

A Jungian Analysis of Gilgamesh: Enkidu as the Anima, not the Shadow

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Traditional Jungian understandings of Gilgamesh have suggested that Enkidu is Gilgamesh's shadow. (For just some examples see Kluger, 2015; Moore, 1984; Ziolkowski, 2012). Indeed, even Jung (1976) wrote: "the higher and lower man, ego-consciousness and shadow, Gilgamesh and Enkidu himself." (p. 499). Enkidu therefore supposedly embodies the opposite psychic energies which Gilgamesh is unaware of. But consider that Jung (1979), wrote that the shadow is constituted of "dark characteristics" and "inferiorities" (p. 8). If this is so, how exactly is Enkidu Gilgamesh's "dark side", or showcasing Gilgamesh's inferiorities? First, Enkidu is a very benign character (as we shall see, extremely "feminine" in fact), and second, Gilgamesh is *already* in touch with his shadow. As the men of the city of Uruk lament: "Gilgamesh sounds the tocsin for his amusement, his arrogance has no bounds by day or night. No son is left with his father, for Gilgamesh takes them all, even the children; yet the king should be a shepherd to his people. His lust leaves no virgin to her lover, neither the warrior's daughter nor the wife of the noble..." (Sandars, 1972, 62) This is not a man who needs to come to his shadow, he *is* the shadow to a large extent already. He is two-thirds god, one-third man - he was created with access to deeper parts of himself. Further, as Jung (1979) also wrote, the shadow's "content can therefore be made conscious without too much difficulty" (p. 10)

Enkidu then is not the shadow, but a gateway to the *anima* - that powerful and life-jarring feminine psychic energy, much deeper in the unconscious, part of the collective, not merely the personal as the shadow is, and significantly more dangerous than any "shade" of the personality. The first appearance of this Enkidu-as-the-anima appears in a dream Gilgamesh recounts: "a meteor fell down from heaven. I tried to lift it but it proved too heavy... And to me its attraction *was like the love of woman.*" (Sandars, 66). [emphasis mine] There are very few more pellucid presentations of the

anima to the masculine consciousness than this dream. The meteor comes from “heaven,” which is to say, our anima seems to be outside of consciousness, or as Jung informed us, the anima is “much further away from consciousness...” (p. 10) Next, which is what happens when one meets this anima, there is an instantaneous attraction to it, love at first sight. Gilgamesh truly adores this extraterrestrial object like he would love a woman. (It is little wonder that men who have fallen in love often compare her radiant face to the sun and eyes to the stars - she, the true and perilous love, is clearly outside of the realm of normal experience.) Now, modern readers possibly detect a homosocial relationship in all this, but Gilgamesh is clearly dealing with psychic energies that go far deeper than mere sexuality or physical temptations.

The appearance of an anima in one’s life is a signal that one is about to encounter or commence a radical and possibly deadly (or madness-inducing) journey; in short, one has to finally abandon the mother and womb. In another dream prognosticating the coming of Enkidu and the anima, Gilgamesh says, “In the streets of strong-walled Uruk there lay an axe: the shape of it was strange and the people thronged round. I saw it and was glad. I bent down, deeply drawn towards it; I loved it like a woman and wore it at my side.” (Sandars, 67). Again, we find this immediate attraction, plus now it seems that Enkidu is also a tool¹, he is a device and instrument which (as will be made clear) will help Gilgamesh work his way on the journey into the real world. (“Behind every great man is a great woman” would be the idiom expressing the appearance of the axe. Gilgamesh and Enkidu are soon to be, in their way, betrothed.)

Before Gilgamesh has these two dreams, one might say that the man is “happy.” But he is not really a man; no, he is still a boy. He is yet living under the wings of his earthly mother, Ninsun,

¹ The anima is indeed a “tool” on the way to individuation.

as well as his heavenly mother Aruru. He still lives in the city of his birth, Uruk. Jung (1979) noted that the idea of a “mother” does not merely mean one’s physical progenitor, but the idea of mother, the archetype of her. Jung wrote (1979) that man “hopes to be caught, sucked in, enveloped and devoured [by his mother]. He seeks, as it were, the protecting, nourishing, charmed circle of his mother, the condition of the infant released from every care, in which the outside world bends over him and ever forces happiness upon him. No wonder the real world vanishes from his sight.” (p. 11) Is this not Gilgamesh’s life prior to the advent of Enkidu? Gilgamesh is a child, even as an adult - his world “forces happiness upon him.” Gilgamesh does not live in “the real world” - he, like Buddha one might say, does not know of reality, the “real world has vanished from his sight.” He is enveloped in his hometown. Thus, the first step to maturity is to break free from this cordon of the mother, who wishes for the son not to ever leave her side, to never get “married” to life. It is no surprise that this axe of the anima, Enkidu, comes and slices open the womb so that Gilgamesh may leave it (the womb is physically represented by “strong-walled Uruk” and its “seven layers”).

Prior to moving into this direct confrontation with real life outside the mother’s belly, it is well to note what happens at the first encounter between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Now, before Enkidu came meet Gilgamesh, he too has a small journey of his own to make - he has to become a form in which Gilgamesh can relate to him. The anima in raw form is not recognizable to ordinary consciousness. Enkidu is one who lives with nature; he is femininity at its most pure and refined, though in a male body. Again, these are psychic energies, however the feminine appears physically, it appears. Enkidu exists naked, raw, (who knows how he learns to speak even), powerful, fast, graceful, maternal and caring - for instance, he frees the beasts from the trappers various traps (Sandars, p. 63). More yet, he sleeps on the ground, he is one with the terrible and nurturing

feminine earth. He is something very different than Gilgamesh who lives in the world of men and civilization. Enkidu must enter through some portal into Gilgamesh's existence: this requires him to learn of a "woman's art" (Sandars, p. 64). Thus he sleeps with the harlot for seven days and seven nights - possibly a way back in through the "seven layers" of strong-walled Uruk. After doing so, he has become capable of living with men. We see his conversion is complete when he tries to return to his old ways in nature but fails: "when the gazelle saw him, they bolted away..." (Sandars, p. 65). When Enkidu tries to follow the jaunting fauna, he finds, "his body was bound as though with a cord, his knees gave way when he started to run, his swiftness was gone... Enkidu was grown weak, for wisdom was in him, and the *thoughts of a man* were in his heart." (Sandars, p. 65). [emphasis mine: clearly the feminine anima now is thinking of masculinity for the first time] Enkidu next spends time with the Shepherds, learns how to eat, hunt, and wear clothes - all of this so he can meet Gilgamesh.

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When one first falls in love, the anima seems to be one's consummate fit (the shadow, on the other hand does not, it feels extremely foreign - no one feels like a "bad" person). But like any romance, the love may begin with playful fighting. One day, Enkidu hears of Gilgamesh getting ready to indulge in his eternal adolescent happiness again - sleeping with a man's wife before even the man has her (Sandars, p. 68). This "right" was "ordained by the gods from his birth" - to reiterate: it is Goddess mother, Aruru, granting him everything he could ever want - like a forever child. Naturally, the anima is unconsciously the mother's worst nightmare, the influx of a new woman into the son's life may usurp her authority eventually. And Enkidu says so blatantly, "I have come to challenge the old order, for I am the strongest here." (Sandars, p. 68). Not only the mother

² It is a strange thought to imagine, Gilgamesh meeting Enkidu as that wild beast. Gilgamesh would not be able to communicate, to understand, and therefore, his maturation would remain stuck.

senses this regime change, but also the man whose his leaders are being swapped. And what man does not soon realize this when he falls in first love? All of his strength, cockiness shall be challenged! The new ruler, unlike mother, shall not bend to his wishes and whims. The great man (really a boy) is weakened, changed, tenderized in many ways. Therefore, as Gilgamesh ventures out of his throne yet again to make love to another man's bride, he finds his way blocked: Enkidu is there. And in that moment, all Gilgamesh's past silly flings are over; the real "woman" is presented to him. The entire city shakes as the two clash (what man doesn't feel the entire world move when he meets and flirts with *that* woman?). In the end, Gilgamesh throws Enkidu, he "wins." The anima plays its game, lets the male win the first battle so as to drag him into a war he is not at all ready for, and yet, absolutely needs in order to achieve his destiny.

The very next day, after this rendezvous with the love of his life Enkidu, Gilgamesh has new and exciting plans. He now desires to be a great man just as a man in love might start working manically to increase his riches to spoil his "princess." Gilgamesh wishes, as he states, to "set up my name in the place where the names of famous men are written, and where no man's name is written ..." (Sandars, p. 71). No longer wasting his time gallivanting with boring, conventional virgins - he is ready for *life!* He is prepared to egress from "strong-walled Uruk" - outside the womb - into the *real world* for the first time. Gilgamesh picks his aim: He will go to the "Country of the Living... the Land of the Cedars." to battle the demon Humbaba. (Sandars, p. 70). Note that he can now conceive of the "Country of the Living" outside of the city walls., for the eternal womb is much like death - silent, still, frozen gestation. It is a zombie life, there is locomotion but no genuine animation.

Enkidu, at hearing Gilgamesh's heroic plans, however turns into the fickle anima (nevermind he was just crying because he was "oppressed by idleness" (p. 70)). He speaks of how stupendously

awful Humbaba, Lord of the Cedars is: “What man would willingly walk into that country and explore its depths.” (p. 71) Surely a “woman” wouldn’t walk into that country. But now, energized by the appearance of the anima (as Dante was by Beatrice before he ventured into hell), Gilgamesh states, “Where is the man who can clamber to heaven? Only the gods live for ever... but as for us men, our days are numbered, our occupations are a breath of wind... Forward there is nothing to fear!” (Sandars, p. 73).

Gilgamesh is starting to realize that his destiny involves a great battle! And Jung knew this too: any man willing to break free from the womb and try to find truth is in for it. When one is confronted with the anima, Jung writes, that this new reality “does not fall into his lap, does not meet him halfway, but remains resistance, has to be conquered, and submits only to force. It makes demands on the masculinity of a man, on his ardour, above all on his courage and resolution when it comes to throwing *his whole being onto the scales*.... [he is] one capable of forgetting his mother and undergoing the pain of relinquishing [her].” (Jung 1979, p. 12). [emphasis mine] Again, it is also why mothers despise the anima: they take their “boy” away. They will either ruin and ravage him, and/or actually “carry him to term” and a new life. Just prior to commencing their ridiculously dangerous journey, it seems that the city of Uruk, his mother, the counselors in the city, everyone tries to stop him from going. “Stay in the womb, relax,” they say. Without question, a man has to be out of his mind to attempt such things - why would one leave such comfort to face a Humbaba - one who “is not like men who die” (Sandars, p. 73). Why did Buddha leave the palace to face the anima Maya? Why does the great Arjuna decide to fight in war against the womb of his own family?³ But when one is moved by these deep forces, one has no choice even if he thinks he is the one choosing.

³ I realize one can get “too” Jungian so to speak, and everything can become one enormous exercise in seeing symbolism in everything. It must always be remembered that symbolism points to an experiential reality, to the real. When one faces the anima, he is facing real things, not symbols. In other words, each person will meet his own Enkidu and Humbaba.

Hence, the journey to the Land of the Living, the Land of Cedars begins. It is important to note that it is Enkidu, the anima who knows the way of evolution. "Forward," he says, "there is nothing to fear. Follow me, For I know the place where Hubab lives and the paths he walks." (Sandars, p. 76) After some time, they reach the gate to the forest. Enkidu again freezes, "Do not go down to the forest, when I opened the gate my hand lost its strength." (Sandars, p. 76) Enkidu, the anima, now once more fickle, doesn't want Gilgamesh to proceed. This hesitation it seems, is that the anima begins to realize that as the hero moves forward and evolves he will likewise dispense with the anima (as he just did to the mother). Gilgamesh will have none of this turn back talk now, "Dear friend, do not speak like a coward." (Sandars, p. 76).

The forest⁴ is an important symbol in the story. In Jung's analysis it is much like the ocean, the sea being the typical symbol of the unconscious - it is a place of the hidden and forbidden, the unseen and nearly unknowable within a man's being. Just as the oceans beyond reason hold fantastic and mysterious *krakens* in its depths so to such monsters are in the dark and deep forest. Indeed, as the two come to a "green mountain" after a long day's trek through this wood, "they took each other by the hand and lay down to sleep; and sleep that flows from the night lapped over them." (Sandars, p 77) Notice how the word used is *lapped*, as in watering lapping a shore, the parallel between forest and the sea is striking. Also note that this is deep beneath mind as well as typical consciousness: they are in a triple layer of darkness, almost an inverted trinity: the dark of the wood, the dark of the mind, and the dark of the night. The earth, the spirit, and god all in darkness, and Gilgamesh and Enkidu are layered in it. This is when the monsters come.⁵

⁴ Surely, Gilgamesh could relate to the opening of Dante's *Inferno*: "In the middle of our way of life, I found myself within a forest dark, for the straightforward pathway had been lost."

⁵ The difference in tone between these dreams and Gilgamesh's first two dreams is startling - the former, exciting; these latter, petrifying.

And surely, Gilgamesh next wakes in a terror: “the sleep that the gods sent me is broken,” he says (Sandars, p. 77) He has had back to back dreams. The first: “I seized hold of a wild bull... It bellowed and beat up the dust till the whole sky was dark, my arm was seized and my tongue bitten. I fell back on my knee; then someone refreshed me with water from his waterskin.” (Sandars, p. 78) Amazing! Gilgamesh is really in the thick now: the bull must be seen as his own masculinity. Grabbing hold of it is symbolic of him grabbing hold of his core, that wildness within him. He is a matador that does not dodge, but actually must fight the beast. It is telling that his arm and his tongue is injured: A man without his arms cannot work, cannot build a life, and a man without his tongue cannot speak, cannot express his thoughts. The unconscious is dealing not with human action or conscious activity, but the workings of the soul. Going into the real world means risking literally everything one may do in the domain of human affairs, his entire “being is on the scales”, as Jung told us it would be. This journey transcends all of that.

It is vital to note the absolutely extreme importance of the appearance of external help in the dream in the form of Gilgamesh being refreshed with water by a mysterious hand. Jung (1963) when he went into the unconscious felt at times like he was going to lose his mind. The only thing that helped him was relying on “yoga exercises” (p. 177) Likewise Gilgamesh, to avoid defeat, must rely on invisible powers and prayer. When he fights Humbaba, in fact, it is the wind that comes to his aid.⁶ What is wind by symbolic of help which can come from any direction and of seeming unknown origin? What the modern world and bogus churches have made of prayer - how they have on the one hand derogated it, and on the other made a mockery of it with congregations weirdly dancing to scripture induced rock music - is shameful and dangerous. It makes a cipher or a clown of the most

⁶ It is worth noting that those saving powers are *promised* by the gods in much spiritual literature. Krishna says to Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita, “those who are loyal to me are dear to me.” Or see, John 15:7: “ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.”

irreplaceable spiritual tool man has. When one confronts the anima, reason alone shall not suffice. To use reason in fact, might send one straight to the looney bin. One needs to summon powers beyond the ego, beyond the personality, even beyond anything in the Freudian unconscious. It demands a total expansion of self, total self-confidence, and total humility that one cannot do it alone.

Let us return to Gilgamesh's second dream, which he had immediately preceding this first "Wild Bull" dream. To begin, he recounts, "We stood in a deep gorge of the mountain, and beside it we two were like the smallest of swamp flies." (Sandars, p. 78). The real world, the Country of the Living is large, magnitudes bigger than the womb - it dwarfs man. So too the stupendous task before one is almost grotesquely enormous. One does not even feel human any longer in the presence of such dimensions, he may feel insectual. It is horrifying to be presented with one's seeming insignificance in the literal "grand scheme." As Gloucester says in *King Lear*, "The gods play around with us as cruelly as schoolboys who pull the wings off flies." Or it recalls lines from Gerard Manley Hopkins' (1918, 2012) poem "No Worst There is None":

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep.

The mind, the ego has no experience of this. This Country of the Living is totally and utterly new. Next, in the dream, the mountain - this world, this task - trembles and falls and pins Gilgamesh down: "Then came an intolerable light blazing out, and in was one whose grace and whose beauty were greater than the beauty of this world. He pulled me out from under the mountain... he set my

feet on the ground.” (Sandars, p. 78). The mountain falling also demonstrates that the terrain in the unconscious is constantly shifting, unsteady, it is the realm of the chaotic, of inversions, of the stochasticism of the first ages of man. It forms only to reform, and crashes all about one. This is not the stable mother belly, one is no longer safe in the strong-walls of Uruk. And one now sees that on this journey to the real, not only does he lose his arms and his speech, but also his mobility. There is no running away. To repeat Jung again, “It makes demands on the masculinity of a man, on his ardour, above all on his courage and resolution...” (Jung 1979, p. 12). (Note once more, the divine intervention that puts the hero on more solid ground.)

Enkidu does not grasp the full nature of these dreams as Gilgamesh relays them, and gives but only a superficial interpretation of them. (Remember, Enkidu is really just the “tip” of the anima, the doorway through which Gilgamesh meets the full-force of the anima.) He is one looking in from the outside, it is not his journey but the “man’s.” Gilgamesh senses that his betrothed is a bit lost, so after the two walk on farther for a time and they come once again to rest, Gilgamesh prays to the “mountain” to send Enkidu a “favorable dream.” (Sandars, p. 79). Consider that! Gilgamesh *asks* the mountain - that thing that just crashed atop him - to bequeath Enkidu a dream. One can only think that Gilgamesh wants Enkidu to understand what he is going through more deeply after the above mentioned superficiality of his interpretations! Enkidu is not yet one who has “hung there” as Hopkins might suggest, and the word “favorable” can be taken many ways. Verily, Enkidu has a terrifying night’s sleep: “The mountain fashioned a dream for Enkidu; it came, an ominous dream; a cold shower passed over him, it causes him to cower like a the mountain barely under a storm of rain.” (Sandars, p. 79). The dream content is never revealed, but surely it can be guessed that Enkidu began to foresee more clearly his own demise, and the pain it would cause his beloved.

Gilgamesh watches Enkidu sleep, but then he too drifts into slumber. He wakes up at midnight, in the middle of the darkness, the pitch of darkness, and he has found hypnagogic confusion and possibly hallucination: “Did you call me or did I wake you?” he says Enkidu (Sandars, p. 79) He then wonders if a god passed by, causing him to lose his wits - in other words, did the pure form anima wander through and graze and rattle through him? Gilgamesh then relays his dream to a now awakened Enkidu: “The heavens roared and the earth roared together, daylight failed and darkness fell, lightning flashed, fire blazes out, the clouds lowered, they rained own death...” (Sandars, p. 79) This is another reminder that he may yet truly fail, and vitally, nothing rescues him in this dream. One who faces real life is walking toward the Apocalypse, to true extinction. He has to know that. The old world, the old conceptions of heaven and earth shall be changed forever, dismantled. Still, the hero moves forward.

Gilgamesh begins clearing the Cedars with an *axe* they took with them. This clearing of the dark forest is the clearing of the patch upon which the psychic battle shall commence - in our life it would be the same as creating a space to do the work (going to a monastery perhaps). The battle with this monster Humbaba will be his first real test of reality as he heads to true knowledge of his Self, toward what Jung called individuation (Jung, 1979). The synthesis of all the various components of his nature. In sum, they do, with the winds of Divine help (as the dreams foretold), take down Humbaba, that terrible monster. A major victory!

After the triumph, in an attempt to live on, Humbaba pleads for mercy: “Let me go free, Gilgamesh, and I will be your servant, you shall be my lord; all the trees of the forest that I tended on the mountain shall be yours. I will cut them down and build you a palace.” (Sandars, p. 82) This is similar to the temptation of Christ - one has beaten the devil, now the devil makes an offer of

puissance. It is the one Marlowe's *Faust* cannot deny (and which Goethe's *Faust* barely escaped). Jungian analysts (and therapists in general) are very aware of the danger people face when they wish to hold onto their darkness, even just a part of it. They think it has something to do with their success. There is something alluring about the monster - perhaps one may keep it as a pet, or employ its powers for good⁷. But Enkidu (signing his own death warrant in the process) wisely advises: "The strongest of men will fall to fate if he has no judgement... If the snared bird returns to its nest, if the captive man returns to his mother's arms, then you my friend will never return to the city where the mother in waiting who gave birth to you. [Humbaba] will bar the mountain road against you, and make the pathways impassable." (Sandars, p. 82-3). Gilgamesh acquiesces, and the two of them chop off the ogre's head, Enkidu giving the last blow - sealing everyone's fate.

The slaying of Humbaba cannot be underestimated in its importance in one's psychic life. He, being the center of the anima, the ugly, rebarbative witchking behind the stunning and attractive beauty of the beloved, the "absolute face of evil" (Jung 1979, p. 10). And when the head of Humbaba falls to the ground, the unconscious realm is in panic: "For as far as two leagues the cedars served when felled the watcher of the forest... Now the mountains were moved and all the hills, for the guardian of the forest was killed." (Sandars, p. 83). Tellingly, Gilgamesh and Enkidu start to de-forest the place (read the unconscious) even more, and as they do they discover many great things, hidden treasures, palaces - if this were the sea, they would be discovering Atlantis! Jung (1963) found a tremendous deal of wisdom and peace after his Gilgameshesque confrontation with the unconscious, even an out of body experience in which he saw earth from space!

⁷ One thinks of the ring in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Gilgamesh goes back to Uruk and proceeds to bathe. One must be purified after such a journey through the underworld. He becomes royal again, a wiser king. Of course, to make sure the transformation is real, old temptations must arise for him to deny. He is faced again with almost a conglomeration of his past life. The great goddess Ishtar wishes to be with him⁸. Instead of taking her like he took every other woman before his journey, he insults her as a “backdoor which keeps out neither squall of wind or storm... [a] pitch which blackens the bearers, a water-skin that chafes the carrier... a sandal that trips the wearer.” (Sandars, p. 86) (This may very well be how the man talks to the bullying anima once he has conquered it). Ishtar is furious and asks her father, Anu, to give her the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh. This bull is his old juvenile masculinity coming back after him, but he defeats it. Where as before he was controlled by the adolescent prurience, now he symbolically “throws his phallus” at her by tossing the bull’s right thigh “in her face” (Sandars p. 88). He is a man who has conquered his basic and base desire, he is no longer in need of a womb and the gifts the world brings - even if now the worldly gifts are godly.⁹ He even now is strong enough to push back against the wicked aspect of the anima in the form of Ishtar.

Soon, though, Gilgamesh must move on even from this tremendous summit - there are higher peaks in the distance. Defeating the anima is only part of the journey, he must now venture to the *Self*. Enkidu, his beloved, his first sweet taste of the feminine, grows sick and dies and his dealings with the anima in general. Gilgamesh must now tussle with immortality, deal with questions not just of life but eternity: answer questions beyond the world of reality, entering the world of *Reality*. He must go through long periods of darkness (cf. the saint’s “Dark Nights of the Soul”), interrogate a wise old man (a guru), dive to the very bottom of the sea of the unconscious, have

⁸ Goethe’s *Faust* fails this test, when he tries to reach out and touch Helen of Troy.

⁹ One is reminded of Odysseus leaving his divine lovers.

physical immortality once and for all eliminated as an option, and eventually, we hope, find his way to the highest form of gnosis. This is not the paper to go beyond his interaction with the anima, but there is something very fitting about there being no end to the actual Gilgamesh book, that the last tablet is cut off. This is apropos because the journey of individuation is so rarified, it is so incredibly hard and mostly impossible to write or speak about,¹⁰ for it is truly a mystery that is beyond words.

¹⁰ Even Goethe, at the end, has to get Faust out of hell on some technicality in the Mephistophelian agreement so he can get the man to heaven.

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