

The Underworld Again: The Intertextuality between the *Gilgamesh* and *Odyssey* 11

This project proposes that the archaic Greeks directly engaged with the Mesopotamians through heroic narratives, as opposed to merely inheriting Mesopotamian mythology due to close contact during the Bronze Age. Odysseus's encounter with the ghost of Herakles in the Underworld in *Odyssey* 11 reflects Gilgamesh's meeting with now-immortal Utnapishtim in the Netherworld in *Gilgamesh*. In addition, the juxtaposition of imageries, motifs, and themes of both Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the heroes of *Gilgamesh*, surround Herakles in *Odyssey* 11. This duality makes Herakles a stand-in for *Gilgamesh* and therefore the *Odyssey* poet's nod to Mesopotamian storytelling traditions. Furthermore, the contrast between Odysseus and Herakles during their Underworld encounter establishes Odysseus, a mortal man with mortal talents, as the superior hero to Herakles, whose superhuman traits are quite Mesopotamian, thus generating a form of Greek exceptionalism.