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Warren Johansson

GILGAMESH

This Mesopotamian figure ranks as the first tragic hero in world literature. The Epic of Gilgamesh has survived in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite versions that go back to the third millennium before our era. Lost from sight until the decipherment of the cuneiform script retrieved the literatures of early Mesopotamia, the epic is a blend of pure adventure, morality, and tragedy. Only the final version, that of Assurbanipal's library in Nineveh, has survived in virtually complete form, but all the episodes in the cycle existed as separate poems in Sumerian. The setting of the story is the third millennium, and the original language was Sumerian, the Paleoeurasian speech of the first literate civilization of Mesopotamia, which continued like Latin to be copied as a dead language of past culture even after it was displaced by the Eastern Semitic Akkadian.

The epic opens with a brief résumé of the deeds and fortunes of the hero whose praises it sings. Two crucial themes are sounded: (1) that love is at the heart of the hero's character, and (2) that love (or *eros* as the Greeks later called it) is the force that provokes the transformation and development of man's nature. Gilgamesh is announced at the outset as a hero: two-thirds god and one-third man, endowed by the gods with strength, with beauty, with wisdom. His sexual demands upon the people of Uruk are insatiable: "No son is left with his father, for Gilgamesh takes them all. . . . His lust leaves no virgin to her lover, neither the warrior's daughter nor the wife of the noble." In reply to their complaints Aruru, the goddess of creation, forms Enkidu out of clay. "His body was rough, he had long hair like a woman's. . . . He was innocent of mankind;

he knew not the cultivated land." To tame the wild man a harlot offers her services, "she made herself naked and welcomed his eagerness, she incited the savage to love and taught him the woman's art." At the conclusion, the transforming power of eros has humanized him; the wild animals flee from him, sensing that as a civilized man he is no longer one of them. The metamorphosis from the subhuman and savage to his new self proves strikingly how love is the force behind civilization.

Gilgamesh has two dreams with symbolism which presages the homoerotic relationship which the gods have planned for him and the challenger Enkidu. In the Akkadian text there are puns on the words *kisru*, "ball (of fire), meteorite," and *kezru*, "male with curled hair," the counterpart of the harlot, and on *hassinu*, "axe," and *assinu*, "male prostitute." Gilgamesh's superior energy and wisdom set him apart from others and make him lonely; he needs a male companion who can be his intimate and his equal at the same time, while their male bond stimulates and inspires them to action. After a wrestling match between Enkidu and Gilgamesh in which the latter triumphs, the two become comrades. Their erotic drive is not lost, but rather transformed and directed to higher objects; it leads to a homoerotic relationship that entails the rejection of Ishtar, the goddess of love. A liaison of this kind is not contingent on the physical beauty of the lover, it endures until death. Gilgamesh himself abandons his earlier oppressive conduct toward Uruk and comes to behave like a virtuous ruler who pursues the noble goals of fame and immortality through great deeds. But a dream warns Gilgamesh: "The father of the gods has given you kingship" but "everlasting life is not your destiny. . . . Do not abuse this power, deal justly with your servants in the palace."

Because the pair have slain the Bull of Heaven and have slain the demon Humbaba, the council of the gods decrees that one of the two must die, and the choice falls on Enkidu, who succumbs to

illness. Gilgamesh grieves for him and orders a statue erected in his honor. To obtain the secret of everlasting life he journeys far across the sea to Utnapishtim, who tells him the Babylonian version of the story of the Deluge. On his return he carries with him a flower that has power of conferring eternal youth, but loses it to a serpent lying beside a pool and so reaches Uruk empty-handed, yet still able to engrave the tale of his journey in stone. Gilgamesh has been transformed by a love that makes him seek not the pleasures of the moment, but virtue, wisdom, and immortality, hence the motif of the epic is that male bonding is a positive ingredient of civilization itself.

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Warren Johansson

GLOEDEN, WILHELM, BARON VON (1856-1931)

German photographer. Wilhelm von Gloeden was born near Wismar on the Baltic Sea. Though his stepfather was an advisor to the Kaiser, von Gloeden opted for the arts, and trained as a painter in the academic tradition. In his early twenties he showed signs of tuberculosis, and was advised to seek a warmer, dryer climate. In 1878 he settled in Taormina, Sicily. More than just the weather there proved attractive, as he was also able to explore his homosexuality more freely. It was family money and not his painting that supported him, until 1888 when his stepfather defied the new Kaiser and his family estates were forfeited.

Through his cousin, Wilhelm von Plüschow, a professional photographer in Naples, von Gloeden had become interested in photography, and a new career

was launched. Already in 1889 von Gloeden won a prize at an exhibition in Rome; other prizes followed in London, Cairo, Milan, and Paris. The male nudes for which he is best known today were not his only work; he also produced landscapes and studies of peasant life, and was perhaps the world's best-selling photographer in the first decade of this century.

His life changed abruptly again in 1914, when he was repatriated to Germany upon the outbreak of World War I. His studio and home were left in the care of his assistant, Pancrazio Bucini, who had joined him as a model years before at the age of 14. Although von Gloeden returned in 1918, and continued to photograph until 1930, cultural trends had changed and he never regained his reputation. Upon his death he was buried in his adopted village.

Bucini inherited some 3000 glass plate negatives, but five years later was forced to defend von Gloeden's work against obscenity charges brought by the fascist authorities. His defense was successful, but nearly two-thirds of the plates were destroyed during the proceedings or never returned.

Von Gloeden's work must be seen in the light of the artistic concerns of the mid-nineteenth century, during which he was trained. On the one hand, his studies of peasant life reflect a concern for finding a source of artistic inspiration in common life; on the other, his famous male nudes work out in photography the concern for taking classical and academic forms and naturalizing and humanizing them.

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Donald Mader