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## **Nature's Retaliation in the Sumerian Epic Gilgamesh: An Ecocritical Study**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses one of the major conflicts between humans and the wild, natural life as portrayed in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, the earliest surviving great literary work of Mesopotamia. This epic is a prototypical, original narrative about the difficulties which the human groupings face in their confrontation with Nature. The text commences with a description of Uruk city and the wall surrounding it, built to protect the cultural against the natural. There are three protectors seen in the Epic: Gilgamesh, the protector of Culture; Enkidu, the protector of Nature first, the enemy of Nature afterwards; Humbaba, the protector of Nature per se. The lack of harmony among the three conflicting powers sparks the continuous tensions in Gilgamesh. The turning point in the Epic occurs when Enkidu joins forces with Gilgamesh in order to shield their culture by cutting down the Cedar forest. Ecocide is committed only after Enkidu and Gilgamesh ally with the god of the Sun, Shamsh, in order to be spared the retaliation of nature as represented in Humbaba. But Gilgamesh will face the dark destiny of Nature's retaliation in an unexpected manner. This retaliation will be in the form of Nature's refusal to grant him immortality that he aspired for and sought for day and night in the last part of his life.

### **Prologue**

This paper is about the first Sumerian known epic in the Literature of Mankind. It is about Gilgamesh, the first-known literary work in any ancient language by general consent. Gilgamesh is written by an anonymous author around c. 2100 BC. This paper is presented by academic researchers from the country that produced that epic. It is a research about a work we share with the rest of humanity.

Gilgamesh serves as the index to the majority of literary and philosophical themes. We claim that Nature plays a good role there. The ancient

tyrant from Mesopotamia may have been the first human to have defiled the environment and disfigured Nature. This is what the present research is trying to argue and analyze.

### **Synopsis of the Action in the Epic**

The epic has, from the structural point of view, five parts, much like the classical tragedy except that it came some long time earlier than the latter.

The first part relates Gilgamesh's tyranny, focusing on his malpractices as a tyrant. The

people pray to the Sumerian deities to uproot him. The gods decide to create a man sufficiently mighty to overthrow the tyrant. This man is Enkidu.

Enkidu is now in the Garden of Sumeria, the friend and protector of Nature, the flora and fauna in ancient Mesopotamia. In the second part, the informers spy on him to the tyrant. He understands Enkidu's threat. He has to defeat Enkidu in an unfair duel. So, he sends Enkidu a woman with much experience in the arts of physical love, accompanied with strong liquor. Together, Enkidu and the woman spend some time together gratifying their passionate desires. The animals start running away from him, as if he betrayed the cause of Nature. The beasts and the trees see him as a traitor already. Consequently, when he ultimately confronts the tyrant, he is defeated. He turns into a tool in the hands of Gilgamesh.

In the third part, Gilgamesh, who destroyed Nature in his country to impoverish the people and deprive them of their livelihood, takes another destructive step. His next step is to ruin Nature in countries beyond his own realms and borders. There is hardly anyone in Sumeria who stood up to resist Gilgamesh's mad disfiguration of Nature. Thus, Gilgamesh and Enkidu seek to burn the Cedar Forest and brutally murder the guardian of the beautiful forest there. They also brutally kill the Bull of Heaven. Enkidu dies suddenly, in the prime of his youth, to introduce the death-motif into the epic. From now on, the tyrant begins to rethink his malpractices in his past life. Consequently, he goes looking for a cure against death, to revive his dead friend and to make sure that he himself would live, rule, and ruin forever.

The fourth part introduces the characters of Upp-Napishtim and his wife, the immortal Survivors of the Deluge. They know the location of the hidden herbs that give man the power to defeat death. Gilgamesh finds the herbs in the depth of the Seven Seas. He, in consequence to his carelessness, loses them to the snake, which renews itself forever.

In the fifth part, Gilgamesh returns to Sumeria. He tries to accomplish immortality in a more figurative, symbolic way. He starts a campaign of reforms and renewal of temples carrying his name for posterity. However, he completely

ignores to restore the forests and orchards he had ruined or the rivers he had blocked and poisoned. He fails to come to an agreement with Nature as an invisible but a very real force and factor called into play regarding his destiny.

Gilgamesh alienates himself from nature and wild creatures living there. By destroying Nature, he deprives the living creatures of their natural habitat. He is left only with one friend, his follower Enkidu. He becomes the enemy of Nature and bereft of Nature's blessings and joys. Towards the end of his life, he realizes he traded his life for fame, which is eventually unsubstantial. He is destroyed by a power beyond his grips and his grasp. His gross and fatal mistake is disobeying the laws of Nature; this causes a chain reaction leading to the collapse of his world picture. His long search for the rejuvenating plant reveals how pathetically powerless he is in the face of Nature, eventually pushing him towards his inevitable destiny.

Following his exhaustive, time-consuming quest after the rejuvenating plant, at the bottom of the fresh water deep, the serpent emerges to take unexpected possession of the magic plant. The snake's theft is merely a reminder of how Gilgamesh himself used to behave like a thief with his subjects. He often had laid his hands on what belonged to the others. So, as he deprived the others in the past of their hard attained possessions, he is now given a dram of the same old medicine. He is denied the chance to be rejuvenated. Mesopotamia needs new hope, rather than a rejuvenated tyrant renewing his regime.

### **Rationale of the Argument**

Gilgamesh is the earliest piece of literature in the Epic genre to survive. As such, it is one of the rare works that can be called original rather than derivative. It appeared in Mesopotamia, but has universal value, and thus, can apply to all Mankind. It is unclear when it was composed, but it is very likely that it is in existence for the last five thousand years. Gilgamesh himself is the archetype of the Sumerian King of the ancient times. According to Benjamin R. Foster, this work was unlike the later great Greek and Roman epics, such as the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Aeneid and the Anglo-Saxon epic of Beowulf, in that The Epic of Gilgamesh is not among the

works chanted by professional bards before it was written:

There is no evidence that The Epic of Gilgamesh began as an oral narrative performed by bards or reciters and coalesced into a written text only later. In fact, the poem as we now have it shows many signs of having being a formal, written, literary work composed and perhaps performed for well-educated people, especially scholars and members of the royal court<sup>1</sup>.

The epic is written on eleven tablets (though some scholars count another tablet and consider it twelve). Each tablet is a flat slab of stone, or clay used especially for an inscription. In the First Tablet of the epic, Gilgamesh is described thus:

Surpassing all Kings, for his stature renowned,  
Heroic offspring of Uruk, a charging Wild Bull.  
He leads the way in the vanguard<sup>2</sup>.

Foster (xviii) describes Gilgamesh as a bull by birth and behavior. Certainly, the name Gilgamesh in Modern Kurdish (which is one of the two official languages of Iraq, i.e. Mesopotamia) means a horde of buffaloes (Gil = horde, + Gamesh = buffalo, Horde of buffaloes). Gilgamesh's name and actions stand for strength, stature, and leadership, as referred to in the above quotation. In modern Kurdish, the word Gilgamesh stands for strength and wildness as well. Even though he once originated from Nature, he is in a complex relationship with the environment. The hero of the Epic destroys Nature for his own selfish ends. Indeed, he sins against wild life by building a wall around Uruk, aiming to protect the city from the forces of the wilderness, the unknown and easy contact with the outside world. He separates himself from the wilderness. But, he also deprives himself of the source of the force, from the fountains of the everlasting and rejuvenating life. In a context similar to this vein, Greg Garrard writes in his *Ecocriticism*:

The word 'wilderness' derives from Anglo-Saxon 'wild deoren' where deoren or beasts existed beyond the boundaries of cultivation. So useful is the word 'wild' to designate the realm of the 'deoren' that neither its spelling nor its simple meaning have changed in a millennium and a half, although the forests receded and the wilds were colonized and the word attracted new connotations<sup>3</sup>.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is much older than the Anglo-Saxons. Yet, the theme applies all the same: the fear of the wilderness and the fear that whatever comes from there must be demonic "deoren", forces the King to make difficult decisions. Gilgamesh starts to destroy Nature, in the name of preserving culture, forgetting that culture itself is a product of agriculture, which is the fruitful side of Nature in another costume and manifestation.

### **From Harmony to Conflict with Nature**

In his *Green History: A Reader in Environmental Literature, Philosophy, and Politics*, Derek Wall makes this remark: "A recurring theme in virtually all religions has been the relationship between humanity, Nature, and the sacred<sup>4</sup>." Derek Wall expands this view more: "Literary essays, novels, and short stories have all been used to transmit ecological and holistic concepts, literature reaches further than a manifesto ...and deeper<sup>5</sup>."

Subsequently, The Epic of Gilgamesh is indeed aware of Nature, and hence environmentally conscious, from the beginning. This work hardly chooses by chance the episodes of Nature being destroyed. It is hard to think that the Epic writer selects at random the scenes where Gilgamesh destroys Nature. At face value, these episodes seem to prove that Gilgamesh is powerful. But, in reality, they demonstrate how intolerant he is towards anyone or anything that threatens his authority.

So, at first, he is blessed by the gods and reported to have been admired by 'his' people, as he made many projects that served the people of his

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin R. Foster (trans. & ed.), *A Norton Critical Edition: The Epic of Gilgamesh*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2011) p. xiv

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Tablet I, lines 30-33

<sup>3</sup> Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism: New Critical Idiom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) p. 60

<sup>4</sup> Derek Wall, *Green History: A Reader in Environmental Literature, Philosophy and Politics*, p. 181

<sup>5</sup> Derek Wall, *Green History: A Reader in Environmental Literature, Philosophy and Politics*, p. 194

country. He confirms his greatness within the limits of the environment and the powers bestowed upon him by Nature to practice his authority. He is two-thirds divine and one-third human. He is the combination of Shamsh, the glorious Sun that bequeathed beauty on him; Adad, the god of storms, endowed him with courage, and the rest of the gods made his attributes and beauty perfect, surpassing all mankind, but terrifying like an enormous wild bull. Perfect and terrifying is his presence anytime he appears:

Gilgamesh, who saw the wellspring, the  
foundations of the land,  
Who knew [...], was wise in all things,  
[He...] throughout,  
Full understanding of it all he gained,  
He saw what was secret and revealed what was  
hidden,  
He brought back tidings from before the flood<sup>6</sup>.

As seen in the lines from Tablet 1, Gilgamesh at first seems to serve Nature wisely. His people and his country benefit from that service. But, as Derek Wall remarks: "there is no doubt that the earliest urban civilization created severe environmental damage<sup>7</sup>". Thus, by building the wall around Uruk, Gilgamesh aspires to establish an affluent and a happy society, by getting the people busy over winning their bread and livelihood through agricultural methods of gathering the fruits and the yields of Nature. He is, initially, in no need to use force or repressive measures with his people. This in itself proves that there were still some traces of harmony in the link between man and Nature. As a result, one can observe that whenever there is harmony between man and Nature, there will be harmony inter-human relations as well.

However, after a while, Gilgamesh starts to turn corrupt: thus, he abuses his subjects. His relationship with the environment takes the wrong course. He begins to see chaos in the environment. Gilgamesh sees Nature as disorder. As such, the environment must be combated, rather than befriended.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin R. Foster (trans. & ed.), *A Norton Critical Edition: The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet 1, ll 3-8

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

### **The Start of Corruption**

Enkidu, the friend and protector of Nature, the flora and fauna in ancient Mesopotamia, is a threat and a strong rival to Gilgamesh's power as long as he remains in Nature and among his wild friends. The moment Enkidu decides to approach the city and desert Nature, he loses his friendly ties with the environment and all its creatures. To substitute this loss, he becomes the confidant of Gilgamesh. He stands for one aspect of Nature and natural life. He is the Noble Savage<sup>8</sup> the wild man roaming the steppe, saving the wild creatures and beasts of the hillside from the hunters. He is the archetype of the original Shepherd, the custodian of wild life. He is pure and innocent as long as he remains in the bosom of Mother Nature. But, the moment he comes into contact with the City, the symbol of corruption, he is transformed. His potentials begin to dwindle. Enkidu is tamed by the shrewd Gilgamesh. Mehrdad Izady writes:

The animal trappers complain, "He [Enkidu] ranges over the hills with wild beasts and eats grass; he fills in the pits which [we] dig and tears up [our] traps set for the game; he helps the beasts to escape and now they slip through [our] fingers."

To tame Enkidu, they all agree they should get a woman, "a wanton from the temple of love... and let her woman's power overpower this man."

It is hoped that love of a woman of the plains will cause him to lose his natural innocence, "for when he murmurs love to [the woman from the plains] the wild beasts that shared his life in the hills will reject him, he who was born in the hills."<sup>9</sup>

According to the above, the dwelling place of Enkidu was the hills. The Mesopotamian Kurds from time immemorial were the settlers of the hills and the natives of the highlands as well. So, Enkidu, the native of the highlands, is alienated from the homeland hills, because he is seduced

<sup>8</sup> According to Encyclopaedia-Britannica, the Noble Savage is "an idealized concept of uncivilized man, who symbolizes the innate goodness of one not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization".

<sup>9</sup> Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*, (New York : Taylor & Francis, 1992) pp.189-190

by the wanton woman from the Temple of Love behind the walls of Uruk.

Enkidu is twice entrapped by civilization and urbanity: first, through the cunningness and seduction of the holy harlot and the vainglory of the great city and the city life. The harlot, called Shamhat, begins the process of civilizing Enkidu. She teaches him how to eat, drink, dress and prepare himself according to urban standards. The following lines from Tablet II (Lines 1-7) shed light on the process of Enkidu's domestication:

While Enkidu was seated before her,  
Each was drawn by love to the other.  
Enkidu forgot the steppe where he was born,  
For six days, seven nights Enkidu was  
aroused and flowed into Shamhat.  
The harlot said to him, to Enkidu:  
You are handsome, Enkidu, you are like a god,  
Why roam the steppe with wild beasts?

Second, in particular, he is the unsuspecting victim of Gilgamesh's abuse and exploitation of his friendship when he responds cooperatively to Gilgamesh requesting him to take part in the slaughter of Humbaba (who is also called Khwawa in the epic)<sup>10</sup> and in expanding the domains of his country at the expense of the forest land, the hillside, and the wild life. Enkidu's friendship with Gilgamesh stands for his bondage to the tyrant, the master of catastrophes in Nature in the sense of disfiguring it.

In *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, Carolyn Merchant writes that "The idea of Nature as a living organism had philosophical antecedents in ancient systems of thought, variations of which formed the prevailing ideological framework of the sixteenth century."<sup>11</sup>

Enkidu is the embodiment of a phase in Nature. He is more like an image of earth as a living organism, according to the quotation above. This state of affairs leads to the conflict of two sets of values, much earlier than the sixteenth century.

<sup>10</sup> In Kurdish the word (Khw) is still used for God, the Almighty. This similarity between the two words (Khwawa) and (Khw) calls into attention that (Khwawa) was not only the protector of Nature but he was the God of Nature.

<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Merchant, "Nature as Female", in Ken Hiltner (ed.), *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2015) p.10

### **Gilgamesh and Nature**

What seems to be most important to Gilgamesh is his own political survival. He is the archetype/prototype of every pragmatic ruler, who keeps on sacrificing the people, the resources, the air, the sea, Nature, all and everything, to stay in power.

As a tyrant so brutal against his own defenseless subjects, he has to be held in check either by the Council of the Sumerian gods, or the Military Council, or the Assembly of the people, or finally by Nature. None of these bodies is sufficiently effective to stop him except Nature. Nature, only Nature, can act as the force to discipline and harness Gilgamesh against his will. This is the interpretation of the retaliation of Nature. Then, subsequently, the mechanics of the biological ageing overtake him. Nature gives him wrinkles, decline, sickness, disease and ultimate death and destruction. As he causes the disappearance of so many forests and species, he is deprived of eternal life.

As an enormous contrast to Gilgamesh the enemy of natural life and to the foe to all species, the married couple, the Up-Napishtims, are given immortality as a reward from the All-Father of all deities and men, for their attempt to save all the living species from the universal deluge that once ruined life all over the world. Gilgamesh destroyed natural life wherever he went. Up-Napishtim preserved samples and species of life on his enormous ship, going out of his way to protect even the smallest worm and insect that could vanish by the Great Rain that gave rise to the Catastrophic Deluge. The gods are just for they perform poetic justice.

Nature grants Up-Napishtim immortality, but it withholds it from Gilgamesh, whose presence may be regarded as a real cause for alarm, because it is men like Gilgamesh who make it possible for the end of the days to be closer than ever, to call into being the Apocalyptic demise of the planet.

### **Conflict between the City and Nature**

Gilgamesh, as a king of boundless ambition, thinks of widening and extending his authority to reach outside the wall, to subject the Cedar Forest and the mountainous areas under his rule. Indeed, one of the early interpretations of the

Epic is exactly this, according to George Smith, whose viewpoint is summarized by David Damrosch as such:

...what was this national epic really about? [George] Smith located the heart of the Epic in Gilgamesh and Enkidu's journey to the Cedar Forest in Tablet 5, where they defeat a demon called Humbaba. In his expanded analysis of the poem in the Chaldean Account of Genesis, Smith saw Humbaba not as a Chthonic monster but as an Elamite King who had invaded the region and oppressed its people.<sup>12</sup>

Yet Damrosch carries on to say that "Humbaba is no Elamite tyrant but a solitary giant, living alone in his Cedar Forest and oppressing no one, least of all Gilgamesh's subjects in distant Uruk."<sup>13</sup>

One may ask why Gilgamesh assaults the harmless Cedar Forest. Obviously, he has issues with the environment. He has no opposition against him in his City. So, he can get away with any tyrannical whims and fancies, or that is what he thinks. Thus, his next quest is to fight against the wills of Earth and Heaven. He begins to think about slaying Humbaba, the Guardian and God of Nature. By mortifying the forest, he seeks to accomplish his own immortality, in his twisted logic.

Again, it is necessary to recall what Derek Wall writes in *Green History*: "There is no doubt that the earliest urban civilization created severe environmental damage."<sup>14</sup> Gilgamesh's destruction of the forest is in harmony with Timothy Clark's viewpoint:

"...the forest ... relates to ...the opposition between the human and the wild..."<sup>15</sup> Gilgamesh the tyrannical human is much against the forests, the wild, natural life. He gets Enkidu involved in this gross misdeed. Under normal, balanced circumstances, "the forest [is] constitutive for human self-understanding,

historically, culturally, and imaginatively.<sup>16</sup> But, Gilgamesh is not purely human, he is two-thirds divine. He is one-third human. He is a bull. He is a mighty horde of buffaloes. He is, in his stand against the forest, neither divine, nor human. His attitude is the application of extreme brutal force outside his borders. To travel distant realms to slay Humbaba is nothing short of illegal interventions in external affairs.

Gilgamesh's divinity is reduced to its minimum. His bull-related, beastly, bovine attributes are present and they overcome his divine one. Even his manly, human, royal, gentle qualities are gone astray in his mad frenzy of slaughtering Humbaba, the guardian of the forest, destroying the Cedar Forest, and killing the bull of heaven sent by Ishtar, the Goddess. Gilgamesh causes a triple crisis in Nature, because he himself is undergoing a big crisis. In this respect, Tony Fry's words will shed further light on this issue:

Crisis is a foundational condition of life. In the final instance, death always overwhelms. The ecological crisis, as it can be understood not just biologically but also socially and psychologically, is the crisis of life in crisis. The crisis of crisis is one in which the dependent cycle of creation and destruction becomes disarticulated. Our living on "here" in that place we assume to be "our place" can no longer be assumed as a given.<sup>17</sup>

Tony Fry's words are relevant to the ruinous acts with which Gilgamesh disfigures Nature. He causes a crisis to it. But, it is able to respond and retaliate by depriving him of immortality. This must be the deadliest blow to Gilgamesh and all those who behave like him against Nature. Gilgamesh is ensnared by the saddest fact that all men, great or small, must die. Tragically, he is the initiator of his own demise. He, the Bull, kills Ishtar's Bull of Heaven. It is a figurative suicide.

### **Gilgamesh: the Enemy of Nature**

Gilgamesh is a noble character in the classical literary sense. He is the son of the gods and divinely chosen to be the King, but regrettably, he is hostile to Nature. He hates to see his people

<sup>12</sup> David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003) p. 64

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64

<sup>14</sup> Derek Wall, *Green History: A Reader in Environmental Literature, Philosophy and Politics*, p. 33

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 60

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60

<sup>17</sup> Tony Fry, *Remakings: Ecology, Design, Philosophy*, (Cumberland, Sydney: Envirobooks, 1994) p. 113

love someone or something (Nature) other than himself. The Epic itself shows beyond doubt that he is a great man. Dreadfully feared by his people, he is the enemy of his people, rebellious against the gods, and hostile to Nature. He destroys all natural life, flora and fauna in Mesopotamia. It is implied here and there that the tyrants hate the forests because these may become a suitable hideout for the anti-tyrant opponents. It seems that in his mind, Nature has to be controlled by brutal force. As every action has to generate a reaction Nature gets even with Gilgamesh, eventually.

The animals, the trees, the young lovers, have high hopes in Enkidu as their Saviour when he first arrives. However, Gilgamesh corrupts him with wine and women. The only person Gilgamesh craves for is himself. Anything and anyone that poses a threat to his rule has to be wiped out, including Nature. In this, this great and noble Epic is able to give us the prototype of the typical tyrant.

Still, along with the crimes of Gilgamesh portrayed as feats and exploits, the epic-composer manages to throw in the immortal questions about life, death, the origin of man, human Nature, the problem of evil, the link between man and Nature, and the Chain-of-Being.

Gilgamesh, if luck abides by his side, needs to eliminate almost everyone and everything to ensure his own survival. To remove this tyrant, only Nature can be called into play, but it has to be provoked first by the Tyrant. So, the epic tells us about the costly rise of a brutal tyrant and his downfall by "natural" causes. When he is close to acquiring immortality, Nature unleashes the Serpent to ruin Gilgamesh's dream of immortality. The Serpent is but a small part in the Epic, but sufficient to bring down the tyrant's pride and put him in undignified light. This shows the final triumph of Nature, because it wins when harassed by those who refuse to understand its rules.

Gilgamesh committed many crimes against Nature. The first misdeed of Gilgamesh is to deny the wild creatures their friend and shepherd Enkidu, the Protector. Gilgamesh shrewdly alienates the shepherd from the flock. He removed him from his natural habitat and

displaced him in the city, which accelerates Enkidu's downfall.

The second fatal mistake is the slaughtering of Humbaba through tricks and deception. It is the slaying of a deity (Khwawa). Neither Gilgamesh nor Enkidu have sufficient strength to overpower him. But, Gilgamesh makes him false promises; that Gilgamesh would give his older sister in marriage to Humbaba, and his younger sister, as a handmaiden to him. Furthermore, Gilgamesh lies to him, saying that he did not come to the forest for a fight, but to see and know the mountains where Humbaba dwells. Again, the exploitation of the females to vanquish the powerful is recast into the mould of marriage this time, to calm down Humbaba. Formerly, Enkidu had been domesticated by a holy harlot of the Love Temple. Now, Gilgamesh wants to play the same game with Humbaba, but Humbaba is not the man to fall for a wanton lady of easy virtue. He may be convinced to become the royal consort of a princess. Thus, he is cheated. Truly, it is beneath Gilgamesh, the two-thirds divine man to lie like a devil. His divinity is seriously questioned by the conveniently anonymous author of the Epic.

Another serious mistake is Gilgamesh's defiance of the mundane as well as the divine powers, in slaying the celestial bull sent by Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess of love, beauty, eros, fertility, sexual desire, war, combat, and political power. In truth, the Mesopotamian mentality once saw all these offices and duties as inter-related. But, Gilgamesh in a winner's triumphant mood, miscalculates all the data items at hand, and most probably thinks that only can make right. He is virtually digging his own grave by this act and behavior, as well as his close companion's grave, unaware.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Nature's Retaliation: Environmental Justice or Eco-Justice**

In the great literary works of the past, the well-known concept of poetic justice is fulfilled in the form of virtue's triumph over vice. However, in Gilgamesh, the Environmental Justice comes from Nature. Nature retaliates for the loss of Humbaba. Nature avenges the destruction of the Cedar forest by inflicting incessant pain on Enkidu. He attains inner enlightenment and he

regrets his wasted joy, in the bosom of paradisiacal Nature and the company of innocent wild creatures in contrast to the envy and corruption which he becomes familiar with, within the city walls.

Tyranny is unable to be environmentally friendly. Gilgamesh, as a tyrant, may exploit Nature but ultimately the tyrant will attempt to ruin it. Nature everywhere seems to be a threat to the tyrant. It is Nature that denies him the immortality herbs. Eternal death and darkness are his lot. Nature gets even with the tyrant in the end.

The principles of Gaia<sup>18</sup> confirm that the Earth is one whole, one integral unit. So, whenever and wherever one part of Nature is destroyed, abused, or maltreated, the rest of the parts congregate to restore harmony to Nature. Thus, Mother Nature retaliates upon Gilgamesh by depriving him of eternal life. This is, beyond doubt, Nature's fatal retaliation, or the natural, environmental justice. The war against natural environment like, the Cedar Forest is like the war against God of Nature (Khwawa, Humbaba).

The crimes against Nature which Gilgamesh committed in his own country go unpunished. But, when he goes to extremes by destroying the Cedar Forest, he activates, unawares, the retaliation of Nature. In this way solely and exclusively, Eco-justice or poetic justice is done. The epic suggests to the careful reader that the tyrant is unable and unwilling to become the friend of the environment. He may exploit Nature to his own advantage but will ultimately attempt to ruin it. Everywhere, even beyond his own walls and borders, Gilgamesh becomes a threat to Nature and in return Nature poses a threat to Gilgamesh. He, thus, deserves to be denied the natural herbs that granted the Up-Napishtims endless youth. Eternal death and darkness must be the tyrant's just fate rather than getting hold of the immortality plant. Why should the tyrant scornful of all plants and animals, the flora and fauna, have access to the

rejuvenation herbs? In this way, Nature gets even with the tyrant.

Gilgamesh, as a person and an Epic, offers the chance for mankind in today's world to revisit some of the givens, the malpractices, and the erroneous attitudes towards Nature and the environment. Mankind had better be at one with Nature because it is the true source of happiness, joy, purity, longevity, and harmony with oneself and in society.

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<sup>18</sup> According to Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott's *A Greek-English Lexicon* the word "Gaia" is a poetical form of "land" or "earth". In fact, Gaia is the mother of all life: the primal Mother Earth goddess. She is the immediate parent of Uranus (the sky), from whose union she bore the Titans (parents of many of the Olympian gods) and the Giants, and of Pontus (the sea), from whose union she gave birth to the primordial sea gods.