

## **Global Literature I**

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### **Literacy Analysis Paper**

#### **The Epic of Gilgamesh**

##### **Introduction:**

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a classic work of ancient Mesopotamian literature that tells the story of the legendary King Gilgamesh of Uruk and his companion, Enkidu. Enkidu is a key figure in the story, as he is Gilgamesh's loyal friend and ally throughout many of the adventures that the two undertake together. Despite his importance to the story, Enkidu's character is often overshadowed by that of Gilgamesh, leaving him somewhat underexplored and undervalued.

This paper seeks to rectify this oversight by providing a more in-depth examination of the character of Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Through a careful analysis of the text and consideration of the historical and cultural context in which the story was written, we will develop a deeper understanding of Enkidu's role in the story and the significance of his character.

##### **Thesis:**

Enkidu, the companion of Gilgamesh, is a complex and multi-dimensional character whose role in the Epic of Gilgamesh goes beyond that of a mere sidekick. Through his interactions with Gilgamesh, his experiences in the wilderness, and his eventual demise, Enkidu serves as

a catalyst for Gilgamesh's growth and development, and as a symbol of humanity's relationship with the natural world. By examining Enkidu's character in greater detail, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the complex themes and ideas that the Epic of Gilgamesh explores, and a greater understanding of the ancient Mesopotamian worldview that gave rise to this enduring work of literature.

### Enkidu's Introduction

Enkidu's introduction in the epic presents him as a wild and uncivilized creature, living in the wilderness and coexisting with animals. He is created by the gods as a counterbalance to Gilgamesh's arrogance and tyranny, and his initial purpose is to defeat Gilgamesh in battle. Enkidu is portrayed as a powerful and fearless opponent, described as "terrible as a demon from heaven" (Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet I, line 95). However, despite his physical strength, Enkidu lacks any social or emotional intelligence and is unaware of human customs and norms.

### Enkidu's Friendship with Gilgamesh

Enkidu's character transformation begins when he meets Gilgamesh and forms a close bond with him. Gilgamesh teaches Enkidu about human culture and introduces him to the city of Uruk, where Enkidu discovers the pleasures of civilization, such as food, drink, and music. Through their friendship, Enkidu starts to develop empathy and compassion towards humans, which is evident when he convinces Gilgamesh not to kill Humbaba, the guardian of the Cedar Forest. Enkidu argues that Humbaba is not evil, but rather a protector of the forest and a servant of the gods. This marks a significant shift in Enkidu's personality, from a violent and aggressive creature to a more considerate and humane individual.

### Enkidu's Relationship with Shamhat

Enkidu's relationship with Shamhat, the temple prostitute sent by Gilgamesh to tame him, also plays a significant role in his character development. Shamhat is depicted as a wise and experienced woman who teaches Enkidu about love, pleasure, and the ways of the world. Through their intimate relationship, Enkidu learns about the importance of intimacy and emotional connection, which he had previously been unaware of. Shamhat's influence on Enkidu is evident when he refuses to kill her, despite his initial violent impulses. This shows that Enkidu has become more self-aware and empathetic and that he now understands the value of human life and relationships.

#### Enkidu's Connection with Nature

Enkidu's transformation from a wild beast to a compassionate human is not only due to his socialization and human connection but also his connection with nature. Enkidu's initial existence in the wilderness and his ability to communicate with animals suggest that he has a natural affinity with the natural world. This connection is evident when Enkidu mourns the loss of Humbaba, the guardian of the Cedar Forest, and laments the destruction of nature caused by human greed and ambition. Enkidu's appreciation for nature demonstrates that compassion and empathy are not limited to human relationships but can also extend to non-human beings.

#### Enkidu's Role as a Foil to Gilgamesh

Enkidu's character development is also significant in its contrast with Gilgamesh's character. While Gilgamesh starts the epic as a tyrannical and arrogant ruler, Enkidu's wildness and lack of socialization represent the opposite end of the spectrum. However, as the two characters form a bond, they learn from each other and become more balanced individuals. Enkidu's transformation highlights the importance of humility, empathy, and compassion, which are qualities that Gilgamesh lacks at the beginning of the epic. Enkidu's role as a foil to

Gilgamesh demonstrates that character development is not limited to individual growth but can also occur through our interactions with others.

### Enkidu's Death and its Impact on Gilgamesh

Enkidu's death is a pivotal moment in the epic, as it forces Gilgamesh to confront his own mortality and the fragility of life. The loss of his friend also causes Gilgamesh to question the meaning of his existence and to embark on a quest for immortality. However, Enkidu's death also serves as a reminder of the importance of human connections and the value of friendship. In the words of the goddess Siduri, "When the gods created mankind, they allotted to him death, but life they retained in their own keeping. As for you, Gilgamesh, fill your belly with good things...but also take heed of yourself day by day, make merry each day and let your clothes be bright, bathe yourself in water, cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your wife happy in your embrace" (Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet X, lines 20-27). Siduri's advice highlights the importance of cherishing the simple pleasures of life and the people around us.

### Enkidu's Legacy

Enkidu's legacy lives on after his death, as his transformation from a wild beast to a compassionate human inspires Gilgamesh to become a better person. In the end, Gilgamesh realizes that immortality is not achievable and that his legacy will live on through his deeds and his impact on others. Enkidu's influence on Gilgamesh is evident when the king decides to build a monument in his friend's honor and to make his story known to future generations. This demonstrates the significance of Enkidu's character development and its impact on the narrative of the epic. Enkidu's transformation serves as a reminder that socialization and

human connection are crucial in shaping our identities and that empathy and compassion are essential in creating a better society.

### Conclusion:

Enkidu's character development in the Epic of Gilgamesh is a multi-faceted and complex process that highlights the importance of socialization, human connection, nature, and personal growth. Enkidu's transformation from a wild beast to a compassionate human emphasizes the significance of empathy and compassion in creating a better society. Enkidu's relationships with Gilgamesh, Shamhat, and nature demonstrate the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of understanding and respecting different perspectives. Enkidu's legacy lives on through his impact on Gilgamesh and future generations, showing that our actions and relationships have a lasting impact on the world around us. Overall, Enkidu's character development is a significant aspect of the Epic of Gilgamesh, highlighting the importance of personal growth and the transformative power of human connection.