adventures, can be compared to Odysseus' love for adventure. There is a basic difference immediately comprehensible in the Odyssey and Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh seeks adventure first to achieve fame and then to avoid death. Both reasons stem from a vain search for immortality. Odysseus risks dangers to reach home but does not labor in vain. The journeys of Gilgamesh are similar to those of Odysseus. With the exception of the Humbaba and Bull of Heaven incidents and the initial description of Gilgamesh, the epic does not resemble the Odyssey until after the death of Enkidu. From the beginning of Gilgamesh, it is clear that the main character strongly resembles Odysseus. The external description of Gilgamesh is immediately revealed by a list of his qualities. Gilgamesh is omniscient and Odysseus is polymētis. Gilgamesh knows the countries of the world and Odysseus is polytropos. Gilgamesh is wise; Odysseus, polyphrôn. Both men are endowed with beauty and courage. Gilgamesh is a story-teller. It is he, the epic states, that brings the tale of the days before the flood and engraves it on stone. Odysseus' fame as a story-teller is proverbial.
After the description of Gilgamesh, the story begins to resemble the *Iliad* and centers on the friendship-death theme. The killing of Humbaba may be looked at as an *Odyssey*-type adventure or may simply be a tale of an expedition to a foreign country like the expedition to Troy. It is continually mentioned as Gilgamesh's claim to fame as Odysseus tells stories of his adventures at Troy. However, the mystery enveloping the Humbaba incident makes it seem more like the fantastic adventures of Odysseus. When Enkidu opens the gate of Humbaba, Enkidu's hand loses its strength. When Gilgamesh fells the cedar, a strange sleep overcomes him. Shamash or light forsakes him. What happens is doubtful. Is there an historic truth behind the incident? Could there have been an eclipse of the sun? Shamash, no doubt, personifies the light of life. When Shamash disappears, Gilgamesh enters a deep sleep which is the closest thing to death. It is not unusual to sleep after completing a hard task. When Odysseus finally comes to the land of the Phaiakians, *Athena* veils his eyes and sheds a sleep upon Odysseus. He sleeps there until he is wakened by the cries of Nausikaa and her maidens.

Another adventure of Gilgamesh is the Bull of Heaven. This adventure, too, has several levels of interpretation. The Bull seems to personify a seven-year drought. But like the Humbaba incident, the story of the killing of the Bull has

\[18\] The Humbaba story as an historical possibility will be discussed in Chapter IV.
a deeper level of interpretation. The manner in which Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the Bull resembles the Bull-leap-
ing sport of Crete. The connection between the drought, the number seven, and the bull-leaping can be found in the religious custom of bull-worship. The bull symbolizes fertility and regenerative power. The fertility goddess Ishtar asks for the creation of the Bull. The act of Gilgamesh and Enkidu in killing the bull is a ritual which ends the seven-year drought. Parallel rituals in other ancient lands suggest that the ritual is concerned with the cycle of the seasons of the year. Robert Graves discusses the seven month cycle of the goddess' seven months travels in seeking the sun. He cites a similarity in "Mithras, the Persian Sun-god whose birthday was celebrated at the winter-
solstice, was worshipped as a bull of seven fights."¹⁹ Gilgamesh plates the horns of the "Bull of Heaven" with lapis lazuli and gives them to the god Lugulbanda. He states the horns' capacity in oil which suggests they were used as vessels of some sort.²⁰ These rituals in the Gilgamesh epic suggest some connection with Crete.


²⁰The connection with Crete is remarkable. One immediately thinks of the "horns of consecration" at the Palace of Knossos and the cupbearer fresco. The cups are shaped like bull's horns.
It is interesting to note that the poet of the *Odyssey* is also familiar with Crete. Odysseus twice claims to be a Cretan. Upon his return to Ithaka, Odysseus tells Eunaios he is a Cretan who once entertained Odysseus. He gives his guest wine to drink and cattle to sacrifice (ireusasthai). There is a suggestion of the sacredness of cattle in Crete. The idea of sacred cattle is even more evident in Book XII when Odysseus' men kill the cattle of the sun-god. Although there is no one-to-one correspondence between this incident and the Bull of Heaven, there are elements in each which suggest a common origin. There is a famine in Uruk. Odysseus' men kill the sacred cattle only after their food supply is exhausted. The cattle belong to Helios, the sun-god. The days of the year are represented by the sun's travels just as the seasons are represented by the fertility goddess, Ishtar. Odysseus' men cut short the number of the days of their lives by incurring the anger of the sun-god. Enkidu and Gilgamesh incur the anger of Enlil by killing the Bull of Heaven. Enkidu cuts short the days of his life through his curse of the goddess Ishtar. Again we see a similarity between an adventure of Gilgamesh and one of Odysseus.

Further parallels are found in the narrative sequence. After the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh is alone just as Odysseus finds himself alone after the death of his companions. Gilgamesh

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21 *Odyssey*, 19. 198.
searches for Utnapishtim, the Faraway who supposedly holds a secret of eternal life. Gilgamesh's journey resembles Odysseus' journey "faraway" to the ends of the earth to seek the advice of Teiresias. At the time of Odysseus' journey he has not yet lost his companions. Odysseus does not seek eternal life and is more successful in his search. Odysseus journeys to the ends of the earth where the sun never shines. Gilgamesh too, enters a dark land. He no longer prays to Shamash the god of light but to the moon god Sin. Gilgamesh has come to question Utnapishtim concerning the living and the dead. Odysseus too, learns about the living and the dead. Gilgamesh accomplishes a singular feat in going to the lower world. The task which Gilgamesh is about to attempt is one "which has not happened as long as my wind drives the waters." In Greek mythology only a few men have returned from the underworld alive. The poet of the Odyssey gives a detailed description of Odysseus' sacrifices to enter the underworld and then concentrates on the people Odysseus meets. But the poet of Gilgamesh gives a vivid description of the country of the dead. There is a contrast between this journey of Gilgamesh and his journey to the Country of the Living. The Country of the Living is the country of the immortals and is forbidden to mortals. The gate of Humbaba's forest is difficult to open. But the Man-Scorpion permits Gilgamesh to go to the land of

darkness. The gate of the mountain lies open. Even after Gilgamesh enters, however, he is warned by Shamash that his expedition is in vain.

Gilgamesh next encounters Siduri. Siduri, the maker of wine, which brings oblivion, resembles Circe, the magician. She, too, tells Gilgamesh he will never find eternal life. This contrasts the words of Teiresias who tells Odysseus he will reach home after much suffering. Like Circe, when Siduri sees that she can not detain Gilgamesh forever, she gives her guest directions for his journey. Ishtar the fertility goddess also has some of the characteristics of magical Circe. Like Circe, Ishtar has the power to change men into animals. Ishtar also closely resembles Kalypso. Ishtar offers Gilgamesh life in a blessed land similar to Kalypso's island, a type of Elysian Fields. Life with the goddess Ishtar prefigures Dilmun, again a type of Elysian Fields. All of these women try to deter the hero from reaching his ultimate goal. Both heroes resist the women who are presented as obstacles which must be overcome.

Now that we have examined adventures which are similar in the Gilgamesh epic and the Odyssey, let us turn to the motif of water which is common to the adventures of both heroes. In Gilgamesh, water and water imagery play a major role. To reach Dilmun, Gilgamesh must ride in the boat of Urshanabi, the ferryman who seems to serve the same function as Charon. Before Gilgamesh embarks on his journey to Humbaba, the
counsellors advise him to wash his feet in the water and to offer cold water to Shamash. He is also directed to dig a well. Again upon his entrance to Dilmun, Gilgamesh digs a well of specific dimensions. Water is less prominent in Odysseus' visit to the dead. Odysseus' journeys to the ends of the earth, beaches his ships and walks along the Streams of Ocean. He does not cross a river in a boat nor does he need to enlist the help of a ferryman. He digs a pit of specific dimensions, not a well. The attitude toward the sea seems to be different in Eastern and Western cultures. The sea, as a metaphor in *Gilgamesh*, is an ambiguous symbol. It is both life-giving and destructive. Water is a source of life for Shamash. But it is also clear, from the description of the underworld in *Gilgamesh* that water is connected with death. In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, the sea is not directly connected with death. Teiresias tells Odysseus he will die when he comes to a land where the sea is not known. Death seems to be beyond the life-giving sea in Western tradition.

Several main themes dominate the adventures of both Gilgamesh and Odysseus. The theme of identity provides some grounds for comparing the two adventure stories. Gilgamesh is searching for Utnapishtim, whom he calls his father. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus seeks his home and Laertes, his father. Telemachos goes on a parallel search for his father. The real identity of Odysseus is father of Telemachos and husband of
Penelope. He constantly lies about who he is. But he never doubts that he is mortal. Odysseus' desires for his home, his wife, his son are all human desires. Odysseus succeeds in re-establishing himself as King of Ithaka. Gilgamesh, however, searches for immortality which is beyond his identity. Gilgamesh labors under the false premise that he is immortal. He thinks that the secret of a man's passport to immortality lies in winning eternal fame through battle. Utnapishtim shatters this last hope of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh expects to see Utnapishtim "as resolved to do battle." Instead he finds him resting on his back. Valour in battle is not what makes men immortal. Utnapishtim conveys a pessimistic sentiment of Eastern culture. Nothing is permanent. Houses fall. Contracts do not hold forever. It is suggested here, that man too is not permanent. His identity is to be mortal.

The pessimistic feeling in the *Gilgamesh* epic that all things including man are ephemeral is emphasized by the preoccupation with the passage of time. They are keenly aware of the flow of time and continually express it in various metaphors. Light imagery is one way of expressing the passing of days. The forest journey of Gilgamesh and Enkidu is divided by a pattern of days and nights. After walking twenty leagues, they eat and after thirty leagues, night falls. In this way, they count the days. The journey of Gilgamesh in the nether world is similarly divided by the

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distance covered. He walks in darkness until he has covered a distance of twelve leagues. Then there is light and he meets Shamash. The night has ended and Shamash has returned from his daily journey to the other side of the mountain. When there is no cycle of day and night, time seems to standstill. The regularity of the seasons symbolizes birth, growth and death. Sleep and death symbolize a permanance reflected in the standstill of the passage of time. When Gilgamesh sleeps he is unaware of the flow of time. Utnapishtim must be able to prove to Gilgamesh that time has passed. He does this by placing a loaf of bread beside his head for each day he sleeps.

The passage of time is not as significant to gods as to men. For the flow of time does not bring immortals any closer to their death. Gilgamesh hopes to "inherit" immortality. But he fails and returns home without achieving his goal. Gilgamesh upon his return resumes his role as king. But he is a much wiser king now. He has found his essence which is his admission and acceptance of his mortality.

In a sense, the outcome of the journeys of Gilgamesh and Odysseus is the same. Both find their identity. Gilgamesh is content with his essence as a man. Odysseus re-establishes himself in his role as an individual, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachos and king of Ithaka. We must also remember that Gilgamesh's search for immortality was inspired by the divine-
human conflict within himself. Odysseus, on the other hand, is one step beyond Gilgamesh. Our Greek hero is already content with his fate as a mortal. He realizes he is a man like all mortals but in addition he has a particular desire as a particular man. Ithaka and his family are the objects of this particular desire. Achilleus, also, reflects a particular desire to be remembered for his honour and fame as Achilleus, the warrior. Hence, we see a progression in the formation of primitive society. First, we see man expressing individual desires. This cycle is completed when man returns to expressing common identity by living in society. 24 Men, by virtue of particular weaknesses as individuals, are dependent upon one another and thereby forced to live in society. 25 Society, however, creates problems such as the problem of tempering absolute authority as we have seen earlier in this chapter. Gilgamesh, in his very search for immortality, finds a solution for this problem of society.

Gilgamesh returns to Uruk not with the secret of immortality or a herb of rejuvenation but with an answer to a problem of society, society which grew from man's realization of himself.

24 The Gilgamesh epic seems to gloss over the stage of the individual awareness as we have seen before. But the epic does, however, necessarily admit the formation of society and the problems it entails. The formation presupposes the strength and weaknesses of the individual.

as a man and then as an individual with individual needs. Gilgamesh has learned that it is sometimes wise to have compassion through the tragic death of Enkidu who had no compassion to hear the plea of Humbaba. He learns that Enlil has compassion for Utnapishtim. But this is not an unqualified compassion. It is the beginning of the concept of justice. Throughout the Gilgamesh epic there is a sub-theme of punishment for crimes. Humbaba, the personification of evil, is "punished" by Gilgamesh and Enkidu. His prayer of supplication is unheard. The goddess Ishtar punishes her lover Ishullanu who insults her. She turns him into a blind mole who can not reach what he wants. The frustration of hopes is a common type of punishment in ancient mythology. Tantalus, for example, is subjected to such a punishment. Enkidu is punished for cursing Ishtar after he kills the Bull of Heaven and for killing Humbaba in spite of the monster's plea for mercy. Finally, the world is punished by Enlil who sends a flood to destroy the entire population. This punishment proves too severe.

There must be a system of justice to regulate rewards and punishments. In Gilgamesh, Ea represents this balance. Ea the wise speaks to the impetuous warrior Enlil. Ea admits that it is just to punish: "On the sinner impose his sin,/ on the transgressor impose his transgression/" But there is a limit: "Be lenient lest he be cut off."

severe a punishment. Ea states that a lion, a wolf, a famine or anything would be better than the flood. The gods in Gilgamesh punish beyond just limit when they seek vengeance on humans who have offended them.

Let us see how the punishment-retribution theme is introduced and handled by Homer in the *Odyssey*. Agamemnon is killed unjustly and his murderer is rightly punished by his son, Orestes. The suitors are unjustly eating the stores of the absent Odysseus. They too receive their just punishment. When Odysseus returns he returns not merely to re-establish order and peace but he returns to bring justice to the suitors. In the *Odyssey*, we see punishment not uncontrollable but tempered by justice.

When Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, he returns with more wisdom and an established concept of justice. He has learned this by seeing the uncontrolled punishment of the gods. When Gilgamesh dies, he is still described as he was in the beginning. But to his list of attributes, justice is added. The same words which Enkidu used to interpret Gilgamesh's dream are used: "But do not abuse this power, deal justly with your servants in the palace, deal justly before the face of the Sun." In the *Odyssey*, the goddess Athene fulfills the same role as Ea. She continually pleads with Zeus in behalf of her favorite just as Ea pleads with Enlil in behalf of Utnapishtim in the flood story. Shamash serves the same role in the life of Gilgamesh. The sun-god realizes that Enkidu

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and Gilgamesh killed Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven at his request. They should not be punished. Enlil does not listen to Shamash. There is no reason given for Enlil's decision. It may be conjectured that Enlil chose to punish Enkidu for his acts of pride. It is Enkidu who opens the gate of Humbaba with his bare hand and decides not to accept Humbaba's plea for mercy. The curses Enkidu utters against Ishtar are words revealing the extreme pride of Enkidu. In any case the judgment of Shamash is not accepted. The only one who convinces Enlil is Ea and she does so by means of her forceful claim that the flood violates the concept of justice. In the Gilgamesh epic, we see an appeal of justice being used by Ea. But the flood incident is a tale of long ago. Gilgamesh must return to the time of the flood to see such a system in operation. His own time evidently knows no such system of justice. In the Odyssey, we also see a system of justice. In this epic, the proceedings of justice are initiated by the goddess, Athene from the very beginning of the epic.

The heroes of both Eastern and Western epics bring home a system of justice to a land which is in need of justice. Gilgamesh leaves Uruk, a land which has not known a system of justice or at least does not remember it. The king himself has forgotten his limits. He must return to the past, the tale of old from Utnapishtim in order to see justice in operation. So too, the people of Ithaka, with their good king absent, have forgotten to live justly. A few people,
penelope, Telemachos, Eurykleia and the faithful servants remember Ithaka under the just king, Odysseus. It is the role of Odysseus to return and force the suitors, about to receive their due punishment, to recall justice.

We have seen that justice is but one of the themes expressed through the desires and adventures of the heroes. The theme of justice is an outgrowth of the theme of authority. Justice is the final answer to a need for controlling too powerful a monarch. Various sub-themes express attempts at tempering absolute authority. Supplication is one such theme. The theme of friendship which symbolizes the dual nature of a person becomes a metaphor for the double nature required in a ruler. The theme of the family also serves this purpose. The father symbolizes the authority and the mother, the equity figure, who serves to temper too harsh a ruler. The heroes in all three epics separate themselves from humanity through seeking personal goals: Achilleus seeks fame and personal honour; Odysseus, his identity; and Gilgamesh, immortality. This personal search leads them all to seek an answer to the social problems of their civilizations. Expression of these same themes through the heroes makes them seem similar. The literature of a people can not be divorced from the society in which it is set. The epics often reveal customs and actual events of their respective epochs. The epic when viewed as an historical narrative becomes a storehouse for historical, religious and social customs.
CHAPTER IV
NARRATIVE NOT FOLKLORE

At first glance, the Gilgamesh epic seems to be a series of folk-tales. Upon closer examination, it can be seen that many of these tales are actually primitively artistic ways of representing either religious customs or actual historical events. The same case can be presented for Homer. Both Homer's epics and Gilgamesh draw upon the realm of myth and folklore for some of their material. Both Homer and the poet of Gilgamesh use these folk-tales to an artistic purpose. Although both poems are the products of oral tradition, they have a well constructed framework and unity and thereby merit a classification much more sophisticated than pure folklore. The epics fit into the genre of true, well constructed literature. They are the beginning of a tradition of literature which reflects their own civilization and can not be separated from the historical events of their time.

The epic of Gilgamesh and Homer's epics may reflect actual historical events. For example, Gilgamesh, who is known from the epic as a legendary hero embarking on marvelous adventures, is actually listed in the Sumerian king list as a king of Uruk. That the heroes in Homer did live has been suggested by archaeology. In any event, the poems' audiences regarded them
as history. Several events in the epics may have historical explanations. Just as an expedition to Troy is the scene for Homer's epic, a foreign expedition is the scene for an incident in Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh and Enkidu journey to the Mountain of Cedars to kill the monster Humbaba. The allegorical and symbolic levels of this adventure have already been discussed in Chapter III. We shall now reveal briefly the possible historical importance of the expedition. This interpretation can co-exist along with the other levels of interpretation. The ancient kings of Mesopotamia obtained cedarwood from Lebanon. Mesopotamia had no suitable timber. It is likely that the expedition to Humbaba was made for the purpose of obtaining timber.\(^1\) Hence the purpose of the journey becomes of historical interest.

Buildings are also of historic interest. The style of temples and palaces reflects the customs of the people. The temple Eanna is described as an elaborate structure which Gilgamesh built and "which no future king, no man, can equal."\(^2\) No temple is described in such detail in the Iliad and Odyssey. Homer does describe in detail the great palaces. For example, Telemachos marvels at the gold in the palace of Menelaos. The Greeks attribute to a mortal what the Sumerians grant to the gods. In Gilgamesh, the gods have the rich "palaces."

\(^1\)Gertrude Levy, Sword from the Rock (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1953), p. 127.

The goddess Ninsun lives in the Great Palace, Egalmah. The epic of Gilgamesh does not describe any palaces of mortals. Gilgamesh returns to his land and to his people but not to a palace. The Eastern idea that gods possess the rich temples and palaces is reflected in Homer. When Telemachos marvels at the palace of Menelaos, he remarks: "The court of Zeus on Olympos must be like this on the inside, / such abundance of everything. Wonder takes me as I look on it." The different attitude of the civilizations in regard to the gods is reflected not merely in the style of the literature as we have seen in the serious and jovial treatment of the gods in Eastern and Western epic respectively. The literature also shows actual customs of the people (i.e. temple and palace structure) which reveal contrasting attitudes towards the gods.

Now that we have seen that historical events and religious attitudes are reflected in these epics which have hitherto seemed but folktales, let us examine an important social theme - the status of the monarchy. The Iliad and Gilgamesh reveal the same basic attitudes toward kings, the descendants of the gods. The Eastern tradition maintains that kings are descended from gods and derive their authority from them. In Homer, too, the kings of powerful cities are not necessarily descendants of gods but are usually favored by a god. The power of kingship comes from the gods. We can see this divine transmission of authority in the Iliad: "Powerful

3 Odyssey, 4. 74-75.
Agamemnon stood up holding the sceptre Hephaistos had wrought him carefully. "Hephaistos gives this to Zeus. From Zeus, it is passed in turn to Hermes, Pelops, Atreus, Thyestes and finally to Agamemnon. The king is absolute over his own people. A hint of this power is seen when Agamemnon promises to give Achilleus seven towns. He makes this offer as lightly as if he were offering a sword or cup or other such prize for valour. The absolute authority of kings reflects the same kingship theme seen in the pantheon. Enlil and Zeus are all powerful rulers. The accounts of the gods especially reveal the civilization and social structure of the epics' respective eras.

Both Eastern and Western epics reflect an era of dissatisfaction with the kingship and the beginnings of social unrest. The very beginning of the Gilgamesh epic introduces the theme of the abuses a monarch takes on his people. The nobles of Uruk are unhappy with Gilgamesh's behavior: "The nobles of Uruk are gloomy in their chambers." The king abuses religion by sounding the drum to call his companions. James Fritchard explains that this is perhaps an "abuse for personal purposes of an instrument intended for civic or religious use."

4Iliad, 2. 100-101.
5Ibid., 9. 144.
7Ibid., p. 41.
He uses his authority to usurp the rights of the authority figure within each family. The father of the family is no longer supreme in his own family. "Gilgamesh leaves not the son to his father/ •• • Gilgamesh leaves not the maid to her mother,/ the warrior's daughter, the noble's spouse!" 

Gilgamesh also violates the civic rights of the people: "Into the meeting-house he has intruded, which is set aside for the people." Thus, religious, familial and civic bonds of society are threatened by the king.

This abuse of authority is followed by the attempt of the people to retaliate and affirm their personal rights. The nobles of Uruk appeal to Anu who causes a rival to be created for Gilgamesh. Enkidu meets Gilgamesh in the Market of the Land. He fights with Gilgamesh and then acknowledges the kingship of Gilgamesh which Enlil has granted him. The authority of Gilgamesh is challenged but he maintains it.

Again there is a parallel of kingship of men and that of gods. This is seen in the theogony structure in general. The Hittite theogony shows the successive overthrow of each generation of kings until finally Teshub maintains power. Teshub is challenged by a monster, Ullikummi, but Teshub overcomes him and asserts his authority. The same revolutions of power are seen in the Theogony of Hesiod and in several refer-

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9 Ibid., p. 48.
ences in Homeric epics. Zeus finally maintains his authority after his power is threatened by Typhoeus. Here we can see rebellion against authority among the gods expressed in an analogous situation among mortals. Later we shall see that a struggle for authority among the gods forms part of the actual plot structure of the Iliad.

This same theme of the challenge to human authority is seen in the Iliad in the challenge to the monarch. Agamemnon is the most powerful prince and leader of the army. He like Gilgamesh, tries to abuse his authority. He abuses religious custom by insulting the god Apollo and dishonoring the priest of Apollo, Chryses. Because of this insult, Apollo sends a plague which rages for nine days. Agamemnon abuses his civic power through neglect. He does nothing about the plague. It is Achilleus, not Agamemnon, who finally calls the people to assembly. Agamemnon as leader of the army has a duty to put the goal of winning the war above his own personal desires. When he quarrels with Achilleus he lets his own personal desires overrule the welfare of the army. Agamemnon next abuses a personal right of Achilleus by taking away his prize of battle. Agamemnon violates a domestic right of Achilleus just as

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10 We have seen the third generation's final affirmation of power in Chapter II.

11 Iliad, 12. 78-85.

12 Ibid., 1. 53-54.
Gilgamesh infringes upon the rights of the husband: "He (Gilgamesh) is the first;/ the husband comes after." It is clear that Achilleus regards the daughter of Briseus as more than just a battle prize. He calls her *alochon thumerea*. He continues to say that he loves and cherishes her as any good husband does even though she was won by his spear. Here as in the *Iliad* we again see the king threatening religious, familial and civil bonds of society.

We see the challenge to authority among the gods in the actual plot structure of the *Iliad*. Hera, for example, conspires with Aphrodite to keep Zeus from battle. Zeus, from time to time, asserts his authority as king of the gods. He warns the other immortals that he is the strongest:

> Let down out of the sky a cord of gold; lay hold of it all you who are gods and all who are goddesses, yet not even so can you drag down Zeus from the sky to the ground, not Zeus the high lord of counsel, though you try until you grow weary.
> Yet whenever I might strongly be minded to pull you I could drag you up, earth and all and sea and all with you, then fetch the golden rope about the horn of Olympos and make it fast, so that all once more should dangle in mid air.
> So much stronger am I than the gods, and stronger than mortals.\(^{15}\)

Zeus is able to maintain his authority without much difficulty. Agamemnon, however, finally consents to give back the daughter

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\(^{13}\)Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. J. B. Pritchard, p. 49.

\(^{14}\)Iliad, 9. 336.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 8. 19-27.
of Briseus and other gifts besides if only Achilleus would return to battle. Agamemnon is not able to have what he desires without causing harm to the whole Greek army. He abuses his authority to try to achieve personal desires but fails even in this.

In the Odyssey, the situation is reversed. The power of the king seems to be mocked. The king no longer abuses the rights of the people. Instead, the people infringe on the rights of the king. Odysseus, the king of Ithaka, is being ruled by others throughout the Odyssey. Kalpso detains him on her island against his will. He is also ruled by his men in the sense that he can not control them. His shipmates open the bag of winds and eat the cattle of Helios. Odysseus, as visitor in another king's land, finds himself supplicating the king, Alkinoos, the queen, Arete and the princess, Nausikaa in the land of the Phaiakians. While Odysseus is trying to get home, the suitors are abusing his rights as husband and head of the family. They are killing his sheep and swine, eating his food and drinking his wine. By trying to win his wife, Penelope, they wish to usurp his right as king and thus acquire the rule of Ithaka. The suitors represent potentially wicked kings who plot to kill Telemachos. Odysseus calls the suitor Antinoos a king: "You look like a king. Therefore, you ought to give me a better present of food than the others have done." 16 Antinoos who has power to give food to Odysseus

16 Odyssey, 17. 415-17.
does not show generosity to Odysseus. Eumaios, the swine
herd, Eurykleia, the nurse, and Penelope remember the good
kind rule of Odysseus before his journey to Troy. The return
of Odysseus shows the return to a monarchy led not by a king
who imposes his authority to the extent that he infringes
on the rights of the people. Instead, his return establishes
a monarchy led by a king whose actions are tempered by justice.
Odysseus punishes the suitors who deserve punishment. Athene
stops him from using his power to punish the families of the
suitors. Ithaka is now ruled by a monarchy led by a king
who tempers his power with justice.

Even though the Odyssey shows a mock reversal of king-
subject, the theme is still the same. There is dissatisfaction
with the power in control because of the ruler or rulers' abuse of authority. Both the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Odyssey end by placing the monarch back in control. Gilgamesh returns to Uruk to rule over his people. The end of the Odyssey sees the hitherto reversed situation return to normal. Odysseus reestablishes himself as king of Ithaka and husband of Penelope. In addition, there is a hint that the people do not need to be unhappy with monarchy if the king chosen to rule is guided by a code of justice. The need for a code of justice is seen in Gilgamesh also. The rescue of Utnapishtim from the deluge of Ea shows the beginning of a system of justice among the gods, the first kings.

17Ibid., 24. 531-2.
Although the epic of *Gilgamesh* is many centuries earlier than Homer's epics, it seems that many social problems are similar. The epics seem to develop at corresponding points in the growth of each civilization. There is a period of social unrest in both civilizations. People have been ruled by strong kings whose absolute authority derives from the gods. The kings lead expeditions to foreign lands. It is the period of wars and foreign conquests. The kings begin to abuse their authority and the people then express their dissatisfaction with monarchy. The people of Mesopotamia realize the need for imposing limits on the power of the king. An Akkadian seal depicts Shamash and "his administration of justice; the worldwide attribution of ethnical principle to one who might not overstep his limits, here transferred to the earthly sovereign who by ritual identity maintained the punctual procession of the seasons."\(^1^8\) Just as the kings received their power from the gods, the kings' power is controlled by the gods. A system of justice begins to be formulated and presided over by the gods Ea and Athene. All of these similarities seem to indicate the epics show each civilization in a period of growing distrust in the monarchy.

We have seen that many events in the narrative of the epics reflect historical, religious and social customs of the civilization. The stories that seem fanciful in themselves

have meaning when placed in the context of the epic. We shall see that myth and ritual are used quite differently in Eastern and Western epic. Myths in Homer's *Odyssey* serve to create a symbolic world for Odysseus. In this way, Homer creates a literary effect much more complex than any we have seen in the *Gilgamesh* epic. The myths in *Gilgamesh*, on the other hand, are practical explanations of events in life. Myths are plentiful in the *Odyssey*, for example, but are used for a different purpose. Myths and the supernatural in the *Odyssey* create an unreal atmosphere not only for the audience but for the characters involved. *Gilgamesh*, on the other hand, is quite content in a world of myth. In fact, his very journey to find immortality is a mythical journey that abounds in folklore. *Gilgamesh* is placed in a world of fantasy. On his journey to Utnapishtim, he meets the magical Siduri. He performs amazing feats such as killing many wild animals. On his return from Utnapishtim, he encounters the snake who steals his magical plant. Odysseus, on the other hand, fights to escape all the mythical situations in which he becomes involved. His only desire is home where there are no divine Kalypsos, no magical Circes or utopian Thaiakians. Georg Lukacs explains the attitude toward myth in the epics: "There have been times, perhaps—certain fairy-tales still retain fragments of these lost worlds—when what today can only be reached through a utopian view was really present to the visionary eye; epic poets in those times did not have to leave the
empirical in order to represent transcendent reality as the only existing one, they could be simple narrators of events, just as the Assyrians who drew winged beasts doubtless regarded themselves, and rightly, as naturalists. Already in Homer's time, however, the transcendent was inextricably interwoven with earthly existence, and Homer is inimitable precisely because, in him, this becoming-immanent was so completely successful.\textsuperscript{19}

Let us examine in detail the structure and place of myth first in the \textit{Gilgamesh} epic, and then in the \textit{Odyssey}. The simplest form of myth found in \textit{Gilgamesh} is the dream. It is simple because it involves an individual conception and not a universal one. Ira Progoff defines the relationship between dream and myth: "In general, dreams are that aspect of the symbolic dimension that is experienced in personal terms. When the symbolic dimension is perceived in transpersonal terms, in terms that pertain to more than the subjective experience of the individual reaching to what is universal in man, whether the experience is in sleeping or waking, myth is involved."\textsuperscript{20} Dreams are frequent in the \textit{Gilgamesh} epic. The coming of Enkidu is announced to Gilgamesh in two dreams interpreted by Ninsun. The dream affords a


way of predicting the future and introduces the axe and the falling star as symbols for Enkidu. Enkidu interprets the next dream of Gilgamesh. In the dream of Gilgamesh, the falling mountain symbolizes the defeat of Humbaba. Enkidu also dreams and tells his dream to Gilgamesh. Enkidu sees a vision of afterlife in his dream. The dream here is used to reveal what can not be seen in life. Like all dreams in the Gilgamesh epic, this dream too is accomplished. All dreams are taken as matters of supreme importance. The necessity for interpretation shows that the dreams are expected to have relevant meaning to the dreamer. Because dreams are always accomplished in the Gilgamesh epic, it becomes difficult for the character to sort out dreams from reality.

Dreams in Homer are used somewhat differently. It is true that they do often foretell the future. They share this role with those in the Gilgamesh epic. But the characters in Homer seem to rationalize in their dreams and realize that these are dreams. For example, Penelope realizes that the dream figure is the goddess Athene and not her sister. The dream figure directly reveals the message and there is no place for latter interpretation. Dreams in Homer fulfill the same basic technical function of foretelling the plot but seem to be viewed differently by the characters involved.

21Odyssey, 4. 808-41.
In the *Gilgamesh* epic, other elements of folklore and myth that seem fantastic to the reader are real for the characters involved. When Gilgamesh kills the monster Humbaba he believes he is doing a service to Shamash and his people. Similarly, when Gilgamesh kills the Bull of Heaven, he is ending the drought. For Gilgamesh, killing the Bull of Heaven is part of a religious ritual. It is not just a fantastic adventure as Polyphemos or the Scylla and Charbdis are for Odysseus. The bull-leaping which Enkidu performs before killing the bull is connected with a religious fertility ritual. The similarity with the Cretan-sport has already been discussed. Bulls played a dominant role in Mesopotamian religion. The curved horns of the bull symbolize the crescent of the moon. These became objects of religious worship. Archaeologists have found figures of bulls encircled with the sign of the moon goddess.22

This incident, then, is part of a religious ritual which Gilgamesh and Enkidu perform even though the killing of the Bull may seem just a fantastic display of strength or courage to later readers. N. K. Sandars explains the place of myth in the *Gilgamesh* epic: "Once a myth has crystallized into literary form it is already dead as belief or ceremonial, but it is possible that, at least in the earliest strata of our material, this change was not yet complete, and for that

reason we must not be surprised to find embedded in such early poems fragments of belief which appear grotesque or banal; while at other times we are confronted by the disjecta membra of a poetry which never quite emerges. Hence, we see myth in the *Gilgamesh* epic which has not quite deteriorated as a belief.

The supernatural, in Homer, on the other hand, is used for merely literary purposes since myth as a belief is dead. In Homer, stories of gods are often used to provide humour in between the more serious sections of the epic. The gods fighting in battles, for example, become the object of laughter. Aphrodite, on one occasion, is wounded and runs to heaven for protection. The ease with which a goddess is cured and the sight of Aphrodite complaining to Zeus makes the incident humorous. Hera tricks Zeus from interfering in battle by seducing him. This delightful incident provides an intermission from the battle accounts. In the *Odyssey* too, myths of the gods provide amusement. After the unpleasant incident in which Euryalos taunts Odysseus in the land of the Phaiakians, Demodokus sings the tale of Ares and Aphrodite in which Hephaistos sets a trap to catch his wife Aphrodite with her

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24 *Iliad*, 5. 343 f.
lover Ares. Thus one literary use, however simple it may seem, of myth in Homer is to change the scene from serious to light. It relieves the tension of the audience and holds interest by suspension of an awaited event.

In the *Odyssey*, folklore has a much different meaning than in *Gilgamesh*. Gilgamesh is at home among strange adventures that are very real to him. Gilgamesh seeks adventure voluntarily. Odysseus encounters fanciful adventures in his search for home. He is thrust unwillingly into a world of strangeness and he knows it is strange. Homer sets off the fanciful adventures from the real ones. The land of Kalypso and the promise of immortality do not tempt Odysseus to give up the real life of Ithaka. He escapes from the marvelous adventures, Circe, the Cyclops, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis. Scheria is also land which is strange to humans. From this utopian society too, Odysseus chooses to escape. Odysseus belongs nowhere in this world of myth and unreality. In fact he is "no one" (as he tells Polyphemos) until he reaches the real world of Ithaka. Homer creates a striking contrast by placing Odysseus, an exceptionally strong and clever but not unbelievable character, into a world of the unbelievables. The technique of composition in Homer allow a much more sophisticated use of folklore. By using the law of contrast, Homer develops an epic rich in artistic technique and not just a simple narrative enriched only by marvelous

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26 *Odyssey*, 8. 266 f.
folk adventures.

Before we examine the style of the narrative, let us now turn to a brief sketch of the literary devices common to both epics by virtue of their dependence on oral tradition. N. K. Sandars enumerates the oral characteristics of the *Gilgamesh* epic: "a poem in twelve songs or cantos of about three hundred lines each, inscribed on separate tablets. The Ninevite recension is written in loose rhythmic verse with four beats to a line, while the old Babylonian has a shorter line with two beats." The poem also contains repetitions, epithets and greeting formulae. He adds "that," all of these are familiar characteristics of oral poetry, tending to assist the task of the reciter, and also give satisfaction to the audience."27 The Homeric epics, composed in dactylic hexameter, contain many of the same devices. Both poems use a stock epithet to express a new day: "rosy fingered dawn," in Homer and "with the first glow of dawn" in *Gilgamesh*. Also, a similar formula of greeting is revealed in both Eastern and Western epics. When Gilgamesh meets Utnapishtim, he tells who he is, where his homeland is and what deeds he has accomplished.28 Odysseus too, gives the same information to those he meets throughout his travels.

28*Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. J. B. Fritchard, p. 64.
Here we see that some similarities must be attributed to oral tradition.

These epics, products of oral tradition, are unified by several literary devices. The use of simile and metaphor is one such device. The sameness of identity between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is illustrated by means of a simile. Both are compared to Anu. Enkidu compares Gilgamesh to Anu. 29 Enkidu is compared to a shooting star "the essence of Anu." 30 The attraction of Gilgamesh to Enkidu is described by still another comparison. Gilgamesh sees an axe in his dream and immediately puts the axe at his side. Ninsun interpretes the axe as Enkidu. The same image is continued throughout the epic. When Gilgamesh delivers, to the nobles of Uruk, his lament for Enkidu, he calls Enkidu, "the axe at my side." 31 When Gilgamesh goes on the journey to Humbaba he is fitted with an axe "The Might of Heroes." After the death of Enkidu, the axe of Gilgamesh is not used again, except in a dream in which Gilgamesh weeps for Enkidu's death. 32 In general, the similes in Gilgamesh are simple. A character is compared will a bull, a lion, a star or an axe but the simile is not

29 Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. J. B. Pritchard, p. 43.
30 Ibid., p. 46.
31 Ibid., p. 61.
32 Ibid., p. 62.
extended any further. On the other hand, extended similes are frequent in Homer. Often several similes follow one another. Below is the second in a series of four similes:

These, as the multitudinous nation of birds winged, of geese, and of cranes, and of swans long-throated in the Asian meadows beside the Kaystrian waters this way and that way make their flights in the pride of their wings, then settle in clashing swarms and the whole meadow echoes with them.

The Greek army is compared to the swarming birds. Three other levels of comparison are employed in the other similes when the army is compared to fire, insects and finally goat-herds. In the above simile, the birds are placed on the same level of importance as the Greek army by virtue of its full and vivid description. Thus the extended simile in Homer takes on a life of its own.

The epic of Gilgamesh, contains another literary device, which contributes to its unity, ring composition. The Iliad too uses the literary device of ring composition. This provides still another way of unifying the epic by tying the beginning to the end. It also provides a framework and symmetry for the epic as a whole.

In the epic of Gilgamesh, a dream and its fulfillment may be a type of ring composition. The fulfillment of a god's prophecy acts the same way. Shamash tells Enkidu that Gilgamesh "has placed thee on the seat of ease, the seat at the left, /
that princes of the earth may kiss thy feet." After Enkidu's death and Gilgamesh's song of lament, Gilgamesh says: "On a couch of honor I made thee lie, / I placed thee on the seat of ease, the seat at the left, / that the princes of the earth might kiss thy feet." The death of Enkidu and his vision of the afterlife forms the center of the epic just as Odysseus' trip to the underworld is placed in the approximate center of the Odyssey.

The end of the Gilgamesh epic shows several other correspondences with the beginning. The epic begins and ends with: "O Gilgamesh, lord of Kullab, great is thy praise." The beginning of the epic describes the temple Eanna, sacred to Anu and Ishtar. The end of the epic sees Gilgamesh return again to Uruk and the temple precinct of Ishtar. As in the beginning, the base terrace and brickwork of the temple are described. Although quite simple and direct, the epic of Gilgamesh does show some concentricity.

The literary device of ring composition provides the Iliad also with a symmetrical structure. However, in the Iliad, the structure is much more complex. The wrath of Achilleus is the main topic. All events look backward and forward to the quarrel. As in the Gilgamesh epic, the end

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35 Ibid., p. 61
of the *Iliad* parallels the beginning. The pattern of Books I and XXIV of the *Iliad* is illustrated by Cedric Whitman. He enumerates the principal scenes in Book I:

1. the rejection of Chryses, with the plague and the funeral pyres;
2. the council of chiefs and the Quarrel;
3. Thetis with Achilles, consoling him and agreeing to take a message to Zeus;
4. Thetis with Zeus, where the latter adopts the hero's cause;
5. the disputatious assembly of the gods, where Hera opposes Zeus. Book XXIV takes up this scheme, but reverses it, beginning with:
6. the dispute among the gods, with Hera still leading the opposition, though now in a different sense;
7. Thetis with Zeus, receiving notice that the gods no longer support Achilles in his maltreatment of Hector's corpse;
8. Thetis with Achilles, consoling him and bringing him a message from Zeus;
9. Achilles with Priam, where the magnanimous restitution of Hector's body inverts the selfish seizure of Briseis, and the compassion between technical enemies reverses the hostility between technical allies of Book I; and finally
10. the funeral of Hector in Troy, corresponding, though perhaps vaguely to the first funerals of the poem in the Greek camp.37

Furthermore, Whitman illustrates a similar detailed pattern of symmetry within each book of the *Iliad*.

The structure of *Gilgamesh*, on the other hand, is not quite as complex. There is no great reversal of a pattern as there is in the Zeus-Thetis parallels within the *Iliad*. The ending of *Gilgamesh*, although in a simple way, is however linked to the beginning. *Gilgamesh* returns to Uruk and is described in the same words with which he was introduced with

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no variation or reversal of order. "He was wise, he saw mysteries and knew secret things, he brought us a tale of the days before the flood. He went on a long journey, was weary, worn out with labour and returning engraved on a stone the whole story."\(^{38}\) Besides this repetition and others like it, the epic of Gilgamesh contains little or no concentricity within episodes as Whitman has seen so regularly within the books of the Iliad. The poet of Gilgamesh seems to be straining to provide framework and symmetry. The epic lacks the refinement and subtlety which is present in Homer's epics.\(^{39}\) The framework and symmetry of Gilgamesh, however stylistically simple and direct, can not be denied.

Let us now examine the style of the narrative. The complexity and richness in the narrative in the Homeric epics enchances the epics as art forms. The narrative is much more simple in Gilgamesh. Both the poet of Gilgamesh and Homer endeavor to put together a series of historical events, mythical tales and religious customs into one unified epic. The epic of Gilgamesh is a series of incidents narrated in serial fashion. The epic is unified in that all the events


It is true however, that the simpleness in form may be due to the fragmentary state of the epic. The translation of Sandars has been mainly used in this argument because Sandars is most complete in relating all the episodes in the Gilgamesh cycle. Versions in the different languages must suffice to fill in the gaps because an original complete version is lacking.
pertain to the adventures of a single character, the hero, Gilgamesh. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are constructed in a much more complex fashion. In the *Iliad*, various events happen on different planes within the epic. Homer often interrupts a battle account to tell what the gods are doing while the battle of mortals is raging. In Book IV, Hektor and Ajax are matched against each other in battle. Book XVI relates a scene between Achilleus and Patroclus at Achilleus' tent. This later scene takes place at the same time as the events in Book XV. Furthermore, Homer centers upon not one character but many. These characters are seen in association with different people at different times. The *Odyssey* uses a still more complex technique to give the epic depth. The journey of Telemachos to Menelaos and Nestor takes place while Odysseus is being released from Kalypso's island and arrives on the island of Scheria. To reveal what had happened before Odysseus arrived at Scheria, the story-telling device is employed. There are actually two parallel stories in the *Odyssey*, That of Telemachos and that of Odysseus. To add even another level, the counter-theme of Agamemnon's murder is introduced from time to time. The poem's complex unity resides in the interaction of the various sub-plots with the main plot.

Another element which adds to the narrative complexity is the story telling device. Both Gilgamesh and Odysseus spend a considerable time narrating their adventures. Each time Gilgamesh relates the story of his adventures, the tale
becomes longer and longer as he adds his most recent adventure to the list. Homer, in the *Odyssey*, also uses a story-telling device. Odysseus tells his story to the Phaiakians. This is not simple repetition but a flashback. This technique of flashback adds another dimension to the epic. It is a more sophisticated technique of narrative than the linear development of a chain of events happening in succession in the *Gilgamesh* epic. The closest resemblance to the technique of flashback in the *Gilgamesh* epic is the tale of the flood. It is true that the flood is a story of a past event enclosed in the framework of another story. Still this does not give the epic the complexity which the flashback technique gives the *Odyssey*. Let us see why. The flood is not an adventure of the main character. The story of the flood is a simple tale of an incident in the life of Utnapishtim and an explanation of his immortality. It is clear that Utnapishtim is telling a story of his past. The story is told in the past tense. Utnapishtim frequently interjects reminders that this is a tale. He states: "I said" or "Anu told me."

In the *Odyssey*, the main character, Odysseus relates a story which is part of the action of the epic. The whole story seems to be happening in the present. Homer, at several points in Odysseus' narrative, chooses to remind the listener or reader that Odysseus is narrating a tale. At one point, he does this by returning the scene briefly to the land of the
Phaiakians then resumes the story. Odysseus, unlike Gilgamesh in Utnapishtim's story, is a character in his own story. Because Odysseus is telling the story of his own wandering, the story seems part of the plot. The deluge, on the other hand, is not one of Gilgamesh's adventures. The length of Odysseus' tale (Book IX through XII) makes it a significant part of the plot. The fact that it is a tale subordinates the tale to the rest of the epic in construction but not necessarily in importance. This involvement of the main character at both levels of the story is a technique which is not comparable to anything in *Gilgamesh*.

The *Odyssey* is a unified epic even though there are so many levels of narrative. There are several plots within one. Telemachos is the center of his own story of finding his father and protecting his home from the suitors. The story of Agamemnon's return home to death at the hands of his wife is occasionally woven in throughout the epic. On the other hand, a part of the whole, such as the tale of Odysseus' wanderings may be a unit in itself. The presence of these sub-plots is justified through connection with the main theme of Odysseus' homecoming. Telemachos' search parallels his father's journey homeward. The theme of Agamemnon's murder plays against Odysseus' safe homecoming. The wanderings of Odysseus in unrealistic situations contrast his homecoming to his real home Ithaka.

40 *Odyssey*, 11. 333-385.
The unification of the epic of *Gilgamesh* is much more easily accomplished since every incident involves the main character. But the unity of *Gilgamesh* is more deeply established than this explanation would suggest. Dreams and similes are used to connect the various incidents together. The dreams of *Gilgamesh* about the coming of Enkidu help to emphasize the connection and significance Enkidu will have for his companion. Dreams are sometimes used to foretell the plot. The dream of Enkidu foretells his death. Dreams reveal the plot and show the significance of events. Furthermore, dreams are a way of contributing directly to the development of the plot. It is in a dream of Enkidu that the council of gods decrees the fate of Enkidu and condemns the slaughter of the Bull of Heaven and the guardian of the Cedars, Humbaba. Dreams in *Gilgamesh* serve a purpose similar to Teiresias' repetition of Odysseus' fate. Both foretell the direction of the plot to the reader. We have already seen that dreams in the *Gilgamesh* epic are always accomplished. They are not part of a world of myth or fanciful adventure. Furthermore, because the dreams are always accomplished, their significance becomes part of the plot. Now we can begin to see how important the dream becomes as a literary device for the poet.

The prediction of Siduri holds a function in common with that of the dream, namely, to suppress suspense and

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41 Epic of *Gilgamesh*, trans. J. B. Pritchard, p. 56.
create a sense of temporal totality. Siduri predicts that Gilgamesh will never find the immortal life for which he is searching. The outcome of the plot is foretold before the conclusion of the epic. The plot of the *Odyssey* is similarly revealed early in the epic. Teiresias and Circe reveal that Odysseus will reach home after much wandering and the loss of all his companions. The looking back (through flashbacks) and looking ahead (through predictions) does not obscure the temporal unity. On the contrary, this enhances it by helping to relate all events to the main character. It is not necessary for a work of literature to predict the outcome of events although many do. Since many do predict the outcome, it may not initially seem of great importance that both the *Odyssey* and the *Gilgamesh* epic do take such pains to enlighten the audience. Upon closer examination, these predictions reveal that the authors are conscious of an overall framework into which they are fitting legends and historical facts which they have inherited. Thus they are not merely narrating and preserving past events, but they are actually forming a work of art unified in plot and time. The direction of the epic is confined by the plot which is presented from time to time throughout the epic. A sense of temporal unity is achieved through the tendency to integrate the whole. Beginning, middle and end are all bound together as one.

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The epic of *Gilgamesh*, then, like the *Odyssey* has collected a series of past events and presented them in a literary fashion. Within the epic a synthesis of Mesopotamian culture is preserved. This was done at a point in which someone preserved by means of a literary synthesis a culture which has grown to a point worthy and suitable for what was to become literary genre of epic. At this point in civilization, the monarchy is declining; authority is no longer centralized in one man. Now, along with the rise of a class that is actively taking charge of society, a higher degree of historical self-consciousness is required. This is the point of civilization during which the *Gilgamesh* epic is being created.

Homer also inherits the tales of a civilization at a corresponding point in its development. As we have discussed above in the section on monarcy, the historical narrative of Homer's epics and the *Gilgamesh* epic suggest similar stages of development. Again in Homer's time a literary art form later classified as the genre of epic is produced. In these two cases, at least, it seems that epic is created, at least in part, by a civilization which is grounded in oral tradition and which has arrived at an advanced stage of cultural development. The oral tradition preserves historical events and mythical beliefs encompassing the long period of gradual growth and change of civilization. Georg Lukacs sums the characteristics of the epic: "The epic is of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given,
in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality.\textsuperscript{43} Thus the epic using the devices of literature to compress and unify these events, records the transformations of civilization.

Both Eastern and Western epics narrate a chain of historical events and reveal the myths and legends of their respective societies. Both Eastern and Western culture have arrived at a highly advanced degree of civilization. Both cultures produced unified epics showing the use of many of the same literary techniques. The genre of epic produced by civilizations at parallel points in the development of each and the use of the same stylistic devices cause the Eastern and Western epics to be similar. There are also differences which make \textit{Gilgamesh} a treasury of Eastern culture and Homer's epics similarly the storehouse of Western civilization.

We have seen that these epics record the historical, religious, and social customs and problems of civilizations undergoing constant change. When a poet records an event or belief, the custom is most probably about to die or already dead, as we have seen earlier in this chapter. The rapid transformations of a civilization at crucial points in development create a desire to concretise and record events. These transformations can not be preserved in king lists or inventories of trade. Hence, in our study of very first epic poems, we see the genesis of the epic itself.

\textsuperscript{43}Georg Lukacs, \textit{Theory of the Novel}, p. 56.
CHAPTER V

THE NATURE OF EPIC

In the last three chapters, we have been examining mainly the similarities in content and style between the Eastern and Western epics. Now let us turn to a more thorough examination of the major differences between the epics. Then let us try to suggest possible explanations for the differences in mentality. In every main category where we find a similarity, we also find a difference in outlook.

First, we studied the pantheon of the gods set forth in the Gilgamesh epic and in the Homeric epics. The hierarchy of the gods is presented similarly in both epics. The role of the gods in each epic is somewhat different, however. The fundamental difference is revealed in the two opposing attitudes toward the gods. The Gilgamesh epic manifests a serious attitude and the Homeric epics, a light attitude. In the second category we studied, the heroes, we find characters similar to one another, such as Gilgamesh and Achilleus or Enkidu and Patroclus. And here again we find a difference between Eastern and Western thought. The Gilgamesh epic reveals a pessimistic attitude and a mistrust in human nature. The Homeric epics reveal a growing faith in the power of the individual man to accomplish great deeds either with the help of or in spite of the gods. Further, in the Gilgamesh epic,
we see a hero, Utnapishtim, who has no parallel at all in
the Homeric epics. In our third section, we examined the
general thematic concern of the epics. Here, we saw a
portrayal of civilizations at similar periods of social un-
rest; and especially signs of growing discontent with absolute
monarchy. Each epic provides contrasting solutions to the
same problems. The Eastern epic ends by showing man's
resignation to his fate although he is clearly unhappy with
it. The Homeric epics project a view of man never yielding
until he fulfills his desires.

None of these differences, however, are sufficient to
obscure the general features of the genre of epic. Although
the style in the Homeric epics is much more elaborate and
polished than that in the Gilgamesh epic, the style of both
is still an epic style. We must conclude then that these
elements which are different represent permissible variations
within the genre of epic. In studying the similarities and
differences we also find elements basic to the epic genre.

First, let us study the role of the gods in the epics. The epic of Gilgamesh presents the gods as ominous, forbidding
characters. There is no way to escape their wrath. The gods
in Gilgamesh must be respected. If men attempt to show dis-
respect the gods retaliate by severe punishment. We have seen
how Ishtar punishes Gilgamesh for scorning her. The goddess
punishes Gilgamesh by sending the Bull of Heaven, a drought
which affects not only Gilgamesh, the transgressor but many
innocent people as well. Ishtar and gods are fighting
against Gilgamesh and humanity. It seems as though the
Gilgamesh epic is setting up a battle scene between human
and divine. The men are not able to overpower the gods.
The immortal gods have an edge over man's mortality. When
Enlil becomes enraged with Enkidu, he sends him to his death.
The death of Enkidu is not merely a punishment for himself
or a sorrow for his companion, Gilgamesh. Enkidu's death
brings sorrow to all nature. We see this in Gilgamesh's
lament:

May weep for thee (...)
And echo the countryside as though it were thy mother.
May weep for thee (...)
In whose midst we ... May weep for thee
bear, hyena, (panther),
Tiger, hart, leopard, lion; oxen, deer, (ibex),
And the wild creatures of the steppe.
May weep for thee the river Ula (...)
By whose banks we used to walk.
May weep for thee the pure Euphrates, (where we drew)
Water for the skin. May weep for thee
The warriors of wide, (ramparted) Uruk

Again we see the gods punishing not only the transgressor, but
the innocent countryside as well. Gilgamesh spends the remainder
of the epic in search of the god's all-powerful shield,
immortality. His defeat echoes a defeat for all humanity.

Because this divine-human battle revolves around the
serious question of life and death, for all humanity, there
is little room for humour. Homer's Iliad also deals with the
theme of life and death, but with the death of individuals.
The death of Patroclus is not a punishment from the gods for

1Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. J. B. Pritchard, p. 60.
any hubristic action of Patroclus as the death of Enkidu was. In the *Iliad*, the battle between the Greeks and the Trojans, a battle between humans, is the actual cause of death for the warriors. Although the gods take sides in the battle and at times actually fight and kill their opponents, it is not a battle of all humanity against all divinity. No matter who wins the battle, even though an entire army may be defeated, some men are still victorious. All humanity is not threatened. The gods may destroy one man but help another. For this reason, the gods in Homer do not seem such formidable opponents. For, they are not opponents of all mankind but deal with men on individual grounds. It is true that at times gods in Homer act like Enlil. For example, Apollo takes revenge for the outrage to his priest by sending a plague to the Greek army.\(^2\) But still Apollo is not the supreme god as Enlil is. Apollo can not prolong his anger forever for Zeus is always there to impose his authority. In most cases, in the Homeric epics, an individual is punished for an individual act. The immortals do not wage war against all the mortals.

In the *Odyssey*, the gods are even less formidable to mankind. The *Odyssey* singles out the adventures of one individual man, Odysseus. He is befriended by the goddess, Athene. Together they successfully fight whatever danger arises whether

\(^2\) *Iliad*, l. 45-55.
it is mortal or supernatural. Odysseus in no way vies with the gods to share their possession, immortality. In the Odyssey, the strife is not between immortal and mortal, human and divine but simply a contest of wit vs. wit. Whether Odysseus wins or loses does not affect all humanity. Moreover, the contest of wit is one which proves Odysseus strong enough to escape even the supernatural.

The Eastern civilization then, regards the gods as the opponents of mankind. The gods are jealous of their power and punish mankind whenever their power is threatened by mortals. Enlil is angry when Gilgamesh and Enkidu trespass on the territory of the gods and transgress the boundaries of their mortal limits by entering the Country of the Living and killing the monster, Humbaba. This concept of the divine set over against humanity as a whole is more ancient than the Greek ideas and is distinctly Eastern. We see this same attitude in other Eastern texts and especially in the Bible: "I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, from man even to beasts, from the creeping thing even to the fowls of the air, for it repenteth me that I have made them." Here we see God asserting his power not only over humanity but over all nature as well. Here, as in the Gilgamesh epic, we see man and all nature set at odds against the supernatural. Man even when allied with all nature is helpless in the face of the divine.

3Genesis. 6:7
The Greek epics put much more faith in the power of humanity. This distinctively Greek emphasis on humanity is seen more clearly in a study of the heroes, our second main category of interpretation. The heroes of the Gilgamesh epic show the Eastern attitude of pessimism and a distrust in human nature. Gilgamesh is a strong hero but at the opening of the epic he does not use his strength in the service of his people. He is seen abusing his privileges as monarch by usurping the rights of the people. They lose faith in the man who is their ruler and appeal to a higher ruler, the god Enlil, who sends a rival for Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh later in the epic, represents humanity as a whole by his quest for immortality. He is not content with his fate as a human being. But, the point is, he fails to find the secret of immortality and cannot change the fate of man.

The opposite of despair in human nature is seen in the Homeric epics. In the Iliad, the Greek warriors put their trust in their fellow warrior, Achilleus. They rely on his strength for a favorable outcome in battle and feel his absence when he withdraws from battle. Men, in the Iliad, recognize their common humanity. It is the realization of a common humanity which leads to an agreement between the enemies, Priam and Achilleus, over the body of Hektor. They do not, however, seek immortality which can not belong to them, as Gilgamesh does. The heroes in the Iliad are already reconciled to their fate as men, whereas Gilgamesh is just beginning to realize,
through his vain quest, that he can do nothing to alter his fate. This realization is a necessary condition of heroism. Heroes, in the Iliad, fight battles to achieve fame by immortal deeds because they realize they themselves are mortal:

Man, supposing you and I, escaping this battle, would be able to live on forever, ageless, immortal, so neither would I myself go on fighting in the foremost nor would I urge you into the fighting where men win glory. But now, seeing that the spirits of death stand close about us in their thousands, no man can turn aside nor escape them, let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others."

The Homeric epics take for granted man's mortality. But in the Gilgamesh epic, man must acquire this knowledge. Hence, we see a progression from the Gilgamesh epic to Homer, from mere realization of humanity to man's reconciliation with his fate.

The hero of the Odyssey not only is reconciled to his fate but is so accustomed to humanity that he refuses divinity. We have seen this in Odysseus' refusal of Kalypso's invitation to immortality. Here, in the Odyssey, the progression from realization to reconciliation is completed by individual contentment. The individual man comes into his own in the Odyssey, as we have suggested above in our discussion of the gods' role in the epics. Odysseus recognizes his essence not only as man (an identification with all humanity) but also his role as husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus, son of

\[Iliad, 12. 322-328.\]
Laertes and king of Ithaka. He is an individual fighting for his own peculiar prize, his own home. In this way, the Odyssey differs from the Iliad. For, in the Iliad, the Greeks are fighting in common for the sake of another man's wife. The Trojans are fighting collectively to defend their land. In the Odyssey we see one man fighting to reach his land. It is true that in the Gilgamesh epic, we also see the adventures of one man. But he is searching for immortality which all men lack. Odysseus can only be happy in his own Ithaka and no other man belongs in the capacity of husband of Penelope and king of Ithaka.

Gilgamesh's search for immortality takes him to Utnapishtim, the only mortal who has become immortal. The story of the deluge in which Utnapishtim receives his immortality is unparalleled in the Homeric epics. Utnapishtim happens to have escaped his own death but cannot help others escape death. This adds to the feeling of the utter passivity and helplessness of man to escape his fate in the Gilgamesh epic. The flood episode illustrates still another example of the gods punishing mankind collectively. The purpose of the deluge, according to Enlil, Enlil, is to destroy all men: "Has some living soul/ escaped?/ No man was to survive the destruction!" Mankind is by itself powerless to escape the will of the gods who attack mankind as a whole.

5Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. J. B. Pritchard, p. 70.
In the Homeric epics, the battle is not between men and gods, as we have seen. A story such as the deluge which destroys mankind as a whole would be highly out of place in the Homeric epics. The Greek man is a much more hopeful man. If someone should escape the bounds of mortality, he would be, according to the Greek mind, one who would be capable of helping other men at any cost to himself. We see this hope that mankind can be helped expressed in the conception of Prometheus. He helps men by bringing the art of fire even though he himself is punished for this act. Again we see the emphasis on the individual. It is Prometheus who is punished and not all humanity.

If the story of wholesale punishment would be unusual in the Homeric epics, so too would the story of destruction by means of a deluge. We have seen in the first chapter the Greek and particularly the Cretan dependence on the sea and sea-trade for their very existence. The peoples of the Mesopotamian Valley, however, are well acquainted with the frequent floods which destroy food, shelter and men themselves. This recurrence of destruction itself may explain the pessimism and feeling of despair revealed in their literature. In fact, a land dependent upon water for its livelihood, according to Karl Wittfogel, is apt to be governed by a despotic ruler: "It was this routine terror in managerial, fiscal and juridical procedures that caused certain observers
to designate the government of hydraulic despotism as "government by flogging". ⁶ It is not surprising to see such a pessimistic attitude among people so governed. The geography of a land, for example, then causes differences in the mental attitudes of people of different regions of the world. It is these different mental attitudes that produce the variations in outlook found in Eastern and Western epics.

The third category which we will examine is the thematic structure of the epics. As we have seen in Chapter IV, both Eastern and Western epics reveal civilizations at parallel points in their respective developments. Both are at a period of social unrest. The people of Uruk rebel against Gilgamesh, their absolute monarch. Achilleus rebels against the authority of Agamemnon. The Odyssey, as we have seen, is a reversal of the monarch-subject theme. Each civilization furnishes different solutions to the problems of their own epochs.

In the Gilgamesh epic, the people of Uruk appeal to the gods for help against their too powerful king. Gilgamesh's power is subsequently matched by his rival, Enkidu, sent by the gods at the request of the people. The friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu results in service to the people as a whole. The expedition to kill Humbaba is meant to destroy some evil which is menacing the people. After Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh tries to serve the people again by bringing home

immortality. When he fails in this, he tries to bring home the herb of rejuvenation. He fails in this, too. Gilgamesh could have eaten the herb immediately and become young, but he does not do this. He takes it with him on his journey home to Uruk and thus loses the herb to the water snake. In an age of social discontent, the Eastern epic tries to portray the reformed monarch who endeavors to help humanity but fails.

The Odyssey reveals a solution to the problems of rebellion against authority presented in the Iliad in the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilleus. The question raised is: What is able to control the power of the ruler? In the Gilgamesh epic, the answer is not as simple. Odysseus exercises his power and strength over the suitors. In killing the suitors he punishes those who are guilty. In this sense, he is fulfilling a function of the gods, that is, the power of life and death over men. We have seen Enlil and Ishtar, in the Gilgamesh epic, punish those who have done injury to them. And, also, we have seen the gods in the Gilgamesh epic, punish men collectively and indiscriminately as in the deluge story. Odysseus does not punish indiscriminately but is stopped by the goddess Athene from spreading his quarrel with the suitors of Penelope to the other townsmen of Ithaka:

"Son of Laertes, and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,/ hold hard, stop this quarrel in closing combat, for fear/ Zeus of the wide brows, son of Kronos may be angry with you."\(^7\) Here

\(^7\)Odyssey, 24. 542-544.
the power of the ruler is controlled by the divine Athene.

In the epic of Gilgamesh, it is Enkidu, a human, even though he is sent by the gods, who controls the power of Gilgamesh. It is a human bond of common mortality which unites Gilgamesh and Enkidu. This is but another indication of the heroes of Gilgamesh joining together as human beings to fight their common enemies. When the people of Uruk appeal to the gods for help against their monarch, the gods do not directly intervene but send a human to help. This independence of mankind expresses feeling of man's isolation in the face of trouble. In the Odyssey, however, we see a man's appeal to the gods result in direct divine assistance and ultimate success. Moreover, the individual man does not stop until he has achieved his desire.

The differences we have seen in these three categories do not make a difference in the genre of epic. What then makes each work an epic? An epic does not have to deal with gods but both of these do. They happen to do so, because gods are part of each's culture and civilization. The heroes express their attitude to the things around them. They explain nature in terms of gods. They seek their place in the cosmos. In the Eastern epic, the heroes find their essence as man. In the Homeric epics, the heroes seek their individual identities. The narrative deals with the problems that arise within a society built on the principals we see in each epic. Thus, in all three categories, in both Eastern and Western
epic, we see man in his own environment, in the civilization which he has formed. The common ground of the epics is the expression of each's culture.

As we have seen, it is not the expression of any culture. It is the expression of the transformations of a great civilization that has grown to a height of power. Such a civilization must keep changing and adapting itself to each new phase of society: The record of each such civilization differs according to national characteristics. Trade and commerce between nations, even in such ancient times as we are studying spread customs and beliefs. We have seen that the Hittites share elements of their theogony with both East and West. Sea-faring Crete is another intermediary between East and West. We have seen that the intermingling of the gods and men in the plots of the Gilgamesh epic and the Homeric epics are used to express the problems of man living in the time when man becomes aware of himself first as a man and then as an individual. Man, aware of himself as an individual, at the same time becomes aware of his need for others. Society is necessary. As civilization grows and becomes more complex, the family unit becomes too small to take care of individual needs. With the realization of the necessity for society, comes the realization of the necessity to solve the problems which society itself creates and most prominently the problem of authority. We see a cyclic development in each man in society. Man realizes he is mortal like all other men. Then,
he realizes he is an individual. And again he realizes the common bond of all men and the need for dependence. This conflict in man is also seen in the human-divine opposition which we have seen in the hero. A record of society's constant struggle to exist by ever adapting itself to growth and complexity is preserved by a work of art consciously constructed by a poet who reflects the cyclic development of society in the concentric structure of his work. The epic, then, in almost every respect, reflects the becoming of society.
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