

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Department of History and Archaeology

MA in in Greek and Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology:

from

the Bronze Age Palaces to the Hellenistic Kingdoms

Academic year 2021-2022

Two Hearts, One Soul: An Exploration of Homoeroticism in
the Iliad and the Epic of Gilgamesh

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Introduction

Homosexuality has always been, and might always be, a hotly debated topic in the study of history and historical figures, both real and fictional. Even now, with same-sex marriage legalized in over 20 countries and an overall far more progressive world, the debate of the true feelings expressed in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Iliad* between men rages on. This essay will look at both original texts and translations, extrapolate meaning, and draw parallels between the two epics. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, first written in ca. 2100 BC, tells the tale of Gilgamesh and Enkidu and their various adventures though the early Fertile Crescent. As decreed by the gods, Enkidu is created and is tasked with calming the wild King Gilgamesh. From their first meeting, it becomes clear that they are destined soulmates. The *Iliad*, an oral tradition first composed in the late 8th or 7th century but gained popularity during the 5th century, is a brief glimpse into the last phase of the Trojan war. While the story is vast and covers thousands of pages, we will be specifically looking at Achilles and Patroclus and the hypothesized homoerotic bond they shared. By looking through the lens of death, their true feelings shine through. In order to fully understand and define the relationships between these four men, I will look at language, culture, art, and love itself. By using these aspects, I will try to demonstrate that a deep love is found in both stories, and that it is an essential element of each epic. Through their love for one another, Achilles and Patroclus and Gilgamesh and Enkidu become one soul split over two bodies. Despite hardship, turmoil, trauma, and death, this love is everlasting and makes these men divine.

While I will only be discussing the relationship between the main characters in this essay, there are further parallels to be made between these two works. Such parallels might indicate a deeper connection between both works. One such instance is that of Aphrodite and Ishtar. Both love goddess, enraged by the mortals who shame them, return to their godly parents for advice. In both scenes, their fathers are portrayed as not “particularly sympathetic.”¹ Where this story differs, however, is the outcome. Aphrodite’s wrath is calmed by her mother while Ishtar “successfully requests the Bull of Heaven to slay Gilgamesh and wreak havoc on his city Uruk.”² Ballesteros, noting how the parents of each goddess share the same name and Aphrodite’s mother being one of multiple myths regarding her birth, cites Burkett who says, “Homer proves to be dependent on *Gilgamesh* even at the linguistic level, forming the name of Dione as a calque on Anta.”³ This can further be seen in similar scenes found in the *Iliad*

¹ Ballesteros 2021, 4.

² Ballesteros 2021, 3.

³ Ballesteros 2021, 4.

involving Hades, Artemis, and Ares, all which prompt the question: Are these scenes a direct imitation of the earlier *Gilgamesh* episode, or is this a “pre-existing pattern?”⁴ By looking at both *Odyssey* and Cyclic epics, it would seem that the latter is more fitting. This is also seen in Near East tradition, with similar scenes appearing in the Ugaritic *Aqhat*, the Akkadian *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, and the Sumerian *Lament for Ur*, among many others.⁵ Through these various instances, a clear parallel can be made. Another such parallel can be seen in the deaths, and subsequent resurrections of Patroclus and Enkidu. I will be talking about this subject at length later on in this essay, but I will summarize briefly here. Both men are required to die, as decreed by the gods, in order for their counterparts to become whole and take on their true destiny. Once declared dead, they are treated to lavish feasts and golden gifts. The survivors, however, refuse to accept this death, dirtying their bodies and refraining from actions required for life. Only after a week has passed are they able to reenter society and connect once again with their peers. During this time, abandoned and alone, they are both called upon by the spirits of the deceased and both recount what awaits them after death. During this conversation, both heroes reach out to embrace the other only for the dead to dissipate. As both of these episodes seem to follow each other beat for beat, it is highly likely that inspiration is being drawn. While it has been hotly debated if Homer was directly inspired by *Gilgamesh*, it can be argued that the cultures that created them drew from the same unknown source. There is a conversation being had here but if that was intentional remains to be seen. As the topic of parallels is an essay in its own right, I shall now move on to the bulk of this paper.

I will begin with a quick summary of both epics. This will serve as an introduction to the main themes as well as an overview of critical scenes that will be fully explored later on. Once both storylines and basic character overviews are given, I will move on to an in depth look at laws and customs in regard to homosexuality. Through these cultural guidelines, a better understanding of the relationship between the ideas put forth in these stories and the society that consumed it can be achieved. This section will also include, where applicable, views from the general public and the popular philosophers. Following that, I’ll look at sexuality and how it is defined in both epics. While it is placed at the forefront in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, it plays a far more subtle role in the *Iliad*. Physical artifacts will also be presented to further my point. As both serve as major themes, I will then focus on death and it’s transformative qualities. Not only will I be looking at the actions leading up to the deaths of Patroclus and Enkidu, but I will

⁴ Ballesteros 2021, 4.

⁵ Ballesteros 2021, 13-4.

also unpack how these events effect Achilles, Gilgamesh, and the greater picture. Love, as defined in Plato's *Symposium*, will also be highlighted here. In the final section, I will thoroughly discuss the importance of duality and how both pairs become one in the same. This duality is another major theme throughout both epics. It is used to assign "hidden" character traits that are only found through their relationships with their second halves.

A Summary of Both Epics

The *Iliad*

The *Iliad* takes place nine years after the start of the Trojan War, the cause of which was Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world and wife of Achaean King Menelaus. She was willingly taken by Paris, the son of King Priam of Troy and brother to Hector. The *Iliad* itself begins with the Achaean army attacking the city of Chryse and capturing the maidens Chryseis and Briseis; they are given to Agamemnon and Achilles, respectively. As a result, Chryses, the father of Chryseis, prays to the god Apollo to bring a plague upon the Achaean forces. This plague leads to the death of many men, and Chryseis is returned to her father. Agamemnon, who had wanted Chryseis, forces Achilles to give Briseis to him. Insulted by this act, Achilles refuses to fight in the war. Agamemnon has disgraced his honor, and that cannot go unpunished. He begs his mother, the nereid Thetis, to ask for Zeus's help to end the war. As the god knows Achilles is destined to die a heroic death, no matter what side wins, and he agrees. With Zeus siding with the Trojans and Achilles off the battlefield, the Achaeans begin to lose the battle with many of their men falling under the blades of the Trojans. Zeus was not the only deity to help out in the war. Athena, Hera, and Poseidon supported the Achaean forces, while Apollo, Aphrodite, and Ares fought for the Trojans. After Thetis called on Zeus for help, he banned all deities from intervening.

After seeing the Trojans break through the Achaean fortress and breach their ships, Achilles finally allows his dear friend Patroclus to take his place on the battlefield. Donning Achilles's armor, he leads the remaining Achaeans against the enemy. He is able to push the Trojans all the way back to the gates of Troy before Apollo intervenes, as foreseen and allowed by Zeus, and throws off Patroclus's armor. As he falls to the ground, Hector swiftly puts an end to Patroclus's attack and slays him. In the commotion, Hector is able to steal Achilles's armor off the corpse, but the Achaeans are able to retrieve the body. Now full of grief and anger, Achilles agrees to rejoin the battle and enact his revenge on Hector and the Trojans. He is outfitted by his mother with magic armor created by the god Hephaestus and enters the fight.

Numerous Trojans are killed in Achilles's rage as he approaches their city. The ones who aren't slaughtered flee and hide inside the walls of Troy. Hector stands alone against Achilles, committed to putting on a brave face, but soon finds himself running for his life. After the third loop around the city, Athena turns Hector around, and an epic battle ensues. Achilles is triumphant and kills him, lashing his body to the back of his chariot and dragging it through the battlefield. The Achaeans celebrate Patroclus's funeral for the next nine days through

various athletic games in his honor. As they celebrate life, they also celebrate death, as every day Achilles continues to drag Hector's corpse around Patroclus' funerary bier. On the tenth day, Hermes brings King Priam to Achilles to beg for his son's body. Achilles relents, remembering his own aging father, and returns the body, with both sides agreeing to a temporary truce. The deceased then receives a warrior's burial.

The Epic of Gilgamesh

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* chronicles the life and death of Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk. The epic begins with Gilgamesh as an arrogant king, holding no respect for his people and treating them no better than objects to be manipulated. The people call out to the gods to stop the madness, and, in response, Enkidu is created. A man born in the wild, he lived with the deer and frightened the locals. A local trapper was told to take Shamhat the prostitute to see him, and through sex, she transforms him into a man. The trapper and Shamhat then take him to the city of Uruk, as Enkidu is said to be the only man that can stop Gilgamesh's rampage. The two men clash but, peace is restored, and then mutual respect develops between them.

Time passed, and the men soon found themselves on an adventure: to kill the mighty Humbaba of the Cedar Forest. It was said that the monster was destroying all that entered his forest; no one could harvest the enormous cedar trees that grew within. An epic battle ensued and ended with the great beast defeated. The two returned to Uruk as mighty heroes to a grand celebration. Ishtar, the goddess of love, attempted to charm King Gilgamesh into bed with her, but he rejects her advances. Gilgamesh knew of how she had destroyed past lovers in violent ways and had no interest in such a grisly fate. Angered by his insolence, the goddess begged Anu, her father, to give her the Bull of Heaven. He refused until she promised to provide food for the people and their animals. Bull in hand, Ishtar sent down the bull to rampage the city and kill the traitorous Gilgamesh. With the help of Enkidu, the king was able to find and defeat the creature, stabbing it through the neck. The death of the Bull of Heaven and Humbaba turned the gods against Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and they decided that one of the men must die. As Gilgamesh was already established as an important king, it was decreed that Enkidu must take the fall. Before his demise, Enkidu's dreams were plagued by nightmares in which every night he died until that fateful day came. Gilgamesh, struck with the grief of his dear friend's passing, pledged to walk the ends of the earth until he found a cure for death. The death of his friend struck in him a great fear of his own demise, and he wished to prevent it at all costs.

Gilgamesh crossed mountains, seas, deserts, and forests before he reached the edge of the ocean inside the Garden of the Gods. It was said there was a nearby boatman that could

take him Utnapishtim, the man who survived the great flood. He had achieved immortality, and Gilgamesh wanted to learn his secret. Gilgamesh told Utnapishtim he would do anything for his gift. The man said the only way to achieve immortality was to stay awake for seven days and defeat sleep. However, the moment Gilgamesh sat down on the floor, he closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep. For every day he slept, the man's wife placed a loaf of bread next to Gilgamesh to show him how long he had slept. Waking up, he had no choice but to return home. On his way back, he found a magical plant that was said to bring immortality. He collected the plant and soon found a place to take a nap. As he slept, a snake had slithered by and took the plant. Gilgamesh, defeated by the laws of mortality, finally returned to his city a changed man.

Laws and Customs

Before we are able to discuss the relationship between both Achilles and Patroclus and Gilgamesh and Enkidu, we must first understand the ancient laws and customs created in regard to homosexuality. While there were no Athenian laws that addressed homosexuality directly, by looking at laws on prostitution, education, and *hubris*, we can gain insight on the general views on this practice. On prostitution, it is written that any boy or man who hires themselves out will lose their right to address the Assembly and participate in other important areas of civic life.⁶ Another law states that if a male family member or guardian hires out a boy under their protection, the seller and purchaser will be subject to public action.⁷ These laws also prohibit persuasion and protect any freeborn women and children. Free members of society were the main focus of these laws and prevented any unjust actions against such persons. However, the pursuit of enslaved sex workers was frowned upon as well, as this too would tarnish ones honor.⁸ In regard to education, it was forbidden for schools to open before sunrise or stay open after dark.⁹ Included was the regulation of who could and could not enter the facility and the circumstances of their arrival. Not only was this law a reaction to intimate moments occurring between *erastes* and *eromenos* on school grounds, but it was also a reaction of the ogling that occurred at gymnasiums. The final group of laws critical to understanding this topic are those on *hubris*. *Hubris* directly relates to dishonor and shame and deals with sexual abuse.¹⁰ These laws decree that seduction and adultery involving free women as well as using men as women constitutes *hubris*.¹¹ They serve as a follow up to the laws presented in the above prostitution section as both groups deal with honor and shame and the importance of protecting ones manliness. Through these three concepts, an Athenian man was defined alongside the rest of his family. The male head of household was supposed to be a pillar, not only for his family but the community as a whole. David Cohen writes on these laws in particular that, “Athenian statutes seem to reflect a society which was attempting over a period of time to cope with persistent patterns of behavior which were felt to jeopardize the well-being of the city.”¹²

⁶ Cohen 1987, 5.

⁷ Cohen 1987, 5.

⁸ Cohen 1987, 12.

⁹ Cohen 1987, 6.

¹⁰ Cohen 1991, 172.

¹¹ Cohen 1991, 178.

¹² Cohen 1987, 9-10.

Girls were married off at age fifteen while men married at age thirty.¹³ During this decade long period, men were supposed to remain single and focus on assisting their family. The young women were heavily and violently protected by their parents, and boys became substitutes to be pursued in their stead. They too were protected by their families, but they were forced to leave the household due to their obligation to become educated. On this coming of age initiation, Vidal-Naquet points out the all too famous scene at Skyros in which the hero Achilles is disguised as a woman to protect his identity.¹⁴ The mist only falls once the hero is unable to resist taking up arms. Plato, however, is against this role and writes that a male in a submissive role was “against nature “ as it went against the foundations of copulation put forth by the animal kingdom.¹⁵ Aristotle used the same argument in his work the *Generation of Animals*, focusing on the transformation that came with castration.¹⁶ Specifically he notes that it makes men women physiologically. In this space, he places both eunuchs and boys as both are unable to perform acts required by society. As boys have yet to go through puberty, and thus are unable to perform sexual acts, they are not yet men. Boys who do perform these acts are, in his eyes, shameful as they wish to gain something from the other, or are plagued with a physiological disorder.¹⁷ Xenophon also spoke out against such relationships, writing “Homer pictures us Achilles looking upon Patroclus not as the object of his passion but as a comrade, and in this spirit signally avenging his death.”¹⁸ He even dismisses the idea of physical attraction between men overall, as on the topic of Ganymede and Zeus he notes “it was not his person but his spiritual character that influenced Zeus to carry him up to Olympus.”¹⁹ Aristophanes contradicts these philosophers, and writes in support of homosexuality. In Plato’s *Symposium*, he created a new natural order and creation myth that left institutionalized heterosexuality behind.²⁰ He notes that the homoerotic man is more virile and only marries to follow customs. The only way honor could be maintained was if the *erastes* was given favors by his *eromenos*, but such favors protected his honor and avoided acts that resulted in penetration.²¹ While he did support homosexuality, he viewed *Pederasty* with disdain. He claimed it was no better than the prostitution the law prevented.

¹³ Bardis 1964, 157.

¹⁴ Apollod. 3.13.8

¹⁵ Cohen 1987, 13.

¹⁶ Cohen 1987, 14.

¹⁷ Cohen 1987, 15.

¹⁸ Xen. Sym. 8.31.

¹⁹ Xen. Sym. 8.30.

²⁰ Cohen 1987, 15.

²¹ Cohen 1987, 20.

As I spoke about before, both boys and women were placed in the same feminine realm of society. They were to be innocent and modest, keeping to themselves and their peers. This continues through the courting process depicted on Attic vases. On them, both boys and women were drawn in the same way. Cohen writes that “the stages, gestures, rituals and gifts of courtship were much the same whether the object was a boy or a woman.”²² From this, it becomes clear that this view of boys was widespread and was a major influence on the process of becoming an adult.

In the world of Mesopotamia, sexual relations between men were viewed in a positive light, depending on the partner and position. Their laws directly opposed the views of the Athenians and are written in support of homoerotic love. Four omens in the *Summa alu*, a “manual used to predict the future,” on this subject read as the following:²³

“If a man has sexual relations with an *assinnu*, hardships will be unleashed from him.

If a man has sexual relations with a male house(-born) slave, hardship will seize him.

If a man has sex per *anum* with his social peer, that man will become foremost among his brothers and colleagues.”²⁴

“If a man copulates with a *gerseqqu*, worry will possess him for a whole year but will then leave him.”²⁵

Before we understand these laws, however, the terms must be defined. An *assinnu* was a passive male follower of the Cult of Ishtar and was categorized as a third gender.²⁶ A *gerseqqu*, on the other hand, was a royal attendant.²⁷ By looking at these laws, it becomes clear that homoerotic pairings were the norm and thusly required different rules. However, much like the rules of *Pederasty*, these acts benefited the active over the passive participant.²⁸ These laws decreed that intercourse between a man and another male of equal standing brought good luck, while intercourse with an *assinnu*, a *gerseqqu* or a slave brought trouble. On the ancient Near East, Naphy writes, “how few cultures seem to have any significant ‘moral’ concern about same-sex activities. ... Most cultures seemed to accept that males might have sexual relations

²² Cohen 1987, 17.

²³ Gerig 2005.

²⁴ Nissinen 2010, 75.

²⁵ Gerig 2005.

²⁶ Brown, 2016.

²⁷ Gerig 2005.

²⁸ Walls 2001, 15.

with other males,” a contrition of the Athenian view.²⁹ Middle Assyrian Law, on the other hand, decrees that if a male slanders his neighbor and says, ‘People have lain repeatedly with him,’ he shall be flogged fifty times, work for the king for a month, be castrated, and pay one talent of lead.³⁰ Another law states that, “If a seignior [an Assyrian man] lay with his neighbor [another citizen], when they have prosecuted him (and) convicted him [the first citizen], they shall lie with him (and) turn him into a eunuch.”³¹ Hittite law is also relevant here and states, “If a man violates his son, it is a capital crime.”³² Hoffner remarks, “a man who sodomized his son is guilty of urkel [illegal intercourse] because the partner is his son, not because they are of the same sex,” and follows up by saying, “[I]t would appear that homosexuality was not outlawed among the Hittites.”³³ Thusly, homoerotic relationships were not viewed as immoral, and prosecution only came when slander, incest, or rape occurred.

We should also briefly discuss the concept of *Philos*. Translating to “friend,” “dear one” or “another I”, it comes from premodern discourse on male friendship. It goes beyond our current view of friendship into something much deeper.³⁴ The integration of philosophy into this discussion allows for a deeper insight into our two pairs and their relationship. In some sense, it is comparable to modern Queer Platonic Relationships as both deal with a deep marriage-like friendship that can last for life. It is important to note however that they are not the same exact phenomenon and should not be treated as such. There are five main features of *Philos* that I will first define then connect with the two epics and our pairs. The first aspect of *Philos* is that it is a form of love.³⁵ This type of love goes beyond surface level and binds the two participants together. It is a deep connection that not only connects the participants through their hearts but through their souls as well. The second and third aspects directly feed into this as *Philos* is also an exclusive relationship between two people that wish to live and die together.³⁶ Both aspects indicate a marriage-like bond and note the importance of sharing a home, something seen in both epics. The final two aspects deal with passion, one in terms of strong emotions and the other in terms of suffering and death.³⁷ Much like the previous aspects, this concept binds the raw emotions of the pair and allows for individual personalities to be

²⁹ Gerig 2005.

³⁰ Gerig 2005.

³¹ Gerig 2005.

³² Gerig 2005.

³³ Gerig 2005.

³⁴ Muellner 2019, 142.

³⁵ Krass 2013, 158.

³⁶ Krass 2013, 158.

³⁷ Krass 2013, 158.

shared. They are two sides of the same coin and reflect each other's abilities and ideals. With the five core features of *Philos* explained, I will now apply them to the two epics.

For the next section, I will focus on the last three aspects in relation to the epics. The first two will be skipped as I will heavily discuss these ideas throughout the rest of the essay. There are numerous examples of these two aspects seen throughout both works. To reiterate, aspect three is the desire to live and die together between the union. The need is wholeheartedly expressed by both groups. When Hector slays Patroclus, it sends Achilles into a depressive spiral, and he loses the will to live. Achilles was already a vengeful man, a god in a man's body, and this was his tipping point. He cries out to his mother that he would rather die than go on living without Patroclus. Without his *Philos*, he feels that there is nothing left for him. This is of course only enforced by his own prophesied death coming over the horizon. Robert Fagles translates this speech as the following:

“...My spirit rebels – I’ve lost the will to live,
To take my stand in the world of men – unless,
Before all else, Hector’s battered down by my spear
And gasps away his life, the blood-price for Patroclus,
Menoetius’ gallant son he’s killed and stripped!”³⁸

Without Patroclus, Achilles feels that he has nothing left. The death of Patroclus is one of the thousands caused by Achilles' inability to act, but this loss finally allows him to put aside his hatred of Agamemnon, saying, "Enough. Let bygones be bygones."³⁹ His honor can wait. Achilles only wants to avenge his partner and restore his integrity, putting an end to those who felled him on the battlefield. This death transforms him into a feral beast, lion-like and ruthless. He makes quick work of all those who approach him, wishing nothing but hellfire on his enemies. Following the brutal slaying of Hector, the ghost of Patroclus comes to Achilles in the night and begs to be placed in the same two handled urn as him as his final wish.

“So now let a single urn, the gold two-handed urn
your mother gave you, hold our bones – together!”⁴⁰

Thus, both will be returned to their natural state as a combined soul.

In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, we see a very similar scene play out. Before his death, Enkidu cries out to Gilgamesh, “weren’t we to remain forever inseparable, you and me?”⁴¹ Unable to

³⁸ Hom. Il. 18.105-9.

³⁹ Hom. Il. 18.132-3.

⁴⁰ Hom. Il. 23.109-10.

⁴¹ Mitchell 2004, 149.

accept his friends death, Gilgamesh begs the other to wake up from his deep slumber; he cannot live without him.

“When he heard the death rattle, Gilgamesh moaned
like a dove. His face grew dark. ‘Beloved,
wait, don’t leave me. Dearest of men,
don’t die, don’t let them take you from me.’”⁴²

Throughout his rule, Gilgamesh had ignored any pain and suffering he put on his people and for the first time in his life, that pain comes back to him. These scenes connect with the final two aspects as well. Both are overwhelmed with strong emotions and experience a deep suffering or death resulting in the survivors of both pairs becoming wild and animalistic in their grief. These men are only able to move on once the dead has been honored and they themselves understand what waits for them after death. There are more scenes that work for aspect five, however. For example, this aspect is expressed by Achilles when he wishes death on all Argives and Trojans so he and Patroclus could sack Troy alone. Such passion is only seen when it concerns Patroclus and no other soldier is given the same importance.

“...Oh would to god – Father Zeus, Athena and lord Apollo –
Not one of all these Trojans could flee his death, not one,
No Argive either, but we could stride from the slaughter
So we could bring Troy’s hallowed crown of towers
Toppling down around us – you and I alone!”⁴³

This statement stands out as both intense and frightening, as no other statements made by the soldiers come close to this impassioned speech.⁴⁴ It shows that, compared to others, there is a stronger bond between the two men, which might go beyond simple friendship. Aristarchus, a man from Samothrace and one of the most influential scholars on Homer’s *Iliad*, asserted that this line was added by an outside source who thought Achilles and Patroclus were lovers. His main point against this line is that Achilles would not wish such a fate on his fellow Greeks as he was sympathetic.⁴⁵ While this could be possible, Achilles' actions in war are an apparent contradiction to this statement. The rejection of this passage makes it clear that the emotions Achilles portrays are far too intense and outside the social norms of typical friendship. We also see this passion in the attack against the Bull of Heaven in Tablet Six of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

⁴² Mitchell 2004, 150.

⁴³ Hom. Il. 14.115-19.

⁴⁴ Skinner 2014, 52.

⁴⁵ Schironi 2018, 711.

Following the fight, it would seem Gilgamesh's haughtiness has rubbed off on Enkidu, as he mocks the goddess Ishtar, laughing in her face as he says:

“...If I could only get as you as [the bull’s shoulder] does,
I would do the same to you myself,
I would hang its intestines on your arms!”⁴⁶

Both Gilgamesh and Enkidu quickly kill the beast and, in their victory, insult the gods. This act of cruelty is so severe that it serves to seal Enkidu's fate; he is destined to die a painful death.

By applying the concept of *Philos* to the epics, we are able to give a name to the relationships presented. From my own perspective, this is the best label to use as, while many aspects of the relationships are confirmed, there is an overwhelming amount of grey space. It is clear that there was a thread of love that bound each pair together, but it is unknown if these relationships were explicit. There is a high chance that this was the case for Gilgamesh and Enkidu, but there is little evidence in the case put forth in the *Iliad*. By using the term *Philos*, we know that these people were inherently soulmates with a deep love for one another. Throughout further sections, I will dive deep into these two relationships and provide overwhelming evidence in support of a *Philos*-based love.

Now we must now decide on a title for the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. I think that *Pederasty* did not apply to the pair at the time of the *Iliad* due to the view of others, their ages, and the relationship itself. On the surface level, it might be easy to compare their relationship to the institution of *Pederasty*. I believe, however, there are more than a few factors that contradict this. This isn't to say I do not believe they were involved romantically, instead I propose that they were closer to a modern couple. As a reminder, *Pederasty* involved two male persons of different age groups in a sexual and/or romantic relationship. It was used as a coming of age ritual that brought boys into the adult world. It had a negative connotation, however, and brought shame onto the participants. My first point of contention for the *Pederastic* point of view is that there is an overall lack of shame from outsiders. We never see another soldier shaming Achilles or Patroclus for their closeness and, if anything, we see full support of their choices. When Achilles learns of his dear friend's death, fellow soldier Antilochus rushes to hold his hands as he fears Achilles might kill himself.

“Antilochus kneeling near, weeping uncontrollably,
clutched Achilles’ hands as he wept his proud heart out –

⁴⁶ Dalley 1989, 82.

for fear he would slash his throat with an iron blade.”⁴⁷

During Patroclus’ funeral scene, his fellow soldiers wail alongside Achilles. They share his sadness and support their commander during his grieving process. If Patroclus was an *erastes*, his death would have been viewed in a positive light and Achilles would regain his honor. As this is not the case, this is a strong point against this relationship type.

The next important question to ask is that of age. By using both the *Iliad* and Apollodoros’ *Library and Epitome*, we can come to an estimate on the ages of both men. Beginning with Achilles, Apollodoros outlines the beginning of the war and how long it took the Argives to travel to Troy. He writes that the war took twenty years and began two years after the abduction of Helen. This section also notes that it took the Argives eight years to arrive in Troy after being blown back home by a storm.

Departing from Mysia, the Greeks put to sea, and a violent storm coming on, they were separated from each other and landed in their own countries. So the Greeks returned at that time, and it is said that the war lasted twenty years. For it was in the second year after the rape of Helen that the Greeks, having completed their preparations, set out on the expedition and after their retirement from Mysia to Greece eight years elapsed before they again returned to Argos and came to Aulis.⁴⁸

The second passage notes that Achilles was nine years old when Calchas prophesied his role in the war and his fate to die on the shores of Troy. In order to protect her son, Thetis sent him dressed as a woman to King Lycomedes of Skyros. During this time he sired a son with Deidamia, the king’s daughter, who would later join in the fight.

When Achilles was nine years old, Calchas declared that Troy could not be taken without him; so Thetis, foreseeing that it was fated he should perish if he went to the war, disguised him in female garb and entrusted him as a maiden to Lycomedes. Bred at his court, Achilles had an intrigue with Deidamia, daughter of Lycomedes, and a son Pyrrhus was born to him, who was afterwards called Neoptolemus.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Hom. Il. 18.36-8.

⁴⁸ Apollod. Epit. e.3.18.

⁴⁹ Apollod. 3.13.8

The third passage speaks on the first attempt to sail for Troy. During this journey, Achilles was fifteen years old.

So Agamemnon in person was in command of the whole army,
and Achilles was admiral, being fifteen years old.⁵⁰

In summary, the twenty years of the Trojan war includes the time it took to sail back to the battle field. The plan to invade Troy was first made when Achilles was nine. He was then sent to Skyros until he was fifteen. Talking in account the ten years of the Mysian campaign, once he arrived in Troy, he would have been about twenty five years old. While it is not explicitly stated, we know that the *Iliad* takes place around nine to ten years after the Argives arrive due to the deaths of Hector and Patroclus alongside Achilles' impending doom. Thusly, all together, it is likely that at the time of the *Iliad*, Achilles is in his middle thirties.

Patroclus is much more difficult to place, however, as there are only a few instances that can be used to hypothesize his age. In Book Eleven, Nestor urges Patroclus to join the battle in Achilles' place. This passage makes it clear that Patroclus is older than Achilles and is in a position to give advice.

“And Actor's son Menoetius urging you, ‘My child,
Achilles is nobler than you with his immortal blood
but you are older. He has more power than you, by far,
but give him sound advice, guide him, even in battle.
Achilles will listen to you for his own good.’”⁵¹

We also learn, in Book Twenty Three, that Patroclus was subsequently banished and sent to live with Achilles when he was only a boy.

“...just as we grew up together in your house,
after Meonetius brought me there from Opois,
and only a boy, but banished for bloody murder
the day I killed Amfidamas' son.”⁵²

While these notes are vague at best, it is still possible to hypothesize about his possible age. In my opinion, it is best to place Patroclus' age anywhere from three to four years older than Achilles. Such an age difference would allow for Patroclus to be old enough to give Achilles advice, but also young enough to be a childhood friend. Using these ages, it becomes quite clear that *Pederasty* is near impossible for these two men. They were too close in age and, as

⁵⁰ Apollod. Epit. E.3.16

⁵¹ Hom. Il. 11.938-42.

⁵² Hom. Il. 23.102-5.

an *eromenos* was chosen at twelve and *erastes* made their choice around eighteen years old, would have belonged to the same age group. Again, this opposes the common definition of *Pederasty* and puts this relationship into its own category. Alongside this small age gap, if the pair were *pederastic* lovers, their relationship would have ended years ago. Both are in their thirties by the end of the war, making them far older than what was considered “proper” for this institution. If they were younger, then perhaps an argument could be made but, as they are past the prime ages for *Pederasty*, this is impossible.

The final piece of evidence I will look at is the relationship between the two men. If it is *Pederastic*, we will be able to see that reflected in their interactions. As I spoke about before, Achilles is often painted as the more senior figure during their discussions. Before the banquet in Book Nine, he asked Patroclus to mix the wine and bring bread to the guests. Achilles, on the other hand, carves and serves the meat. This discrepancy alludes to Achilles having more experience with cooking and hosting, two features an adult ought to have.

“As soon as the roasts were done and spread on platters,
Patroclus brought the bread, set it out on the board
in ample wicker baskets. Achilles served the meat.”⁵³

Later on, during Book Sixteen, Patroclus is once again portrayed as a child, begging Achilles to let him fight in the war. He is described as a crying child and Achilles becomes his mother.

“Why in tears, Patroclus?
Like a girl, a baby running after her mother,
begging to be picked up, and she tugs her skirts,
holding her back as she tries to hurry off – all tears,
fawning up at her, till she takes her in her arms ...”⁵⁴

This scene directly parallels that of Achilles and Thetis in Book One. In it, Achilles cries out for his mother over the loss of Briseis to Agamemnon. This event would, of course, later cause Patroclus to do the same to Achilles. Both men are reduced to children in their respective scenes and call out for their mothers. This, however, is not the only occurrence of this parallel. Homer once again creates this connection when Achilles loses Patroclus and when he is buried. For the first scene, Thetis cradles Achilles’ head and comforts him.

“As he groaned from the depths his mother rose before him
and sobbing a sharp cry, cradled her son’s head in her hands

⁵³ Hom. Il. 9.258-60.

⁵⁴ Hom. Il. 16.7-11.

and her words were all compassion, winging pity.”⁵⁵

This motion is seen in various other works of Greek art, each of which paints it as a feminine gesture.⁵⁶ On the way to Patroclus’ bier, Achilles does the same with the head of his dead friend. His head is cradled and held with love.

“They covered his whole body deep with locks of hair they cut
and cast upon him, and just behind them brilliant Achilles
held the head, in tears – this was his steadfast friend
whom he escorted down to the House of Death.”⁵⁷

During the funeral itself, Achilles wept like a father who lost his son on his wedding day.⁵⁸ Again, we see this parent/child relationship expressed. Overall, this parallel enforces this idea that Achilles led the relationship and contradicts the ideas put forth by *Pederasty*.

These three factors make it clear that the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus was not *Pederastic*. Instead, their relationship was that of *Philos* and the two were bonded through a close, marriage-like friendship. These two men were childhood friends that traveled the Greek world together, both fated to die on the shores of Troy. While there were aspects of their relationship that alluded to a parent/child bond, Achilles always led the pair despite being the younger of the two. Patroclus might have been placed in the role of mentor and guide by Peleus, but he is always seen following Achilles.⁵⁹ Once he acts on his own accord, he falls in battle and seals his second half’s fate. Throughout their final days, they are never shamed for their relationship. In fact, Patroclus brings his fellow soldiers together through his leadership and eventual demise during the battle for the ships. This act of bravery brings about the final act of the war and topples the first domino that leads to the Argive win. Through these pieces of evidence, I believe I have sufficiently shown that Achilles and Patroclus were not *Pederastic* lovers. Rather, they were prophesied friends with a deep and profound love for each other. They were always fated to be close, decreed by the gods the moment Patroclus was sent to live under Achilles’ roof. This is the overarching theme that connects not only Achilles and Patroclus, but Gilgamesh and Enkidu as well. They are blessed with a godly love that binds them together and transforms them. Both pairs are two parts of one soul and are destined to become one.

⁵⁵ Hom. Il. 18.82-3.

⁵⁶ Currie 2016, 119; Warkwick 2019a, 8.

⁵⁷ Hom. Il. 23.155-8.

⁵⁸ Hom. Il. 23.254-8.

⁵⁹ Stagakis 1966, 419.

We actually see such a thing occur in Aeschines speech condemning Timarchus for his supposed prostitution. He writes, "...see how far apart they considered chaste men, who love their like, and men who are wanton and overcome by forbidden lusts."⁶⁰ In his eyes, the love shared between Achilles and Patroclus was something chaste and innocent, free from the scorn that came with *Pederasty*. Aeschines also cites Euripides, who writes:

"There is a love that makes men virtuous
And chaste, an envied gift. Such love I crave."⁶¹

This chaste love seems to be very similar to the concept of *Philos* I discussed before, both guided by emotion and Aphrodite Urania, a concept that will be further explained later in the paper. It is a wised love that elevates men into their true selves and binds them on the battle field.⁶² Such love is also explained in Plato's *Symposium*, and cited as the reason for Achilles living out eternity on the Isles of the Blest. His love for Patroclus was so strong that he would rather avenge him and die than spend the rest of his life safe under his father's roof.

"For this the gods so highly admired him that they gave him
distinguished honor, since he set so great a value on his lover."⁶³

These antidotes exhibit a clear differentiation from those on *Pederasty*. There was honor and virtue in the relationship between these two men and it instead made them role models. This, of course, ties right in as the inverse of the aspect of shame that was present in this institution. While *Pederasty* resulted in societal exile, the love shared by Achilles and Patroclus was a connection placed upon a pedestal.

The laws and customs detailed in this section, alongside the overarching theme of *Philos*, will define the rest of the paper. These aspects will allow me to take apart the thoughts and actions put forth by both epics and deep dive into their true, hidden, meaning. Thusly, the relationships that I have chosen to discuss will be uncovered and every aspect thoroughly explored. Through *Philos*, the love shared by both pairs will be legitimized and given the recognition it deserves.

⁶⁰ Aeschin. 1.141.

⁶¹ Aeschin. 1.151.

⁶² Held 193, 137-8.

⁶³ Plat. Sym. 180a

Sexuality and Love

While *Philos* had its base in chase, nonsexual love, there is a clear theme of sexuality expressed in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. This too can be seen in the *Iliad*, but there is only circumstantial evidence for it. A lack of clear sexual expression is consistent throughout the works of Homer, so this censorship is unsurprising.⁶⁴ One possible reason for this literary choice is expressed by Aeschines who writes, in relation to Achilles and Patroclus:

“Their love, and the name of their friendship [Homer] conceals; assuming that what goes beyond the limits of goodwill is obvious to the educated among his readers.”⁶⁵

An instance that could be read as relating to intercourse, however, can be found in Book Twenty Three when the ghost of Patroclus visits Achilles. Patroclus laments that:

“Never again will you and I, alive and breathing,
huddle side-by-side, apart from loyal comrades,
making plans together – never...”⁶⁶

Aeschines once again appears and whole heartily supports this interpretation, saying “this fidelity and affection were what they would long for most.”⁶⁷ Like the rest of Homers works, this reference is subtle and leaves most to the imagination. It highlights the simple joy the men experienced while in each other’s company, as well as placing them in their own bubble, separated from the rest of the soldiers.⁶⁸ Alone in the dark, Achilles and Patroclus would speak on love and life, hushed tones only meant for one another. Such a moment serves as the first of many instances of Achilles and Patroclus becoming one, a concept that will be explored further later on in this paper.

There are, however, examples of sexuality found outside of the written work in pottery pieces and plays, to name a few examples. In the Attic red-figure kylix attributed to the Sosias Painter c. 500 BCE titled *Achilles Tending to Patroclus' Wounds*, the two men sit side-by-side outside of the battlefield (*Fig. 1*). Patroclus has been injured by a stray arrow but, thankfully, Achilles is quick to tend to the wound. There are clear sexual undertones in the positions of the two men, however, as Achilles sits between Patroclus’ bent legs. This continues with the location of Patroclus’ right foot, which has been placed behind his genitals. Such a gesture points to Patroclus seemingly presenting himself to the other, an act that does not go unnoticed

⁶⁴ Dover 1978, 197; Finkleberg 2011, 790.

⁶⁵ Clark 1978, 396.

⁶⁶ Hom. Il. 23.92-4.

⁶⁷ Aeschin. 1 147.

⁶⁸ Fantuzzi 2012, 252.

by Achilles. This immodest expression can further be seen in the way Patroclus hides his face, it could be from pain but also from his bashful and innocent nature seen in the epic. It is also important to highlight the connection between the bandages on Patroclus' arm and the pairs of limbs. Both are in a tangle that binds the two together and further solidifies their love.

In the lost play *Myrmidons*, written by Aeschylus around the same time of the creation of the kylix discussed above, Achilles and Patroclus are presented as lovers.⁶⁹ While only a few fragments remain, much can be gleaned by the pieces that survive in other works. As Achilles cradles the other's dead body, he exclaims:

“You showed no reverence for [my] chaste respect of [your] thighs, oh ungrateful for [my] many kisses.”⁷⁰

This has an obvious sexual connotation and presents Achilles as the Lover. In this quote, Achilles blames Patroclus for going against his wishes and fighting for longer than was necessary. As Patroclus only joined the fight as a last resort, Achilles' accusation serves as an expression of his grief at losing his close companion. Both “[my] chaste respect of [your thighs]” and “[my] many kisses” point to a long history of sexual intimacy and love between the two men. Achilles continues his monologue with the following line:

“And yet – for that I love him – [his thighs] are not repulsive to my sight.”⁷¹

In this line, amorous Achilles confesses his true feelings and reiterates the sexual nature of his relationship with Patroclus.⁷² The use of his/your thighs in both lines is critical for drawing connections as we see something similar used in the discussion of Zeus and Ganymede's relationship.⁷³ Sophokles writes that “Ganymede's thighs ‘set Zeus aflame.’”⁷⁴ From these two examples, and many more to come, is it clear that at least a few creatives and consumers of the original work viewed the pair as lovers.

There is an overtly sexual nature to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, as I noted before. This sexual nature comes hand-in-hand with the minimal restrictions on who could love who expressed in the laws discussed in the first section. Even from the beginning, this is clear enough, from Shamhat's process of civilizing Enkidu in the field to the attacks against newly married women

⁶⁹ Ath. 13.75; Licht 1932, 136; Krass 2013, 163.

⁷⁰ Krass 2013, 162.

⁷¹ Krass 2013, 163.

⁷² Plut. Amatorius 17.

⁷³ Clarke 2019, 2.

⁷⁴ Krass 2013, 162.

by Gilgamesh. A more subtle instance of this comparison can be seen in the first meeting between the two men.

“Gilgamesh, raging,
stepped up and seized [Enkidu], huge arms gripped
huge arms, foreheads crashed like wild bulls,
the two men staggered, they pitched against houses,
the doorposts trembled, the outer walls shook,
they careened through the streets, they grappled each other,
limbs intertwined, each huge body
straining to break free from the other’s embrace.”⁷⁵

They fight outside the bedroom of a newlywed couple, and, from the first tablet, we know that it was customary for the husband and wife to lay together the night after their marriage. With this information, it is quite clear what is occurring in the room between our main characters. Combine that with the heated wrestling match and the intertwining of limbs, there is a clear parallel being made between the couple and our heroes. These events, however, take place within the first few books of the Epic. These references continue through the middle of the story with their encounter with Ishtar. Gilgamesh violently rejects her advances, the direct opposite reaction compared to his early treatment of the wives of Uruk.

“He is king, he does whatever he wants,
takes the son from his father and crushes him,
takes the girl from her mother and uses her,
the warrior’s daughter, the young man’s bride,
he uses her, no one dares to oppose him.”⁷⁶

This transformation comes about through the introduction of Enkidu, not only does he calm the King’s violent tendencies, but he makes Gilgamesh seemingly reject the opposite sex. The same occurs with Enkidu himself, who ignores Shamhat, the woman who civilized him, upon meeting Gilgamesh. He even curses her for his impending death and for bringing him into the civilized world.⁷⁷ Enkidu only rescinds this curse through the intervention of Shamash who reminds him that it was her who brought him to Gilgamesh.⁷⁸ Soon after, Enkidu enters the

⁷⁵ Mitchell 2004, 89.

⁷⁶ Mitchell 2004, 72.

⁷⁷ Mitchell 2004, 146-7

⁷⁸ Mitchell 2004, 147-8.

land of the dead, and Gilgamesh mourns for his counterpart. Even now that he is gone, yet another instance of sexuality occurs. During Enkidu's visit with Gilgamesh, he weeps and says:

“[My friend, the] penis that you touched so your heart rejoiced,
grubs devour [(it) ... like an] old garment.
[My friend, the crotch that you] touched so your heart rejoiced,
it is filled with dust [like a crack in the ground.]”⁷⁹

These lines not only confirm the sexual nature of their relationship, but it also serves as one of the few direct references to same-sex intercourse in the Epic.

The discussion on sexuality does not end here, however, as sleeplessness is a common trope with a sexual connotation used for those who are suffering from a great loss.⁸⁰ Tossing and turning are used a metaphor, the motion mirroring intimate acts.⁸¹ This concept is Greek in origin, but can be seen plaguing Gilgamesh as well. Both of our heroes experience this sleeplessness as a result of the death of their second halves. Achilles' response is the most intense of the two men and his sleeplessness perpetuates his abuse of Hector's body. Even after Patroclus is buried and his funeral games are finished, Achilles is plagued by grief and unrest. He “longed for Patroclus' manhood, his gallant heart;” the sorrow is so great it tears him from his cot and onto the surf.⁸² Achilles refuses to succumb to sleep and spends hours dragging Hector's body around the grave of his beloved. The few times he attempts to sleep, he'd “lie on his side, now flat on his back, now face down again,” all the while his tears pouring from him like the waves on the shore.⁸³ Achilles can only think of his beloved and his empty heart, reminiscing on their fantastic journeys and manly fights. In this moment, it becomes clear how deep his sorrow lies; it threatens to swallow him up and drown him like a monsoon. With his second half defeated, Achilles is severed from his heart and becomes truly alone. The *Philos* that kept him grounded is gone and he must suffer for it.

While it is unknown if this sleeplessness followed him for the entire twelve day grieving process, what is shown allows for a deeper dissection of Achilles' psyche in the aftermath of Patroclus' death. It goes without saying that this instance is the most traumatic event to occur in his life and, by his own words, will never be topped by another.

“... for a second grief this harsh

⁷⁹ George 2003, 733.

⁸⁰ Laguna-Mariscal and Sanz-Morales 2005, 122.

⁸¹ Morales and Mariscal 2003, 294.

⁸² Hom. Il. 24.8.

⁸³ Hom. Il. 24.13-4.

will never touch my heart while I am still among the living ...”⁸⁴

He already knows his life will end soon, wanting to do it himself after learning of his comrade’s death, and has little to live for. This pain, however, is not just felt by Achilles’ but his mother and, by extension, his father as well. The death of Patroclus serves as critical turning point for the family, for now they know that their son will never return home. His old father will never hold him again and his son will grow up fatherless. Moving away from the family, and the generational trauma that will plague it, anger is the greatest effect of his grief that Achilles presents. The sleepless nights perpetuates this, choosing rather to take out his grief on the Trojans than allow for Patroclus to rest. This rage, however, stops at his own men, and they join him in his sorrow.

This trope isn’t as common in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, but it is possible to see a glimpse of sleeplessness in Tablet Four. In the days leading up to the fight against Humbaba, Gilgamesh is plagued by nightmares that repeatedly keep him from sleeping. These dreams depict the future battle with the giant and the victory that is in store. It is important, however, to look at Gilgamesh’s words. Upon awaking, he asks Enkidu the following:

“What happened? Did you touch me? Did a god pass by?
What makes my skin creep? Why am I cold?”⁸⁵

These questions can be interpreted in multiple ways, not only relating to the matter at hand, but also to his relationship with Enkidu. Through this quote, the entire story is laid out and the fate of Enkidu is foreshadowed. Even before Enkidu’s death, Gilgamesh’s body knows what will happen and it is preparing for the future burden. “What happened?” and “Did you touch me?” both relate to the meeting between the two men and their first fight. As discussed before, their fight had sexual undertones and it is possible to see that here as well. This touch grounded Gilgamesh and allowed him to shed his aggressive behavior. Next, he asks, “Did a god pass by?” and “What makes my skin creep?” These questions could have possible connections to Ishtar and the days before Enkidu’s death. The god, of course, is Ishtar, whose heedless and vindictive actions were the last nail in Enkidu’s coffin.⁸⁶ As he died from a divine plague, the days before his death would have been horrifying, his body racked with pain and other unsightly effects. Both would have been awful to see and would have affected Gilgamesh in a visceral and life changing way. The final question, “Why am I cold?” relates directly to the death of Enkidu. In this moment, Gilgamesh loses his second self and feels the same pain. His

⁸⁴ Hom. Il. 23.53-4.

⁸⁵ Mitchell 2004, 106.

⁸⁶ Ballesteros 2021, 3.

heart breaks in tandem with Enkidu's final breath. There is a shared suffering seen between these men; the red string of fate not only connects their destinies but their hearts as well.

A second instance of this sleeplessness might be seen in Gilgamesh's journey to find immortality. During these tablets, it is unspecified if he slept at all and, if anything, there seems to be a focus on staying awake. We see this in his run to the Garden of the Gods and in his meeting with Utnapishtim, the second of which promises him eternal life if he does not sleep for seven days.

“First pass this test: Just stay awake
for seven days. Prevail against sleep,
and perhaps you will prevail against death.”⁸⁷

By not sleeping, Gilgamesh would be perpetuating his grief and, thusly, breaking his necessary bond with Enkidu. Not only do these trials serve as a quest for immortality but also as a journey through his grief and acceptance of his friend's death. His constant running can be seen as a denial and rejection of Enkidu's passing, bargaining with various figures to halt his future, mortal, fate. Only through a visit from the dead is this journey put to rest and Gilgamesh is able to accept both his and Enkidu's fate.

While sexuality is not an inherent part of *Philo*, this angle allows for a multifaceted understanding of the relationships put forth in both epics. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, such scenes prove not only that the love shared between Enkidu and Gilgamesh was real, but it was mutual and physical. Alongside these revelations, through the laws dissected in the first section, it becomes abundantly clear that this love shared was not considered a crime. In a world where death can be a punishment for expressing your sexuality, the homoerotic past can be a safe haven. We even see such ideals expressed in the *Iliad* by Achilles and Patroclus. Two men who, under a shared tent, whispered sweet nothings to each other. In their own secluded world, their love was right and none of their fellow soldiers seemed to disagree.

⁸⁷ Mitchell 2004, 191.

Death and Transformation

The acceptance of death does not come easy to either pair. In the following section, I will further analyze their journeys and their outcomes. The mourning process takes place over a few days in both epics. The survivors are unable to come to terms with the death of their beloveds and refuse to let them rest properly. This is understandable of course, death is kind to no one and leaves a hole where the living once stood. The mourning process this time around is different however, not only is the person gone but, as the living and the dead half are so intrinsically connected, part of the survivors die as well. During the mourning period, Achilles and Gilgamesh are unable to leave the body, sending others to collect offerings and prepare for the funeral. Even though Achilles leaves the side of his soulmate to defeat Hector, he quickly returns to Patroclus's bier. Patroclus' body is kept fresh and supple with the assistance of Thetis, the food of the gods allowing Achilles to defeat his killer.⁸⁸ Where the mourning processes differs however, is the reason for letting the body go. Achilles is only able to burn Patroclus' body after the dead man comes to him in a dream. His friends pleading face and his request to share an urn are the only thing that can convince Achilles to let him go.⁸⁹ No other god or mortal had that power, not even his slaughter of Hector was enough to quell Achilles' grief. Just as Patroclus was brutalized, the same comes back ten-fold to Hector. In fact, this desecration of Hector's body becomes part of the mourning process; it is a ritualistic slaughter that mirrors Achilles' broken heart. Hector is an offering to calm his rage, the rage that permeates the whole of the Epic. Of course, this is only the first of many gifts presented to his dead comrade. In his honor, following the death of Hector, Achilles orders the slaughter of pale-white oxen, sheep, goats, and pigs by the hundreds.⁹⁰ During the grand feast, however, Achilles eats bitterly and promises that water will never touch his head until Patroclus is buried.

“He spurned their offer, firmly, even swore an oath:

“No, no, by Zeus – by the highest, greatest god!

It's sacrilege for a single drop to touch my head

till I place Patroclus on his pyre and heap his mound

and cut my hair for him – for a second grief this harsh

will never touch my heart while I am still among the living ...”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Hom. Il. 19.43-5.

⁸⁹ Hom. Il. 23.109-10.

⁹⁰ Hom Il. 23.35-9.

⁹¹ Hom. Il. 23.49-54.

I'll discuss Gilgamesh's refusal to bathe during later on, but note that the dirtiness of both body and soul is a parallel seen in both works. At the funeral, the Argives offer a second grand gift consisting of two-handled jars of honey and oil, four stallions, two dogs, and a dozen young Trojans.⁹² Even though Patroclus is burned and buried only a few days after his death, Achilles and the Argives continue to mourn him for the next twelve days. During this time, fantastic funeral games are held in his honor and serve to boost morale. Despite the fun, grief still plagues Achilles' heart as seen with his meeting with Priam.⁹³

As stated before, we see this same extended mourning sequence in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It features the giving of expensive gifts as well as Gilgamesh's refusal to bathe. His grief lasts six days and seven nights until Enkidu's body begins to rot.

“For six days I would not let him be buried,
thinking, ‘If my grief is violent enough,
perhaps he will come back to life again.’
For six days and seven nights I mourned him,
until a maggot fell out of his nose.”⁹⁴

This is a stark contrast to the Iliad where both the bodies of Patroclus and Hector are protected by the gods and put in stasis. Perhaps this serves as a reminder of the gods disapproval of the men's acts and the overwhelming harshness of mortal life. Enkidu's suffering, even in death, served as a continuation of Gilgamesh's experience with humanity and his mortal half. During this period, a grand statue is erected in Enkidu's likeness and numerous animals are slaughtered in his name.⁹⁵ Much like Patroclus, Enkidu receives various wonderful gifts of gold and beautiful weapons.⁹⁶ Such weapons would protect him in the Netherworld and display his status. The whole city mourns and brings offerings to the statue; both they and Gilgamesh hope that the chaotic Netherworld will not swallow him whole. Through these repeated offerings, they will keep his soul alive and strong.⁹⁷ Enkidu was already on bad terms with the gods at the time of his death and these gifts would ensure his survival. Only by pleasing the gods does Enkidu have the possibility of a bountiful second life. Many hardships await him that not even the greatest love can prevent.

⁹² Hom. Il. 23.190-201.

⁹³ Hom. Il. 24.595-9.

⁹⁴ Mitchell 2004, 167.

⁹⁵ Mitchell 2004, 155.

⁹⁶ Mitchell 2004, 155.

⁹⁷ Katz 2003, 198.

Even after death, Enkidu continues to be a steadfast companion in spirit. As noted before, a magnificent statue of the finest gemstones and precious metals is created in his likeness. Gilgamesh exclaims that the statue will be placed in the throne room and treated as if the man was still alive.

“I will lay him down on a bed of honor,
I will put him on a royal bier, on my left
I will place his statue in the seat of repose,
the princes of the earth will kiss its feet,
the people of Uruk will mourn him ...”⁹⁸

This act is very similar to the mourning process today. Once a loved one has passed, more often than not, they are cremated, and their ashes are placed inside a significant room in the house. This closeness encourages the healing process for those who have been left behind. Again, this connects to the family comparison made before; they are inseparable in both life and death. Alongside this statue, we see the ghost of Enkidu visit the other in a dream. He tells Gilgamesh of the horrors that await him in the afterlife and highlights just how important offerings are.⁹⁹ Without such offerings, the soul will wither away and starve much like the living. There is nothing, however, that keeps the body itself from rotting away. Enkidu tells Gilgamesh that he has been eaten by grubs much like they devour old fabric.¹⁰⁰ Only by remembering the dead are they able to continue living even though there is little pleasure in the Netherworld.

Love and loss, transforms both pairs in vastly different ways. The end result, however, is that the survivors of both pairs become balanced through hardship. While there is no clear remark of love, from both actions and other words, it is clear that love resides at the heart of both relationships. In order to define love, however, we will be looking at Plato’s *Symposium* and a quote from Diotima, a female philosopher who focused on Love. She claims that love is:

“A desire for the beautiful, or a possession of the beautiful.”¹⁰¹

The definition of love does not end here, however. In his essay, *Parallels between the Gilgamesh Epic and Plato’s Symposium*, George Held expands on Diotima’s ideas. Love is a means to an end, with happiness as a necessary stop along the way.¹⁰² In the simplest terms, men want the beautiful, the beautiful is good and leads to happiness.¹⁰³ From there, both love

⁹⁸ Mitchell 2004, 155.

⁹⁹ George 2003, 733-5.

¹⁰⁰ George 2003, 733.

¹⁰¹ Held 1983, 134.

¹⁰² Held 1983, 134.

¹⁰³ Held 1983, 134.

and rage can be discovered; they are two sides of the same coin.¹⁰⁴ This ending is only possible through one's own experience and cannot be discovered through other's retellings of their own journeys.¹⁰⁵

In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, this definition shows itself clearly. Enkidu, once he becomes civilized under Shamhat's guidance, is bathed, dressed in fine silks, and fed magnificent food.¹⁰⁶ He is treated like a king and becomes beautiful. He, in turn, reflects these qualities onto Gilgamesh. In doing so, the king of Uruk slows down and is able to support his people in a positive way. It is not only Gilgamesh who benefits from this change, but the city as a whole. Noted by Pausanias, there are two forms of the Greek goddess Aphrodite of which deal with frivolous love and love rooted in truth.¹⁰⁷ Before the introduction of Enkidu, Gilgamesh is under the influence of Aphrodite Pandemos. Pandemos translates to "common to all the people" and was viewed as a goddess of sensual pleasures.¹⁰⁸ This type of love she provides is foolish, fleeting love that lives in the hearts of women and young boys. It has a strong physical effect and reduces the desired to an object. This is clearly how he views the women of his city; he sleeps with them only as a powerplay against them and their husbands. His people are mere objects for him to poke and prod at, things to mold to his own whims. The second Aphrodite enters his heart once Enkidu becomes part of his life. This Aphrodite is Aphrodite Urania, translating to "the heavenly Aphrodite" and coming from the soul.¹⁰⁹ It is a love formed between boys who have "acquired some mind" and does not dispel. This connection lasts until death and is grounded in wisdom and virtue. By introducing this type of love into Gilgamesh's heart, Enkidu stops his wild rampages against the people of his city and transforms him into a noble man. Gilgamesh is able to defeat true beasts and protect his people. Only then is he able to acquire true happiness forged from his own actions.

While there isn't a direct example of Diotima's definition in the *Iliad*, as the beautiful has already been acquired, there are quite a few appearances of the two Aphrodites. Briseis is the object of Achilles' affection under the pull of Aphrodite Pandemos. He views her as a prize to be won and not a true companion.¹¹⁰ This further can be seen in Achilles' response to her abduction by Agamemnon. He throws a full temper tantrum much like a child who has been put in time out. This type of love has no permanence in his heart, and he cares only for the

¹⁰⁴ Held 1983, 134.

¹⁰⁵ Held 1983, 134.

¹⁰⁶ Mitchell 2004, 85-6.

¹⁰⁷ Demulder 2022, 284.

¹⁰⁸ Encyclopedia Mythica, 2006; Held 1983, 137.

¹⁰⁹ Encyclopedia Mythica, 2006; Held 1983, 137.

¹¹⁰ Hom. Il. 1.141.

honor she represents. Aphrodite Urania, however, marks his relationship with Patroclus. The two grew up together and trained side-by-side from a young age.¹¹¹ Even now that they are grown, this love forged in their youth persists. Symbolically, this can be seen through the mirroring of emotions. Patroclus is kind and compassionate, with a childlike innocence until he dons Achilles' armor. This action allows him to take on Achilles' disposition, becoming vicious and bloodthirsty.¹¹² The same exchange can be seen in Achilles, who is cruel until he allows Patroclus to rest. Only then does he take on the calm and forgiving nature of his comrade. As this type of relationship also relies on the passing of wisdom, such an occurrence can be seen alongside Patroclus' death in Book Sixteen. By obtaining Achilles' armor, he gains his second half's knowledge of the battlefield and becomes an awe-inspiring beast. Celsiana Warwick supports this theory, arguing that the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus could be described as a conjugal bond, emphasizing power exchange and role reversal. The main argument for this connection is that of *homophrosynē*, or like-mindedness, through similar goals or characteristics.¹¹³ While some scholars describe Achilles and Patroclus as polar opposites, evidence suggests otherwise. Throughout the Iliad, Achilles is reckless and violent, caring, for the most part, only for himself and his honor. Patroclus, instead, is compassionate, often described with the epithet gentle.¹¹⁴ The final occurrence of this love type can be seen in Achilles' speech to his mother once he learns of Patroclus' death.

“...My dear comrade's dead –
 Patroclus – the man I loved beyond all other comrades,
 Loved as my own life – I've lost him – Hector's killed him...”¹¹⁵

While this statement isn't a direct example of *homophrosynē*, it does display how these two men are inherently connected and, much like Gilgamesh and Enkidu, are one in the same. Along with supporting the conjugal bond theory, this provides insight into Achilles' Ascending Scale of Affection. Coined by Johannes Kakridis, this scale ranks the various forms of love that occur in the Homeric epics by importance.¹¹⁶ At the bottom sits one's comrades, followed by parents, siblings, and, most important, conjugal bonds. Going back to Achilles' statement, there is a clear distinction in Patroclus' rank. He is above his comrades and equal with Achilles. This bond will continue past death even, as Patroclus requests that they be placed in the same

¹¹¹ Miller 1986, 165.

¹¹² Hom. Il. 16.468-98.

¹¹³ Warwick 2019b, 126.

¹¹⁴ Cullhed 2019, 11.

¹¹⁵ Hom. Il. 18.94-6.

¹¹⁶ Warwick 2019b, 123.

urn after Achilles falls in battle. In life, they were two sides of the same coin, and in death, their ashes become one.

A hands on experience with life, loss, and love transforms both Gilgamesh and Achilles from wild, uncaring men into father figures that are loved by and support their communities. These concepts are critical for connecting these two stories as, despite the hundreds of years that separate the two epics, they allow for both an in depth look at the individual characters actions and the importance of such secondary actors. While this topic alone could be its own paper, I will do my best to summarize my ideas here. To begin, it is clear that for both men their second half is the beautiful. Whether it is through, dreams, godly intervention, prophesy and the like, the “beautiful” is a means to an end. Without the second half, both Achilles and Gilgamesh become stagnate and are unable to fulfill their predetermined role. This role allows for happiness and a transformation into their foretold place in life. Of course, the roles for the beloveds are not necessarily happy ones. Both men must first quell the burning heart of the other, serve as a replacement in battle, and then die at the hands of the gods. However, even in death their roles are incomplete. Both must return to the surface and tell the other about life beyond death. In these moments too, the living reach out to embrace their dead comrade only for them to dissipate before their very eyes. With this final message from their second half, both Achilles and Gilgamesh accept their fate and become who they are meant to be. Gilgamesh ends his journey to become immortal, accepting his human destiny to die, and returns to his city. He then becomes a good king loved by his people. For Achilles, he is able to let Patroclus pass on and returns Hector’s body to the mourning Priam; his “self-awareness of his coming death serving as the leitmotiv of the ransom of Hektor’s body.”¹¹⁷ This event allows for a brief peace before Achilles rejoins the battle as a proper, level-headed leader.

¹¹⁷ Burgess 2004, 55.

Two Become One

Not only do the epics depict two men bound by fate, but also one soul stretched over two bodies. Beginning with the *Iliad*'s Achilles and Patroclus, both men have their own distinct personalities, but there are numerous events that allow them to become interchangeable. What I mean by this is that these characters are specifically written to be one in the same. This idea is first proposed by Nagy in his essay *Patroklos as the Other Self of Achilles*. In his eyes, Patroclus serves as a ritualistic double; a statue to be used in Achilles' place.¹¹⁸ This idea is fully explored in Book Sixteen in which Patroclus dons Achilles' armor. In this moment, he becomes Achilles. He takes on his personality, mannerisms, and fighting style. This possession is just as powerful against the Trojans; the gleam of the armor alone makes them run in terror.¹¹⁹ Once kind and caring for his fellow man, now in Achilles' armor he slaughters Trojans and mocks their decaying bodies. This personality also appeared in his youth, when he killed another boy in a rage over a game of dice.¹²⁰ Patroclus' death severs this connection, only possible after the intervention of Apollo who aids Hector in his attack. Without this godly intervention, would the effect of the armor been strong enough to protect Patroclus? And if so, what does that say about the power Achilles holds? His own godly parentage puts him easily above the other fighters and, through his armor, is able to transfer that power when necessary. Not only is the armor of Achilles a vessel for that power, but it is able to choose who may receive it. Patroclus contrasts Hector in this way, the armor gives Patroclus strength in battle, while it makes Hector a fool.

“They gave applause to Hector’s ruinous tactics,
none to Polydamas, who gave them sound advice.”¹²¹

This again feeds into the ritualistic double reading and gives Achilles' arms a soul. Both ideas reinforce the special connection between the two Argives and makes their string of fate physical.

Gilgamesh's second self is a godly creation requested by his people. Enkidu is a necessary force in the King's life that pacifies him and reconnects him with his human half. Thusly, Enkidu can be viewed as a balanced version of Gilgamesh who has equal parts human and divine. He is forged from the earth by the godly hands of Aruru, reinforcing in grounding abilities.¹²² These qualities allow him to counteract Gilgamesh's parenthood and transform

¹¹⁸ Nagy 2020, 199.

¹¹⁹ Hom. Il. 16.326-33.

¹²⁰ Hom. Il. 23.105-6.

¹²¹ Hom. Il. 18.363-4.

¹²² Mitchell 2004, 74.

him. Much like Achilles and Patroclus, this can be seen as a ritualistic exchange; Enkidu, a man made from the Earth and shaped by love, represents a pure form of humanity and thus is the optimal form of Gilgamesh. He is the fine crafted statue made to take the King's place in front of the gods. This is reiterated not only in his death, but earlier during Gilgamesh's dreams and their first meeting. As I have discussed before, Gilgamesh erects a grand statue of the man out of the finest materials Earth has to offer. Again, despite his past misdeeds, both brought on by Gilgamesh, Enkidu returns to his original pure form and becomes his wild and true self. Before his death, the gods debate on who must pay for the crimes the pair committed. They ultimately decide that Enkidu must be sacrificed and bring about his death through divine plague. Not only is this scene important as it marks the beginning of Gilgamesh's journey with grief, but, by the gods own declaration, Enkidu serves as a replacement for Gilgamesh.

“They have slaughtered the Bull of Heaven and killed
Humbaba, watchman of the Cedar Forest.
Therefore one of the two must die.’
Then Enlil said to him, ‘Enkidu,
Not Gilgamesh, is the one who must die.’”¹²³

He becomes Gilgamesh in the eyes of the gods and the two men become one. This is further emphasized after Enkidu's death during which Gilgamesh embodies the other and returns to his wild roots.

“After the funeral, Gilgamesh went out
from Uruk, into the wilderness
with matted hair, in a lion skin.”¹²⁴

This exchange reinforces the two men's connection and fully allows Enkidu's physical journey to come to an end. He is not fully gone, however, even in death he remains. While he does not walk amongst the living, Gilgamesh now embodies Enkidu's ideals, and the man will be a part of him forever. In Tablet One, Gilgamesh's dreams depict Enkidu as a grounding figure, bound to the floor and impossible to move.

“I saw a bright star, it shot across
the morning sky, it fell at my feet
and lay before me like a huge boulder.
I tried to lift it, but it was too heavy.

¹²³ Mitchell 2004, 141.

¹²⁴ Mitchell 2004, 158.

I tried to move it, but it would not budge.”¹²⁵

These also reinforce the grounding affects he has on the King. Both are brought down to the Earth and are held there. During their first meeting, Enkidu makes a point to show off his balanced self. While he is unable to beat the other in battle, the clash is enough to rein in the other. The two become one and, as Ninsun predicted, they become joined at the hip and the chaos of the past is contained.¹²⁶ Gilgamesh is grounded and begins to embrace his human half.

Continuing on the topic of connections, throughout both epics family comparisons are used repeatedly and often mirror each other. In every occurrence of this comparison in the Iliad, Achilles takes the role of the parent and Patroclus, the child. This directly contradicts their ages, as I discussed before. It also contradicts their personalities, with Achilles being the fiery young man who leaps before he looks and Patroclus, the calm and collected man who uses his words before the blade. The first occurrence of this comparison occurs in Book Sixteen when Patroclus comes to Achilles begging him to join in the fight.¹²⁷ Patroclus has been weeping and his companion calls him a young girl asking her mother to be picked up. Achilles indicates that he asks out of pity not malice, a tenderness pointing to the personality switch previously mentioned.¹²⁸

“And the brilliant runner Achilles saw him coming,
filled with pity and spoke out winging words...”¹²⁹

Following this scene is the death of Patroclus and Achilles’ grief. Once again, the mother/child comparison occurs, first with Achilles and his mother, Thetis, and then with the funeral of Patroclus and Achilles’ participation in the event. As I discussed before, both focus on the cradling of the “child’s” head. A feminine gesture that defines both in their relationships.¹³⁰ Also during Patroclus’ funeral, Achilles is compared to a father who has to burn the bones of his son on his wedding day.¹³¹ Achilles’ despair is not only rooted in the loss of a dear friend but in a parent experiencing their greatest loss. He will be transformed forever; the death of a child leaves an everlasting scar.

The same pain is felt in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* with the death of Enkidu. Even when Enkidu passes, Gilgamesh praises the chaos they caused as he weeps like a mother who has

¹²⁵ Mitchell 2004, 82-3.

¹²⁶ Mitchell 2004, 89-90.

¹²⁷ Hom. Il. 16.43.

¹²⁸ Anderson 1956, 265.

¹²⁹ Hom. Il. 16.5-6.

¹³⁰ Currie 2016, 119.

¹³¹ Hom. Il. 23.254-5.

lost her only child.¹³² Despite the many deaths caused by his hands, Gilgamesh does not seem to understand what has transpired when it is close to him. All he sees is his companion dead, his heart beats no more. Stephen Mitchell's version of this scene is wonderfully emotional:

“...my beloved friend is dead, he is dead,
my beloved brother is dead, I will mourn
as long as I breathe, I will sob for him
like a woman who has lost her only child.”¹³³

This line alone makes it clear the importance of their relationship and the lasting effect it has on Gilgamesh. He repeats this line multiple times; the intensity of his grief is incalculable. Refusing to accept reality, he sobs all night long and becomes “a lioness whose cubs are trapped in a pit.”¹³⁴ His mourning is only halted once Enkidu's body begins to rot and he is forced to come to terms with his friend's fate.

Reinforcing Enkidu's position as the child and follower, is his relationship with Shamhat. She serves as a pseudo parental figure for him and prepares Enkidu to become a bride. Before his first bite of bread, Shamhat guides him “like a child” and he is dressed in her clothes.¹³⁵ It her who serves as a guide of the civilized world. She teaches him how to dress, what foods to eat, and what it means to be human. It is Shamhat and Shamhat alone that beautifies him for his future partner. She rubs sweet oil in to his skin and cuts his hair.¹³⁶ In her presence, his animal features are washed away just like the dirt and grime of his past.

Alongside the parent/child comparison, the husband/wife comparison is used repeatedly throughout the epic. Enkidu's initial appearance supports this, as he has, “hair [that] grew thick on his head and hung down to his waist, like a woman's hair.”¹³⁷ Enkidu's position as a wife can also be seen in his death. Once he passes over, Gilgamesh “veiled [Enkidu's] face like a bride.”¹³⁸ This motion, in the realm of a wedding, took place before the event by the husband.¹³⁹ Only then could the bride join the wedding and her beloved. The most direct comparison, however, is seen in Tablet One and in Ninsun's interpretation of her son's dreams. In the first dream, a brilliant star comes to earth and lands at the feet of Gilgamesh. He pulls and pulls, but he cannot lift it. Instead, he caresses it like a wife and the people of Uruk kiss its

¹³² Mitchell 2004, 152-3.

¹³³ Mitchell 2004, 153.

¹³⁴ Mitchell 2004, 154.

¹³⁵ Mitchell 2004, 85.

¹³⁶ Mitchell 2004, 86.

¹³⁷ Mitchell 2004, 74-75.

¹³⁸ Mitchell 2004, 154.

¹³⁹ Tsevat 1975, 238-9.

feet. Only then is he able to lift it and bring it to his mother. At the end of the dream, Ninsun has made the star his equal. The second dream is similar, but the star is replaced by an axe. He rescues it from the throng of people and presents it to his mother. He caresses and embraces the object and Ninsun makes it his equal. In both dreams, Enkidu is the foreign object that, seemingly out of nowhere, appears in Gilgamesh's life and becomes his equal.

“...[You carried [the stone]], laid it at my feet,
I treated it as equal to you,
And you loved it as a wife, and doted on it:
(It means) a strong partner shall come to you, one who can save
the life of a friend,
He will be the most powerful in strength of arms in the land.
His strength will be as great as that of the sky-bolt of Anu.
You will love him as a wife, you will dote upon him.
[And he will always] keep you safe (?).
[That is the meaning] of your dream.”¹⁴⁰

These dreams comes to pass following their fight; Enkidu, despite losing, does not turn away in shame. There is no bitterness or hatred, only admiration.¹⁴¹ Instead, a deep bond is created between the two men, as Enkidu, too, was told that a great love would form. Nowhere else in the epic is there another character that fills this role. It is only Enkidu that is fit to be Gilgamesh's partner.

While Gilgamesh and Enkidu come from wildly different backgrounds, they are essentially soulmates decreed by the gods. Enkidu was shaped from clay to be a second half and companion to Gilgamesh as the king became murderous when left to his own devices. This divine intervention was the only way to stop the chaos. There cannot be one without the other; they are a perfect match. Even when Enkidu eventually passes away, Gilgamesh has been changed for the better. He is kinder to his people and keeps the walls around his grand city standing. Enkidu's death even catalyzes Gilgamesh to find a cure for his mortality. According to the dream, Enkidu's job is serve as an anchor and to guide the wild king back to shore. He is meant to ground him once again and bring him back to the gods.

¹⁴⁰ Dalley 1989, 58.

¹⁴¹ Mitchell 2004, 90.

Conclusion

From the evidence gathered, it is clear that there was a distinct love between both groups of men. The way their worlds shattered and the way they mourned when their second half was lost was nothing short of beautiful. There is a cadence to their words that cries out like a poor widow. Both pairs show clear signs of *Philos*, and this connection transforms each pair, molding them into their true selves. Achilles leaves his rage behind, returning Hector's body and rejoining the war. Gilgamesh returns to his human half and loves his people once again. Both pairs swap personality traits, often at times rife with heavy emotions, and, through death, take on both identities. Through their soulmate, a divine individual is created. While family connections are not an essential part of *Philos*, such language enforces the idea of a life-long union and the love that binds the two men together. This analysis again highlights the possible sexual nature of Gilgamesh's and Enkidu's partnership as their main comparison is that of a husband and wife. Adding this comparison to Achilles' and Patroclus' *Philos*, we can discover a love based on guardian and charge. Despite Achilles leading the relationship, Patroclus gladly follows; even death cannot separate them. Even from a young age, the connection was apparent, as both became fast friends the moment they met. We can see *Philos* yet again in the mourning process for both of the survivors as the living take on the qualities of their fallen half. Gilgamesh becomes wild, letting his hair grow out and donning only an animal pelt while Achilles, after killing Hector and meeting with Priam, is able to bring peace between the warring sides. The death of their beloveds serves as a life changing traumatic moment that will influence them forever. As stated before, not only is their second half killed, but part of their own soul dies as well. Achilles calls out that the death of a wife or a son could not even compare to the sorrow he felt at the loss of Patroclus. Once dreaming of his own death, Enkidu is quick to blame Shamhat even though it was Gilgamesh that brought his fate upon him. Death is no obstacle for this love, as this connection continues even after both Enkidu and Patroclus succumb to their fates. Ghosts of the dead men return to the land of the living to visit their partners. In this moment of great suffering, the living are confronted by what awaits them after death. Despite the deep sadness that encompasses this moment, love is a major player. The living move to embrace their beloveds, their souls begging to become whole again and rediscover the beautiful, only for their hands to pass right through the specter.¹⁴² No matter how strong their love is, it is not powerful enough to bring the dead back. Despite this tragedy, not all is lost, and a reunion is possible. For Achilles and Patroclus, this reunion will occur once

¹⁴² West 1997, 345.

both men are dead. They will rest together in the same urn for eternity. Gilgamesh still has many more years to live, but by his side a grand statue of Enkidu will stand throughout the rest of his reign.

Can I determine that both groups of men were written to be couples intentionally? No, but what I do know is that both groups had an inherent love for each other that went beyond words. Even when it's written out, it is mutual and divine. What they share goes beyond, into a sort of musical piece—the crescendo booming as the second half falls. Even in death, they are present, guiding the living through their next stage in life. The love they shared is timeless and has been acknowledged by countless generations. These two works have been translated by so many different people and read by many more. If even a small fraction can pick up on this interpretation, then perhaps it has merit. One does not necessarily need to say I love you to mean it; sometimes, actions are all you need.

Figures



Fig. 1: Achilles Tending to Patroclus' Wounds (Antikensammlung Berlin F2278).¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Tondo of an Attic red-figure kylix, ca. 500 BCE, from Vulci, Wikimedia Commons, Akhilleus Patroklos Antikensammlung Berlin F2278.jpg.

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