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Gilgamesh the Anti-Ulysses

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Abstract • Questo saggio applica all'*Epica di Gilgamesh* l'analisi critica che Theodor W. Adorno e Max Horkheimer hanno proposto in riferimento all'*Odissea*. L'autore intende discutere una modalità alternativa a quella proposta dai due filosofi francofortesi, esaminando il primo excursus della *Dialettica dell'Illuminismo*, dove Ulisse è definito quale proto-borghese. La conclusione suggerisce una nuova interpretazione che prova a rileggere la *Dialettica dell'Illuminismo* attraverso il punto di vista emerso nelle traversie di Gilgamesh.

Parole chiave • Gilgamesh; Ulisse; Adorno; Horkheimer ; Illuminismo

Abstract • This essay will address the Epic of Gilgamesh through the critical analysis that Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer theorized in reference to the Odyssey. The author intends to discuss an alternative point of view to the one proposed by the two Frankfurt philosophers, by examining in particular the first excursus of the Dialectic of Enlightenment, where Ulysses is defined as proto-bourgeois. The conclusion suggests a new interpretation that tries to reread the Dialectic of Enlightenment through the lenses of Gilgamesh's vicissitudes.

Keywords • Gilgamesh; Ulysses; Adorno; Horkheimer; Enlightenment

Ledizioni

Gilgamesh the Anti-Ulysses

Filippo Ursitti

I. The Enlightenment and its Reason

Was ist Aufklärung? This is the question that a great part of both modern and contemporary philosophy tried to answer to. From the German *Aufklärung*, 'Enlightenment' is a polysemic term, it has been defined as a historical epoch, socio-cultural movement and even as ideology. As it happened for similar epochal notions many tried to periodise and define 'ideal types' of this period, which gave birth to several outcomes.[1] An example of the diversity of the interpretations of this term is given by the comparison between the readings of the L.G. Crocker and P. Gay. Even though they start from the same psychological and literary models, the two authors arrive at two completely opposite results. The first inquired the dark and disquieting aspect of the Enlightenment,[2] sketching its ethical and moral crisis from De Sade until Rousseau, which brings within the premonitory germs of the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century.

The second, depicts the Enlightenment – stack with the classical rationalistic view of the seventeenth century France[3] – as an example of liberation from the religious myth and as a preliminary stage for the liberal democracy. When the word 'Enlightenment' is used to define an epoch, it conserves a specific conventional meaning which shares numerous aspects with the European culture of the seventeenth century. From the epistemological point of view the term is linked to the refusal of the metaphysics, the renunciation of any system which requires an a priori explanation, an increase in the study of the phenomena, and the tendency to privilege a research method based on the analysis and the latest successes of both physics and mathematics. From the ethic–religious point of view, it denotes the scepticism, the historical Pyrrhonism, and the materialism which interacted with the free thought. From the political point of view, there was a well-spread aspiration to the radical social and political emancipation from the absolute monarchy, from the hegemony of the Churches, religious groups and to all the form of domain typical of the Ancient Regime. Such heterogeneity and polysemicity created a variegated and ductile ideology which could integrate, especially in the countries experiencing great cultural and economic development, the new form of knowledge with the aspirations of the emergent class.

But such antinomies and paradoxes bound to the idea of progress proposed by the Enlightenment were antecedents to the Enlightenment itself. The meditation of the two previous centuries already formulated them under the solicitude of the geographic discoveries and the myth of the 'good savage' which contributed to undermine Humanism and the theological certainty of salvation. Moreover, it should not be forgotten the role played by

[1] Paolo Casini, *Scienza, Utopia e Progresso. Profilo dell'Illuminismo*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 1994, p. 7.
[2] Ivi, p. 8.
[3] *Ibid.*

the scientific revolution which destroyed the scholastic knowledge based on the 'adoration' of the *Auctoritates*. And yet, it would be hasty to think that all the philosophes believed that the ancient authors were surpassed, in many occasions, they were still considered masters of taste and of artistic creation.[4]

Given this brief definition of the complexity of the term 'Enlightenment', where does Horkheimer and Adorno's interpretation stand? The two German philosophers give another meaning to the notion of Enlightenment, which, as continuing progress, «was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy».[5] «For Adorno and Horkheimer, enlightenment has been present in some form ever since the dawn of Western culture».[6] In fact, they see in the Odyssey the exemplification of the dialectic of Enlightenment since their definition is formulated more with philosophical than historical intent «for the wish to analyse ideas rather than, for example, assess extent or duration».[7] The two Germans authors have a specific idea in mind, in their words: «enlighten the Enlightenment about itself».[8] *De facto*, their aim is neither historical understanding nor straightforward philosophical definition but rather, the specific act of critical theorisation. In this sense, the Enlightenment revolves around the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the human subject over the objects of nature.

This critical analysis has a historical reason. Adorno and Horkheimer witnessed the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Europe and were interested in the motives which led from the principles of Enlightenment to ignorance, violence and barbarism. It was to fulfil such interests that they developed their critical method, and henceforth their conceptualisation of Enlightenment. This methodology was grounded on a belief and on one intention. «The belief was that the 'Late Modern' society, was in spite of its aspirations to progress, in fact characterized by social repression»[9] which arose from an inadequate form of reason. «The intention […] was to oppose these objectifying and rigid forms of reason»[10] by promoting new forms of reasoning based, on the one hand, on recognising standards, and, on the other hand, on showing the impossibility – because of instances of failure – to live according to such standards. An instance of critical theory was their own *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Herein they offered a critique which they believed would allow the 'Enlightenment' to see its own limitations and become self-critical. How can they make the Enlightenment self–reflective? By using a critical method based on critical-theoretical concepts. Its features are the following:

- First, the idea that there should always be a standard. This is why they conceptualised the Enlightenment as a series of aims. By being identified with a standard the Enlightenment can be showed as something which might or might not obtain its aims.

[4] Ivi, p. 17.
[5] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London, Verso, 1997, p. 3.
[6] Yvonne Sherratt, *Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of 'Enlightenment'*, «British Journal for the History of Philosophy», 8-3, 2010, p. 523.
[7] Ivi, pp. 523-524.
[8] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xi.
[9] Sherratt, *Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of 'Enlightenment'*, p. 526.
[10] *Ibid.*

- Second, the standard has to be a normative one. This allows Adorno and Horkheimer to produce a distinct conceptualisation of Enlightenment from the one developed by historians which is based on empirical non-value laden criteria.
- Third, this critical-theoretical concept of normative standard must have the additional feature of internality. «That is to say, the standard is internal to that which is to be defined […] the concept's standard is its own and not any that might be externally imposed».[11]
- Fourth, the internality leads to another feature, the normative standard does not only produce the Objects' aim, it also produces what the Object 'believes' to be. Therefore, the concept of Enlightenment defines that which Enlightenment would conceive itself to be.
- Fifth, the concept has to be 'open to critique'. This feature is a direct consequence of the previous four. The critical–theoretical concept is defined according to both the idea of the attainment of an internal standard and on the belief of having attained that standard and, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, such definition opens a space for being criticised. There will be discrepancies between what it believes that attained and what it actually attained. In other words, by showing that the Enlightenment does not attain what it wanted (believed) to attain, the two philosophers want to argue that the definition of the concept is loosely constructed and, therefore, that the standards are not logically related to each other – as they were supposed to be – and, therefore, must be redefined.
- Sixth, the critique to which the critical-theoretical concept can be subjected has to be internal to the concept used. In other words, the Enlightenment can be criticised only by its own normative standards. «All those features are unique to a critical–theoretical conceptualisation. Expressed concisely, Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of enlightenment captures a normative standard internal to enlightenment which allows us to criticize enlightenment with reference to its own standards».[12]
- Seventh, Adorno and Horkheimer define Enlightenment by contrasting it with its opposite notion. If the Enlightenment does not fulfil its aims and its internal standards fall apart because a critique shows their inherent irreconcilability, then, the Enlightenment must regress to its opposite which they referred to as myth - «Enlightenment reverts to mythology».[13]

Like its opposite, myth has a specific definition which derives from the interpretation of some traits of the 'classical Western' civilisation without having to do with primitive societies or any literary genre. Nonetheless, they see some aspects of the Enlightenment in the myth which allows them to say that «myth is that it is defined internally to the enlightenment. Their concept of myth is that which they believe the enlightenment conceive to be myth»[14] which will necessarily mean that myth has Enlightenment's opposite aims, but since it is its entire opposite, the myth has no aim at all. Myth then will be conceptualised as an 'animistic' way of approaching the world, which is considered to be a false system of knowledge based on ignorance and delusion which emphasises the opposition with Enlightenment's true knowledge. This is not the only opposition, Adorno and Hork-

[11] Ivi, p. 527.
[12] Ivi, p. 528.
[13] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xvi.
[14] Sherratt, *Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of 'Enlightenment'*, p. 529.

heimer identify immaturity opposed to Enlightenment's maturity; social domination opposed to Enlightenment's freedom; fear and barbarism opposed to Enlightenment's security and peace. All together those traits of ignorance, immaturity, domination, fear and barbarism constitute an extremely regressive kind of society. Now, if the Enlightenment does not attain its aims, its internalise standards do not logically stick together and, hence, Enlightenment regresses to its opposite. Thanks to their specific conceptualisation of both Enlightenment and myth, Adorno and Horkheimer can argue that in the Europe of middle-twentieth-century the entire society mistook ignorance for knowledge, regressing to a stage of mythical immaturity.

2. Odysseus the Bourgeois

According to Adorno and Horkheimer's definition of Enlightenment, Odysseus fits perfectly within the archetypical bourgeois, precisely because of his actions. In the first excursus of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno are interested in investigating the consequences of the Enlightenment. The fact that the Enlightenment is a form of myth is because of its instrumental reason, which has always been present within humanity. The first example of rationalisation, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, is the *Epic of Odysseus*, where the hero dominates both nature and men/women alike. Odysseus «adventures turn out to be the prototype of the bourgeois individual,[15] whose concept originates in the unwavering self-assertion of which the protagonist driven to wander the earth is the primeval model».[16]

Adorno and Horkheimer want to display how the Odyssey, «in its oldest stratum […] shows clear links to myth: the adventures are drawn from popular tradition. But [at the same time how] the Homeric spirit takes over and 'organises' the myths»[17] contradicting them. The Odyssey is grounded on myths, but in narrating the legends Homer shows how Odysseus (the individual) poses himself as the active subject by escaping from the mythical powers – e.g. the encounter with the sirens, Polyphemus, and the Lotophagi. «The hero's peregrinations from Troy to Ithaca trace the path of the self through myths».[18] At first, he proves to be insignificant compared with the natural forces, and yet, by doing so he puts the basis for his self–consciousness. The first step of this process is grounded in the notion of self-consciousness.

«The notion of self-consciousness is only completed in these three moments: (a) the pure undifferentiated 'I' as its first immediate object. (b) But this immediacy is itself an absolute mediation, it is only as a supersession of the independent object, in other words, it is Desire. The satisfaction of Desire is, it is true, the reflection of self–consciousness into itself, or the certainty that has become truth. (c) But the truth of this certainty is really a double reflection, the duplication of self-consciousness».[19] The movement to self-consciousness is essential because Odysseus performs it in every single encounter of his

[15] By «bourgeois» Adorno and Horkheimer mean a person who exploits both nature and other individuals for her own good. «His love of people as they are stems from his hatred of what they might be». See Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, London, Verso, 2005.
[16] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 35.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Ivi, p. 38.
[19] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 110.

adventure. The human weakness of Odysseus is an instrument to undermine the mythical powers, in fact, «all the adventures Odysseus survives are dangerous temptations deflecting the self from the path of its logic. Again and again he gives way to them, experimenting like a novice incapable of learning».[20] He estranges himself (first moment) only to rediscover himself (the second moment) for annihilating the mythical powers (third moment).

The two German philosophers analyse all the typical elements of the mythical legend showing an essential reversal of the mythological–magical world into rationalisation. This is one of the reasons why they decide to focus on the worshipping of the Greek gods in the Odyssey. This adoring the gods has an immediate function, placating the gods and, hence, granting peace and prosperity. And yet, every time Odysseus sacrifices something for a god, he is actually mystifying him. In this exchange – secular form of sacrifice – appears the motif of rational interchange by which gods can be mastered: «the gods are overthrown by the very system by which they are honoured».[21] The trickery in the sacrifices offered by Odysseus is the archetypical form of shrewdness. We can see this happening when Odysseus' allies benefit from Poseidon's visit to the Ethiopians to guide the Greek adventurer to a refuge. «All human sacrifices […] deceive the god to whom they are made they subject him to the primacy of human ends, and dissolve his power».[22] By methodically premeditating the sacrifices Odysseus nullifies the power of whom the offerings were meant to honour. The stratagem of the sacrifice grants to the 'weak' but astute Odysseus the possibility to contend with the mythological fury of the gods. «He can never engage in direct conflict […] but has to recognise the status of the sacrificial ceremonies in which he is constantly involved».[23]

In repeating the ancient ceremonies Odysseus displays their naiveté and irrationality which, towards the end, is dominated by the ratio which abolishes the mythic forces. As Adorno and Horkheimer noted: «The subjective spirit which cancels the animation of nature can master a despiritualized nature only by imitating its rigidity and despiritualizing itself in turn».[24] The mimetic approach – asserted through the sacrifice – becomes the pre–requisite for the *ratio* which disbands the myth. Thanks to his shrewdness Odysseus comprehends that Scylla and Charybdis are the embodiment of the natural forces of the current – which the antique ships could not resist – and that they are merely repeating their actions over and over just like Circe, the Sirens, and Polyphemus do. By recognising this repetition Odysseus welcomes his fate and honours its regulation precisely by bending it. «It is impossible to hear the Sirens and not to succumb to them; therefore, he does not try to defy their power».[25] Odysseus does not attempt to modify the path of his ship because he uncovers an escape clause in the mythical contract, the trick of using wax to seal the ears of his sailors, which by fulfilling it allows him to elude it. «Odysseus recognizes the archaic superior power of the song even when, as a technically enlightened man, he has himself bound».[26] Odysseus becomes both priest and sacrificial lamb, thus showing his fine bourgeois soul because first, he calculates the risk of giving himself to the gods (sacrificial lamb). Second, by 'sacrificing' himself, he obtains, from the gods for whom dispensed the sacrifice, a truce (the priest). Third, he redeems the life he at first put

[20] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 38.
[21] Ivi, p. 49.
[22] Ivi, p. 50.
[23] Ivi, p. 56.
[24] Ivi, p. 57.
[25] Ivi, p. 58.
[26] Ivi, p. 59.

at stake in the sacrifice, because the gods are now pleased and cannot hurt him; the usage of a deceiving offer for a greater reward shows Odysseus's bourgeois essence.

In this progression, is possible to witness how the essential process for acquiring the self–consciousness is both mythical and rational. «The frequently cited irrationality of sacrifice is no more than an expression of the fact that the praxis of sacrifice outlasted its rational necessity, which was replaced by particular interests. This split between the rational and the irrational aspects of sacrifice gave cunning a point at which to take hold».[27] This same tryptic movement has to be repeated by Odysseus every time he faces a new mythical force. In this dialectical process, the two philosophers foresaw the catastrophe, because if the sacrifice was originally based on the simple idea of 'a gift for free passage', in its rationalised form, its purpose is not the possibility to continue the journey but the subjugation of nature itself (mythical powers). What was at the beginning easily ascribable to a mimetic behaviour is now altered into irrationality by the same rationality which brought man to self-consciousness in the first place. This means that the triadic dialectical movement started to overcome the opposition thesis-antithesis, or in other words, the overcoming of mythology in a non-mythological state never happened and, even worse, it turned into a new irrational stage where individuals can escape only by annihilating the new themselves obtained at the beginning of this process. In the end, humanity cannot achieve the self-consciousness it desired because it is this same self–consciousness that humanity is destroying every single time.

This brings the conclusions that: First, the idea according to which humanity was living in a symbiotic approach with nature is false, humanity was constantly dominating it. Second, the sacrifice and the myth are supposed to desacralise myth itself and to lead to the glorification of reason. Third, the Enlightenment is the necessary conclusion of the myth, and the instrumental reason is patently mimetic and therefore aims to subjugate nature. Fourth, humanity found a way to interrupt the mythical cycle which introduced a new one both illusory and rational: the Enlightenment as a blind mythology of reason. Horkheimer and Adorno after showing how the dichotomy mimesis-Enlightenment is the result of one dialectical movement which did not reach its *Aufhebung* go deeper in their philological study to find the typical bourgeois behaviours in the figure of Odysseus. The expedient to put together the two different subjects the Greek hero and the bourgeois, relies on the fact that both, thanks to their cunning, want to face superior powers because great riches can only come from risky expeditions.

Horkheimer and Adorno spent a great portion of their study in tracing and identifying proto-bourgeois social structure from the Homeric epic. The first episode is the one of the Lotophagi: here Odysseus encounters people who, by eating the lotus flower, fall in an original state where they do not struggle with fighting or working at the cost of their self-consciousness. «It is only an illusion of bliss, a dull aimless vegetating, as impoverished as the life of animals. At best, it would be an absence of the awareness of unhappiness. But happiness contains truth within itself».[28] Odysseus denounces this lifestyle and shows his domineering attitude, he cannot accept such happiness and therefore nobody can, that is why he takes all his intoxicated sailors back to his ship. This behaviour of Odysseus is caused by his hate for the Lotophagi, he sees only people regressed to a prehistoric life where nothing is produced but only collected. Odysseus cannot trade with them because they do not even know what trading means, so he «left that country and sailed on sick at

[27] Ivi, p. 42.
[28] Ivi, p. 49.

heart».[29] The next figure is Polyphemus, which represents the 'barbaric age' of the hunters and the shepherds. «For Homer, the definition of barbarism coincides with that of a state in which no systematic agriculture, and therefore no systematic, time–managing organisation of work and society»[30] exists. This is why Homer, through the words of Odysseus, calls them «lawless and inhuman»,[31] they live thanks to their animals and the gifts from the gods and do not have cities but only tribes; a «society based on kinship and the suppression of the physically weaker [a society] based on the oppression of the weak».[32] Their inhumanity comes from their lack of laws and from their irrational and rhapsodic thinking which explains why Polyphemus cannot understand the sophistic ambivalence of the false name '*Nobody*' given him by Odysseus. «Odysseus, the subject, denies his own identity, which makes him a subject, and preserves his life by mimicking the amorphous realm. He calls himself 'nobody' because Polyphemus is not a self, and confusion of the name with the thing prevents the duped barbarian from escaping the trap».[33] But Odysseus cannot remain assimilated with the amorphous (natural world), in fact, he will reveal his real name to Polyphemus to re-confirm his rational–bourgeois identity, which he himself denied at first. Here we see again the dialectical movement seen in the ritual of the sacrifice, at first Odysseus surrenders to the mythical but once it is weakened by it, he can affirm his (rational) superiority.

Two main aspects of Odysseus' behaviour should be highlighted: on the one hand, his opposition against the natural world which can be simplified as the clash between natural and culturalised world. On the other hand, the hero's opposition against the symbols of previous stages of the human behaviour which is a direct consequence of the first feature. The central theme of Horkheimer and Adorno is the auto-destruction of the Enlightenment, in other words, man's claim of constantly increasing his domain over nature reverses in its opposite, that is, in the subjugation of man and in his degradation – barbarism and violence brought back by Nazism and Fascism. The Enlightenment here is not a historical-cultural moment but it is a broader conjunction of all humans' behaviours of subjugation and dominance over nature. And since for the two philosophers the Enlightenment is the expression of an ideologic-organisational institution of the bourgeois society, the latter has to experience the same shift of meaning, the Odyssey is one of the first texts documenting the Western bourgeois society.

But the attentive reader might ask: What do they achieve by broadening the meanings of 'Enlightenment' and 'bourgeois society', which in this way lose all of their historical specificity? The advantage of such an enlargement is that the critique of Horkheimer and Adorno is not relegated to a specific critique of an epoch, but to the entire western civilisation, which after a continuous desacralisation of nature has generated a new reality adverse to humanity (twentieth century totalitarianism). It is not a coincidence that they write: «human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them».[34] This critique of the Western civilisation has provoked a significant turmoil in the European intellighenzia, and many intellectuals and philosophers approached it, trying to show its weaknesses and its

[29] Ivi, p. 50.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by Samuel Butler, Rockville, Wildside Press, 2007, p. 145.
[32] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 51.
[33] Ivi, p. 53.
[34] Ivi, p. 6.

strengths. One of them is J. Habermas whose aim was to investigate the relation between myth and Enlightenment as expressed by his former professors. Habermas does not share his same opinion; he believes that the conclusions of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* have to be revised. Starting from the same assumption that «Enlightened thinking has been understood both as a contrast to myth and as a force opposing it»[35] he arrives at a different conclusion which is less critical and sceptical of reason. By going through the mythical narrations of the Odyssey, Habermas notes that Horkheimer and Adorno – by falling in a *petitio principii* – follow meticulously «the Odyssey episode by episode in order to discover at what price the experienced Odysseus emerges from the adventures he had encountered with an ego that is both strengthened and rigidified».[36] Thanks to this inner ambivalence of the consciousness in the epic text they show how the mythical ritual-praxis is both real and fictitious. Real because its aim is to sacralise the mythical authorities by acknowledging their powers; fictitious because this process leads to one objective, the creation of the 'I' which uses the ploy of the magical ritual only for its formation.

It is exactly here that Habermas deviates from his teachers, he notes that the authors are aware of this risk and, contrary to a first impression, are making a serious attempt to substantiate their cultural critique. Moreover, «they put up with generalisations and simplifications which ultimately threaten the plausibility of their project».[37] This leads Habermas to note that the ambiguous behaviour of Horkheimer and Adorno creates two dissimilar but analogous attitudes: the use of reason to criticise reason itself; and the attitude of the philosopher bathed in an initiatory aura. Habermas supports the idea that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* does not do justice to the rational content of the Western modernity which was brought by the bourgeois ideals. «Habermas' position is that by denying the rationality of all reason, Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of reason denies its own rationality».[38] In other words, the critique gets so radicalised that becomes total. As Benhabib reminds us: «If the plight of the Enlightenment and of cultural rationalisation only reveals the culmination of the identity logic, constitutive of reason, then the theory of the Dialectic of Enlightenment, which is carried out with the tools of this very same reason, perpetuates the structure of domination it condemns. The critique of Enlightenment is cursed by the same burden as Enlightenment itself».[39]

3. The epic of Gilgamesh: an overview

«The Epic of Gilgamesh is the longest and greatest literary composition written in cuneiform Akkadian».[40] It tells a heroic quest for immortality and glory, followed by a man – Gilgamesh – with extraordinary capacities for friendship, endurance and strength. The work is considered to be an epic because its hero was a real historical figure who gets in-

[35] Jurgen Habermas, *The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re–Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment*, «New German Critique», 26, 1982, p. 14.
[36] Ivi, p. 15.
[37] Ivi, p. 17.
[38] Martin Jay, *The Debate over Performative Contradictions: Habermas versus the Poststructuralists*, in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, edited by Axel Honneth *et alii*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1992, pp. 266-267.
[39] Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 169.
[40] Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 39.

volved in the affairs of gods and goddesses in order to achieve his objective. There are two main versions of the epic, one is the standard Akkadian version written before the 1300-1000 BC. and the Old Babylonian version – also called *Surpassing all other Kings* – which in its majority remains incomplete. There are many differences between the two versions: first, the Akkadian version is written in the Akkadian language while the Babylonian is written in Sumerian. Second, the Akkadian version is the result of the incorporation of several short oral stories about Gilgamesh, while the Babylonian is composed of different tablets of diverse origins which were not meant as chapters of one single story. For the purpose of this research will be utilised the standard Akkadian version because it shares more similarities with the Odyssey since it was meant as one single story.

«Gilgamesh was one of the many kings of the city of Uruk who lived between the 2800-2500 BC».[41] Around the 2150 BC there were many short stories featuring Gilgamesh as king of Uruk and the Epic probably comes from the conjunction of all of them in one single story. Those stories were written when the city of Uruk was the capital of the south of Mesopotamia, probably after the solicitude of the main dynasty of the city which had a special relationship with it and wanted to be identified and therefore glorified by being connected to the mythical hero. The patron behind this intensive work of transcription was king Schulgi who ruled c. 2150-2103 BC. He took an interest in legitimising his power through Gilgamesh, namely by claiming that he was Gilgamesh's brother, and thus, a god himself.

The aforementioned stories were then merged, with numerous changes, into the Akkadian epic. The stories were: 1) Gilgamesh and the halub-tree, known also as *Gilgamesh Enkidu, and the Netherworld*. Part of this story was used for the 12 tablets when Gilgamesh goes to the Underworld in order to rescue his friend Enkidu. 2) Gilgamesh and Huwawa, also known as *Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living*. Huwawa (sometimes called Humbaba) was a monster which was guarding the cedar forest next to Uruk. It has an incredible strength, and no man has ever been able to come back once he entered its domain. Gilgamesh, together with his friend Enkidu, decides to kill Humbaba for obtaining glory and respect from the citizens of Uruk. 3) *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Haven* narrates the battle between Gilgamesh and the Bull of Haven was expanded once integrated into the Akkadian epic. 4) *The Death of Gilgamesh* is a very fragmentary story, but from the parts of the tablets studied, we know that it speaks of Gilgamesh's quest for immortality, which at the end fails poorly because of the denial of the gods. 5) *The Flood* is the only story that did not originally include Gilgamesh. It is the Sumerian version of the Biblical story of the great flood in which the Mesopotamian gods decide to annihilate the majority of the human race by inundating the entire world with water to reduce the overpopulation on Earth.

The content of the 12 tablets of the Akkadian epic is as follows:

In the first tablet, Gilgamesh is introduced as king of Uruk. He is for one–third man and for two–thirds god. Even though his people consider him a god, he oppresses them – i.e. asking the men to work all day and sleeping with all the women of the city. Because of this, the entire population asks the gods to send a warrior strong as Gilgamesh to overturn his tyranny. The gods respond by creating Enkidu, a primitive man who lives with the animals until a harlot, called Shamhat, is sent by Gilgamesh to 'culturalise' Enkidu. In the second tablet, Shamhat teaches Enkidu to behave like a man and prepares him to fight against Gilgamesh. Enkidu engages battle with Gilgamesh, but after a fierce battle, he

[41] Ivi, p. 40.

surrenders to Gilgamesh's superior strength. Gilgamesh decides to repay Enkidu's valour and courage with his friendship. In the third tablet, Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother, is presented to Enkidu who decides to adopt him as a second son. In the fourth tablet, the two friends decide to leave the city of Uruk for the cedar forest to defeat Huwawa the monster. The heroes get frightened after performing a ritual which reveals future horrors and disgrace. In the fifth tablet, the battle seems to turn into a tragedy when both Enkidu and Gilgamesh lose their strength and their courage, but the father of the gods, Shamash, sends thirteen winds to help the two heroes, which by blocking Huwawa allow Gilgamesh to kill the creature. In the sixth tablet, Gilgamesh refuses to marry the goddess Ishtar who, outraged by the refusal, turns to her father Shamash to kill Gilgamesh. After a short discussion between the two gods, Shamash agrees to the request of his daughter and gives her the control of the Bull of Haven, a formidable creature which just by walking on the earthly soil next to Uruk causes earthquakes. But Gilgamesh and Enkidu, once again, fight together and defeat the beast, but this time Enkidu – because of his anger for the destruction caused by the irritated goddess – throws one of the tights of the Bull to Isthar causing her to ask her father to kill one of the two friends. After a long ponderation, the gods decide to kill Enkidu since Gilgamesh is a for two–thirds god. During the celebration for the defeat of the mythical creature, Enkidu falls ill and, in a dream, foreseen his dreadful future. In the seventh tablet, Enkidu, once aware of his imminent upcoming curses all the people who let him enter the civilised world (the harlot and the hunter who spotted him in the steppes). But soon Shamhat reminds him the great things he did, together with Gilgamesh, after becoming a civilised man, Enkidu dies. In the eighth tablet, Enkidu's death has a tremendous effect on Gilgamesh who mourns him for weeks until his body starts to decompose. To commemorate his dead friend the king of Uruk commissions a great statue enriched with great treasures. In the ninth tablet, Gilgamesh leaves the city of Uruk and starts a long journey to find Utnapishtim – the only survivor of the great flood – because he is terrified of dying like his beloved friend Enkidu. After surpassing many obstacles Gilgamesh reaches the Garden of the gods. In the tenth tablet, after meeting the alewife Siduri, Gilgamesh prepares himself for crossing the Waters of Death which can kill him by the touch. Urshanabi, the ferryman, decides to carry him on his boat but the hero has to cut one-hundred-and-twenty trees in order to produce poles that he will use as a propulsion mechanism for crossing the deadly waters. After many hours of navigation, the poles are over, so Gilgamesh, in order to achieve his objective cuts his clothes and creates a sail for the small boat. The hero and the ferryman finally reach the island where Utnapishtim lives, Gilgamesh asks him what the secret of his immortality is. In the eleventh tablet, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh how he obtained the immortality after the flood and that humans are condemned to die. Nonetheless, Utnapishtim's wife manages to convince her husband to reveal to the hero of Uruk the location of a plant which can rejuvenate people. Before letting Gilgamesh leave for his new quest Utnapishtim gives him new precious clothes and washes his dirty and weakened body to show, once back to Uruk, that he did not fail in his mission. After many days of travel, Gilgamesh finds the plant, but while taking a bath in a river, a snake steals the plant and eats it. Gilgamesh's plan to bring back the plant and use it to rejuvenate himself and his people fails. Urshanabi, who travelled with Gilgamesh, spurs him to go back to his city. Once they arrive, Gilgamesh's troubled mind finds peace and, by pointing at Uruk's walls, he tells Urshanabi that the products of the civilised man are immortal because nobody will ever forget them. In the twelfth tablet there are some inconsistencies with the previous parts of the story, the most astonishing is that Enkidu is still alive despite the fact that Gilgamesh saw him dying at the end of the seventh tablet. The reason

behind the discrepancies is that this tablet was added centuries after the original story, which is also why its vocabulary is different. Here Gilgamesh tells Enkidu that many of his possessions, during the years, 'fell' in the Underworld, so Enkidu decides to help his friend to get them back. The king of Uruk tells his companion what he must and must not do in the Underworld, but once there, Enkidu commits one mistake after the other, and the gods decide to imprison him. After discovering what happened to Enkidu, Gilgamesh praises the gods to help him rescuing his incautious friend. He menages to reach the Underworld and saves Enkidu. The tablet closes with Gilgamesh asking Enkidu questions about what he saw in the Underworld.

4. The Instrumental Reason in Gilgamesh

As seen it before, two are the features of Odysseus' behaviour: the first one can be described as his (culturalised) opposition against the natural world; while the second is his attitude to criticise that which does not meet his criteria of civilisation. The first feature was exemplified by the role of the offer-sacrifice, which by honouring the gods (as well as mythical monsters) was weakening them allowing the hero to escape (or kill them) while the second trait of the Greek hero leads to Odysseus' exploitation of both the people and the mythical world. These should be kept in mind since it is now the time to see wheatear or not they appear in the epic of Gilgamesh as well. The epic opens in a similar way to the Odyssey, by describing Gilgamesh as «a hero who knew secrets, and saw forbidden places».[42] As Jacobsen observes, «there is a special note to the Gilgamesh Epic introduction not found in the Odyssey, a stress on something beyond mere unusual, individual experience, a focus rather on lasting tangible achievements, typified by the walls of Uruk, still a cause for wonder».[43]

> He built the town wall of Uruk, (city) of sheepfolds,
> of the sacred precinct Eanna, the holy storehouse.
> Look at its walls
> with its frieze–like bronze!
> Gaze at its bastions, which none can equal![44]

This focusing on the city walls is not just a mere praise to the engineering skills of the architects of the city, but rather a way of stressing the attention on the role of culture over nature which will be encountered at the end of the epic as well. The first time in which this form of antagonism appear is in the creation of Enkidu as the counterpart of Gilgamesh. On the one hand, we have Gilgamesh dressed in rich clothes who knows all there is to know, nonetheless he harasses all the women of the city and forces the men to work all day, leaving them no time for their families. Here can be seen already a similarity with Odysseus: Gilgamesh, like his Greek counterpart, enjoys exploiting his fellow man/women for his own pleasure. This behaviour of Gilgamesh leads the unhappy people of Uruk to pester the gods with complaints to do something about it. The citizens cannot

[42] Danny P. Jackson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Wauconda, Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1992, p. 1.
[43] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973, p. 196.
[44] Jackson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 1.

of course fight against Gilgamesh, he is too strong for them, they need someone with the same incredible strength and energy.

Enkidu is created in the steppe and he looks like a wild beast. It is exactly like an animal that he lives, he drinks and feeds like the animals (eating grass and drinking in ponds) but most importantly he spends all his time in their company running with the gazelles and jostling with wild-beasts. But of course, he has something more than his companions, he is able to avoid the traps and to help the wounded animals. «So Enkidu, although a man, is also the very antithesis of man and his work».[45] But after Gilgamesh learns of his existence, a harlot is sent to him. She introduces him not only to love, which the animals practice as well, but also to shelter, company, clothing, cooked food, strong drinks and all the other benefits of culture.

> The harlot says:
> I look at you Enkidu,
> you are like a god!
> Why do you roam
> the desert with animals?[46]

An important instance to note is the fact that Enkidu, once culturalised by the harlot, tries to go back to his animal friends, but now he is too slow to reach them, and they are afraid of him. He has made a choice, by deciding to sleep with the harlot he now belongs to the human race. «He grew up, says the author and his understanding broadened».[47] He is fully culturalised now, this is proven by the fact that he even captures some of his former friends for some hunters Enkidu meets. Enkidu is the polar opposite of Gilgamesh, «in the desert, Enkidu has rejected animals and become wise like a god, while in the city Gilgamesh, who is king and should be wise, behaves like a wild beast».[48]

Once ready Enkidu decides to face the king of Uruk, but after wrestling with each other, the wild man and Gilgamesh become friends. Gilgamesh's 'Other', whom he eventually befriends, is a primeval man who represents the primitive world from which the urbane (modern) people of Uruk have distanced themselves. From now on their only task would be acquiring fame and glory to become immortal. Here arises the second contrast between nature and culture because the first project conceived by the two friends is to defeat the monster Huwawa which is the guardian of the cedar forest that no man can defeat. At this point, there is a new attack to the natural-mythical world from the culturalised one; «Gilgamesh has to move from culture and the city into the mountain wilderness, to overcome the savage Huwawa, and to bring back the cedars to Uruk».[49] The fight between Enkidu, Gilgamesh, and Huwawa is similar to the encounter between Odysseus and Polyphemus because only by tricking the monster can the hero(s) defeat the mythical creature. The stone on which the battle is inscribed in the Akkadian version is too damaged for the readers to understand the development of the battle. The Sumerian version of the tale comes in handy to describe the encounter. In this other version of the epic, it is written that Gilgamesh and Enkidu are too weak to fight Huwawa; they are so terrorised

[45] Geoffrey S. Kirk, *Myth its Meaning & Functions in Ancient & Other Cultures*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 146.
[46] Jackson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 9.
[47] Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 197.
[48] Kirk, *Myth its Meaning & Functions in Ancient & Other Cultures*, p. 147.
[49] *Ibid.*

by it that they cannot even move. Gilgamesh saves himself from this perilous situation by deceiving Huwawa. Gilgamesh lies to Huwawa that he does not come to him for a fight but to get to know the mountains where Huwawa lives and to offer him his older sister as a wife and his younger sister as a handmaiden.[50] Huwawa then calms down, removes his armour and deposes his weapons. Defenceless, Huwawa is now subjugated by Gilgamesh who indeed is ready to spare him. But Enkidu convinces Gilgamesh to kill the monster.

The third example of the clash between nature and culture is represented by another fight, the one with the Bull of Haven, which is sent by the goddess Ishtar because of Gilgamesh's refusal to marry her. In this case, is the mythical world which attacks the culturalised one, in fact:

> Anu set to lose a bull from out of the sky and,
> at the bull's proclamation, there cracks the
> earth to swallow up nine dozen citizens of Uruk!
> An earthquake fixed a grave for nine dozen
> citizens of Uruk.[51]

«But Gilgamesh and Enkidu prove old hands at handling cattle. Enkidu gets behind the bull and twists its tail while Gilgamesh, like a matador, plunges his sword into the neck of the bull.[52] The importance of this passage is twofold. First, it shows how nature is subjected by the cultural man even when the former strikes first. Second, Gilgamesh adduces some remarkable reasons in rejecting Ishtar's proposal, he reminds «what the goddess seems to have done to most of her previous lovers [which] is to reverse their position between nature and culture».[53] First came the lion, embodiment of strength and freedom, which after loving Ishtar was trapped and confined in the hunter's pit. Then came the herdsman, who conversely has been turned into a wolf and condemned to wander alone in the steppe. Then the young Tammuz, a virgin boy, was turned into a bird with broken wings which cannot fly. Last comes the wild horse which was forced to carry a saddle and to 'wear' horseshoes – twice a change from nature to culture (lion and horse), and twice from culture to nature (the herdsman and Tammuz).

Here a parallelism with Odysseus' encounter with the sirens can be made. Gilgamesh stops the continuous cycle of reversals (nature to culture – culture to nature) by refusing to marry Ishtar because he knows what will happen if he accepts, he finds an escape clause in the mythical contract – i.e. a simple refusal which the previous lovers were not able to pronounce. There is also another possible similarity with the Odyssey which leads to the second aforementioned feature noted by Adorno and Horkheimer in the Greek epic. Odysseus criticised the previous stages of development (encounter with the Lotophagi and Polyphemus) by showing how the civilised man has laws and duties which underline his superiority. Something similar is happening here. By defeating both Huwawa (the tree-guardian) and the Bull of Haven (mythical animal) Gilgamesh is showing how the civilised man subjugates the flora – by collecting the cedar wood – and the fauna – by using the horns of the bull to produce jewels – at his will with both cunning and brute force. The time for adoring those mythical creatures – primeval stage of human development – is over, now the time of subjugation has come.

[50] Jacobsen, *op. cit.* p. 146.
[51] Jackson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 37.
[52] Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 201.
[53] Ivi, p. 148.

At this point of the story, there is a turning point: Enkidu falls ill because he insults Ishtar and will eventually die perturbing Gilgamesh's mind. «Up to this point […], Gilgamesh has lived by the heroic values of his times. Death was a part of the scheme of things, so, since you had to die anyway, let it be a glorious death in battle with a worthy foe so that your name and fame would live».[54]

You are – already now – afraid of death.
What about the fine strength of your courage?
Let me lead,
And you (hanging back) can call out to me:
Close in, fear not!
And if I fall I shall have found fame
«Gilgamesh fell (they will say)
in combat with terrible Huwawa».[55]

But as soon as our hero sees what death really looks like, that is, the decomposition of Enkidu's body, he leaves the city and starts to roam over the steppe. «Gilgamesh's actions are extreme […]: he himself, the embodiment of culture, now rejects the cultured world and roams like an animal in the wild – not only like an animal but also clad in a wild animal's skin».[56] Thus, by roaming Gilgamesh remembers of Utanapishtim the only survivor of the great flood and the only man who has become immortal. Since death, and fear of death are now Gilgamesh's obsession, he wants to meet him and learn his secret. In this second part of the epic Gilgamesh is not arrogant and cocky as he was before, he does not fight anymore; all the characters he meets (scorpion man and his wife, Siduri the alewife, Urshanabi the ferryman, and Utanapishtim and his wife) after hearing the story of Enkidu's death take pity on him and help him. Once the king of Uruk reaches the immortal man he discovers that immortality was granted only once and that no other man after Utanapishtim will ever obtain it. Nonetheless, there is a plant that can be used to rejuvenate, this will be the new objective of Gilgamesh's quest. With the ferryman our hero reaches the shores of the Persian Gulf where the secret plant can be found, they find it and pluck it. But the weather is warm and as Gilgamesh sees an inviting, cool pond, he decides to take a bath. A serpent smells the plant, and, after stealing it, eats it, becoming young again.

«This spells the end of Gilgamesh's quest. It has come to nothing. The serpent, not he, has obtained the power to rejuvenation».[57] He has to admit his final defeat.

On the day Gilgamesh sat down and wept,
tears streaming down his cheeks:
For whose sake, Urshanabi, did my arms tire?
For whose sake, Urshanabi, has my heart's blood been spent?
I brought no blessing on myself.[58]

This new resignation, this acceptance of the sad and harsh truth leads Gilgamesh exactly at the beginning of the epic, the walls of Uruk – which will remain the king's best

[54] Ivi, p. 202.
[55] Jackson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 22.
[56] Kirk, *Myth its Meaning & Functions in Ancient & Other Cultures*, p. 149.
[57] Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 207.
[58] Jackson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 83.

achievement. «Man may have to die, but what he does lives after him. There is a measure of immortality in achievement, the only immortality man can seek».[59]

> Gilgamesh said to the boatman, Urshanabi:
> «Go up, Urshanabi, on the wall of Uruk,
> walk around!
> Examine the terrace, look closely at the brickwork!»[60]

Again, as in the Greek ritual of the sacrifice, the inevitable death of Enkidu sentenced by the gods becomes the reason according to which the gods are weakened, humiliated and forgotten. Only the city walls remain, the mythical has no influence on Gilgamesh anymore.

In the accompanying diagram (Figure 1) Jacobsen has indicated the progress toward the goal of Gilgamesh and the overall effect that this cause on the hero himself.

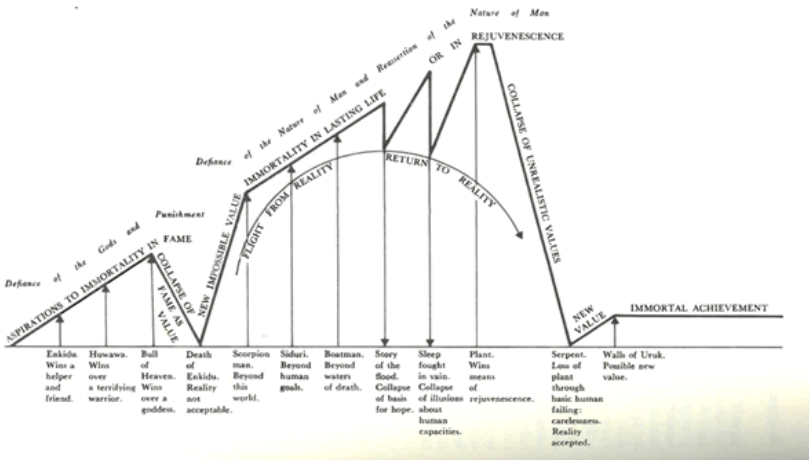

Fig. 1 Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness,* p. 216. This shows the progression of Gilgamesh in the epic and his shift from unrealistic values to materialistic/immortal values.

At first, Gilgamesh's inspiration for immortality takes the form of a quest for immortal fame which can be acquired only through killing a worthy enemy. In pursuing his objective Gilgamesh acquires one success after the other; he fights and kills first Huwawa and then the Bull of Haven. But at this point, the gods are displeased and decide to kill Enkidu causing the collapse of fame as value. With the death of his companion, Gilgamesh understands death in all its stark and brutal reality and after the comprehension the realisation that he himself will inevitably die. Nothing means anything to the king anymore but immortality introducing a new impossible value: immortality in lasting life. Here, he begins his new journey, not for immortality through fame, but for immortality in the flesh. And once again, as in his first quest, he overcomes all the obstacles and reaches his immortal ancestor. But the story of the flood told by Utanapishtim shows that the case of his ancestor was unique and special, which means that it will never happen again. And yet, even if the quest seems to be a great *fiasco*, there is still hope, Utanapishtim knows a secret, the location of the rejuvenating plant. But, as shown in the Figure 1, this final

[59] Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 208.
[60] Jackson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 84.

quest fails as well, leading to the 'final collapse of unrealistic values' from which Gilgamesh can never recover. «Gilgamesh's first quest for immortality in fame defied the gods and brought their retribution on him; this quest for actual immortality is even more deeply defiant; it defies human nature itself, the very condition of nature that reasserts itself».[61] The king of Uruk can only blame himself for a moment of weakness. But in this moment of lack of heroism, something strikes him, and he smiles at himself. This smile marks a new scale of values: «the immortality he now seeks, in which he now takes pride, is the relative immortality of lasting achievement, as symbolized by the walls of Uruk»[62] – immortal achievement.

The emphasis moves from the object of the quest to the quest itself; from the presuppositions on which is based to the consequences to which it leads. But those consequences are not external but internal, deeply psychological, and stress the spiritual change of the subject who undertook the search.[63] Therefore, the conclusion, which is completely supported by the eleventh table, is not a heroic but a melancholic one. Nonetheless, Gilgamesh comprehends and understands a new dimension of life grounded on wisdom and knowledge. This is the ultimate demystification of the mythical which becomes a waste of time and produces only comic results. The everyday realism illustrated by the last comments of Gilgamesh re–asserts the refusal of childhood with its incredible and mythical elements of the adulthood which does not run away from truth, but embrace it producing new realistic values.

5. Gilgamesh the anti-Ulysses

After having seen the story and the motives of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, it is possible to apply the methodological framework adopted by Horkheimer and Adorno to Gilgamesh and his peregrinations. To differentiate this new stance from the notion of Enlightenment elaborated by the two German philosophers, I will call mine 'Mythism'. The first step requires to identify a standard, that is, the aim of Mythism. The reply is immortality and dominance over one's surrounding, since Gilgamesh tried to acquire it in different manners (fame, lasting life, human achievements). Such standard is implicitly normative insofar as it supposedly means that Gilgamesh would have an immortal life of pleasure as immortal king of Uruk. Is such standard internal? Yes, Gilgamesh self-imposes it upon himself several times throughout the story without any external pressure. Mythism, in putting forward its quest for immortality, leads Gilgamesh to believe that immortality is a state of dominance over his surroundings, since he will be the ruling god, hero, or king of the situation. As seen above, Gilgamesh does not reach his aim and most importantly, he does not identify himself with what Mythism believes immortality to be. At the end of the story Gilgamesh is rather dominated by his surrounding and affirms his defeat before the natural world by sheltering himself behind the great walls of the city of Uruk. If Gilgamesh does not achieve what he was supposed to achieve, then, the notion of Mythism must be re-defined accordingly, that means that instead of dominance over nature and acquisition of knowledge Mythism is a form of negative governance. By this I mean that rather than dominating the world, Gilgamesh can only rule over his city; rather than en-

[61] Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 218.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] As Gilgamesh's Greek counterpart «the hero's peregrinations […] trace the path of the self through myths». See Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 38.

joying an endless life of pleasure, Gilgamesh has suffered perpetual torments; rather than becoming the most knowledgeable man in the world, Gilgamesh comes back home knowing that he will never gain access to the entirety of knowledge. As Horkheimer and Adorno point out, if Mythism does not fulfil its aims it must turn into its opposite. Therefore, Mythism should be re-defined as a decentralised humanism where humanity understands that it is not the subject *par excellence* and that it can only understand and live within the boundaries of culturally created environments.

Let us compare, once again, Gilgamesh to Odysseus to see if they are ultimately similar in their intentions and hopes. «On his journey, Gilgamesh is […] stripped of his following, of his energies, of his chief companions, and of his ambitions. Ultimately, he is brought to the extremity of the world, the Far West, the land of death and immortality».[64] The Sumerian King learns from his expedition and comes back ready to administer his kingdom. Odysseus, on the other hand, returns as a hero who simply wants to settle down with his family. There is an idealistic difference in how the two men conduct their journeys. After the loss of his men, Odysseus works unaided and succeeds to save himself without other's advices; while Gilgamesh is regularly assisted either by other people (Enkidu, Siduri, the ferryman, and Utanapishtim) or by the gods; he is never truly alone. The king of Uruk has all his responsibilities once back in his city, but Odysseus has left the worst of his responsibilities behind him, and after murdering Penelope's suitors his life can finally return to 'normality'.[65] An additional difference between these two men is in their ideals. Odysseus is a father which is a crucial facet of his character. «In the aristocratic world of the Homeric hero, the legacy of power and prestige passed on through the male line is an essential element of selfhood. Heroes are constantly identified by patronymics, as sons of their fathers, and they become who they are by living up to their paternal heritage».[66] Gilgamesh is far different from this valiant ideal of a father passing on his brave nature to his son, because, as he comes to fear his own death, he realises that he may never be a father and, therefore, he may never pass his kingdom to his son. In this sense Gilgamesh could be understood as the end piece of a cycle of attempts to dominate nature that finally surrenders to the invincibility of nature. This leads us to the original question: does Gilgamesh fit in the theorised figure of the bourgeois proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer? The answer has two dimensions. Yes, he proves to be a very cunning exploiter but on the other hand, he deeply changes throughout the story, for instance in his idea to bring back the rejuvenating plant to revitalise his people, rather than using it only for himself. This, together with the inner contradictions within the notion of Mythism, leads me to refute the idea that Gilgamesh is a Sumerian Ulysses, or *vice versa* that Ulysses is a Greek Gilgamesh: in fact, Gilgamesh is rather an anti-Ulysses, since he is the last king of Uruk, the anti-hero, the mortal, the lonely, the defeated protagonist of a story that will most definitely end with him.

The last piece of the dialectic movement initiated by Adorno and Horkheimer is, however, still missing, namely, the impact of my interpretation of Gilgamesh's story to the overall argument put forward by the two German philosophers. If according to Adorno

[64] Eric J. Leed, *The Mind Of The Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*, New York, Basic Books, 1991, p. 6.
[65] As Leow observes, «after twenty years, Odysseus is the same man who left Ithaca». See Cornelius R. Leow, *Myth, Sacred History, and Philosophy: the Pre-Christian Religious Heritage of the West*, San Diego, Harcourt, 1967, p. 193.
[66] Homer, *The Odyssey*, p. xxxv.

and Horkheimer's interpretation Gilgamesh turns into an anti-Ulysses, then, what does Gilgamesh tells us about the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* itself?

I think it tells us a story of reconciliation and redemption of the mistreated and misunderstood notion of 'Enlightenment'. If we take to be true the hypothesis that the Enlightenment is a negative concept based on dominance over one's surrounding, that both Ulysses and Gilgamesh perfectly embody, then, in the case of Gilgamesh, the dialectic used to penetrate the idea of Enlightenment turns into something drastically different from the tragic depiction of Adorno and Horkheimer. As we have seen, Mythism does not retrogress into violence and barbarism, as the Enlightenment did, but rather, in acceptance (decentralised humanism) and knowledge acquisition (impossibility to gain absolute knowledge). This might sound paradoxical, and, in fact, it is so. As the Socratic paradox tells us,[67] paradoxes show what knowledge of ignorance makes one gain in the bestowal of the very thing of which one was ignorant. This made Gilgamesh wiser than when he left Uruk for he now knew that he was not the sun around which the planets of meaning and comprehension revolve. Having reduced Enlightenment to instrumentalisation and modernity to regression led to hyperbolic generalisations that might have missed the complexity of reality. Evidently because of these generalisations both Adorno and Horkheimer decided to renounce the idea of writing another work on Enlightenment or continuing to investigate the possibility of an actual change within Enlightenment.[68] Against such philosophical defeatism, I propose a new interpretation: Gilgamesh's vicissitudes suggest that rather than the notion of Enlightenment itself,[69] we should investigate its dialectic for it might invert the substitution of knowledge for fancy that Adorno and Horkheimer so frightfully depicted.

[67] Knowing what you do not know.

[68] Bronner points out that Adorno and Horkheimer were interested in writing a second book named *Rescuing the Enlightenment*, but after finishing the first one their original plan changed completely. See Stephen E. Bronner, *Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 14.

[69] Which might or might not be intrinsically problematic.