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**ENGL 108A – First Essay**

**Gilgamesh: Humanity's Inner Demon**

In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a classic work of Mesopotamian literature, we see the story of the King of Uruk, Gilgamesh, unfolding in a series of events that go beyond heroism and delve into the darker parts of our psyche. While traditionally viewed as a heroic figure, I argue that Gilgamesh serves as a symbolic representation of the natural evils that consume every individual. In this essay, I will examine various aspects of Gilgamesh's character, actions, and motivations to support the argument that he is not the “archetypal hero” on a hero's journey but rather a manifestation of the growing inner evils of humankind.

The urge to turn over to the dark side: be cruel, be the most powerful, be immortal, be remembered, be famous; these are urges that exist in every person as it is simply in our nature. As animals, we are hardwired to pursue pleasure and crave power and most of the time, the things that harm us or are not healthy for us are what ironically give us the most pleasure. In the book, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, I wish to argue that Gilgamesh's analysis as a hero is wrong as his actions and his intentions are in no way for the better of his people but are rather, quite selfish and for the feeling of his own empowerment. As a protagonist, Gilgamesh's character can be considered to be similar to every other average human, who naturally feels emotions too deeply and sometimes has the tendency to be completely consumed and swayed by them. Before the battle with Humbaba, Gilgamesh cleverly convinces other people and advisors to approve of the battle by asking the question of whether he should face his and everyone else's fears by fighting

the scary Humbaba or whether he should simply stay silent and although this was a brave move on his part, it was also only because of his selfish desire to become more powerful and be more known and had nothing to do with his duty as king or for the greater good of his people.

Gilgamesh, in the book, faces subconsciously a fear of being forgotten which consumes him to the point where he blindly chases the need to become immortal and the author, in this way, I believe, wanted to portray how inner needs and desires can actually lead a person to go completely mad in their chase of them. Gilgamesh's strength is shown to be mighty, whether it's his strategy in killing The Bull of Heaven or his merciless killing of Humbaba, the power he has as king, he uses to abuse the sons and daughters of his people, as mentioned in the beginning of the story; The power makes him cruel, which makes him happy and carefree, and thirsty for even greater power than he possesses.

In terms of leadership, which is another crucial component of identifying a hero, Gilgamesh is shown to be too immature. After his friend Enkidu's death, he wanders off to a difficult journey in the wild and leaves his throne up to his advisors, which is a duty that kings can't afford to fail, that too for reasons of his own selfish desires of seeking immortality. Instead of a heroic aspect, this behaviour actually portrays the inner evil thoughts that every human at least once in their lives have had. These are the evil thoughts that consume them whole, from choosing between experiencing the pain to causing the pain or from wanting power to achieving it to constantly craving more of it, such thoughts, that symbolise and constitute our darker inner psyche, I believe these are thoughts that are deeply embedded into Gilgamesh's character, perhaps as a reflection of the author's own mind or the minds of those around at that time, and

subconsciously, of all humans who consider wealth, power, their position in society and their fame as their greatest aspirations in life. The problem arises when these aspirations turn addictive and the chasing becomes our way of life. Then, we are driven not by our ambitions or our purpose in life but rather by our endlessly flowing emotions, whether it's those of fear or grief or emptiness or power, like Gilgamesh was driven in his pursuit to search endlessly for immortality due to his fear of death. This inner demon of emotions hovers over our souls all the time, making us want to make certain bad choices, neglect our responsibilities and be a reckless person who can do everything without having to pay the consequences.

Essentially, Gilgamesh's character is an exact prototype of this demon that exists in all of us, the abuse he inflicts on his people, the monsters he kills, the time he wastes on a journey that might have changed him but was still a journey motivated by selfish concerns. He even betrays his duty as king, considering that his kingdom could be facing potential problems while he's gone. The cycle that Gilgamesh's life follows, more than a hero's journey, it follows a sort of determined fate, both in the sense of the story and as a metaphor for the moral lesson of bad choices leading to bad consequences. Although it is not truly known how he dies, the end more or less conveys that Gilgamesh's destruction of himself through the battles with monsters to journeying for days in the wild leads to no clear path in life. His lust, his greed, his fears, his reckless behaviour, all of them had no consequences in the end, as he did not suffer and took glory in the city he had built over the years. He was not granted the gift of immortality by the Gods but it is shown that his strength was still remembered after he died and even statues were made in his name, which really goes to show that if we lived in a world where there were no Gods (or a world that didn't

believe in the Gods), then our inner evils would unleash themselves freely and we would all go crazy in the blind chasing of our unhealthy and dangerous desires.

To conclude, I conclude that the plot of the Gods refusing to grant Gilgamesh his immortality, even though he is already part God and is wise and smart in battle, by refusing to grant this powerful being his immortality in the story, the author might be trying to show us the importance of having a firm control over our actions and deeds, and more than that, over our darker desires. His character can be read as a warning that we must not let grave emotions consume us or let them drive us to the point where we are willing to cross any limits to feel a certain peak of pleasure out of them. Lastly, with this personal analysis, I maintain the argument that the author uses Gilgamesh's character as a subject to symbolise the darkest parts of our inner psyche, a symbol for what those parts of us can change us into, as a person, and the consequences of becoming that person.