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Because You Speak to Me in Words and I Look at You with Feelings

The protagonists in *The Odyssey* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* each encounter female divines who are attracted to mortals. Ishtar and Calypso are two sides of the same coin as their affection for the protagonists are not returned. These experiences build on the concept of what love truly is and how it should be treated. Gilgamesh's rejection of Ishtar is a statement of how friendship, not materials or sex, are the foundation of a healthy relationship. Ishtar's violent reaction to this shows how revenge is not the answer as she is portrayed as impulsive and childish. Likewise, Odysseus' rejection of Calypso is a statement of how love has to be earned, that it takes more than saving one's life to be their lover. Calypso's reaction to how much Odysseus wants to go back home to his family and wife show how jealousy can cloud the good intentions one may had in the start of the relationship. Together, Ishtar and Calypso show how love is a complex concept that can get misinterpreted easily and transform into an unhealthy passion.

Ishtar's introduction makes her admiration questionable from the start as she offers gifts to get Gilgamesh to marry her. When Ishtar first meets Gilgamesh she says, "you shall be my bridegroom!" despite there being no previous interaction between the two beforehand (Gilg 6.7). Ishtar is not asking if Gilgamesh could be her bridegroom, rather she is declaring that Gilgamesh will marry her. This approach would have worked on the Gilgamesh at the start of the epic, a man who would "leave no girl to her mother" as he went with all the girls he saw were attractive (Gilg 1.65). It did not matter if the woman was married, only that she could be with him (Gilg

1.66). Ishtar was willing to be with him and thus Gilgamesh would have no reason to hear anything else.

However, Gilgamesh has changed as he built an emotional connection with Enkidu through their adventure to kill Humbaba. Before encountering Humbaba, Enkidu said that they could not confront Humbaba separately and Gilgamesh agrees by letting out a speech of how intense their journey was and how they were not going to stop. During this speech, Gilgamesh tells Enkidu to “take my hand, my friend, let us walk on together!”(Gilg 4.181). By calling Enkidu his friend, Gilgamesh acknowledges that they have an emotional connection. This act of wanting to fight the monster together shows the importance friendship has on Gilgamesh as the two began this adventure helping one another out, and they would finish the adventure the same way. That is why after they defeat Humbaba, Gilgamesh yells “Now, my friend, let us go on to victory!”(Gilg 5.77). Gilgamesh calls Enkidu his friend again, emphasizing the connection the two have and how grateful friendship is to Gilgamesh. The two have won their battle together and they would share the glory of victory together. This sense of togetherness through their adventure is ultimately the foundation for friendship that Gilgamesh believes to be important in a relationship.

Thus, Gilgamesh’s newfound appreciation for friendship goes against Ishtar’s declaration of marriage. Ishtar does not offer the sense of friendship, adventure, and victory that Enkidu and Gilgamesh had experienced recently. Ishtar instead replaces these notions by promising Gilgamesh material goods such as a “chariot of lapis and gold” (Gilg 6.10). Ishtar assumes that Gilgamesh will want to be her bridegroom because she is rich yet no amount of gold will sway Gilgamesh’s mind. By juxtaposing the grand adventure Gilgamesh and Enkidu have just

experienced with a sudden proposal of love and riches, it makes Gilgamesh's rejection a statement that friendship is stronger than superficial materials.

Ishtar then exhibits a lack of understanding of what goes into a healthy relationship. By not acknowledging the friendship and togetherness aspect of love, she instead only goes for the sexual aspect. Gilgamesh calls out her shallow view on love as he lists off all the previous lovers she had struck down. Gilgamesh specifically recalls how Ishtar fell in love with a gardener and when the gardener refused to "Bring out [his] member" for her she turned him into a scarecrow (Gilg 6.65-6.72). This sheds light on how Ishtar sees marriage as a means of having sex. She has not been in a serious relationship with a man as she has not displayed an awareness of how much friendship and togetherness are integral factors in love. Therefore, when the sex is denied, love in general is denied in her eyes. When her sexual desires are denied by the man, she simply moves on and punishes him.

This punishment leads into how Ishtar's revenge is an immature way of handling rejection. Ishtar grows furious and goes "sobbing before Anu, her father" (Gilg 6.79). Ishtar does not deny Gilgamesh's claims or justify herself, or even point out Gilgamesh's flaws, rather she simply seeks an escape through her father. She plays out a childlike demeanor as she says, "Well then, Father, pretty please, [can I have] the Bull of Heaven, so I can kill Gilgamesh on his home ground." (Gilg 6.91-2). The power of transforming Gilgamesh to a scarecrow is not enough for Ishtar; she needs a fearsome bull to do her deed. Thus, she resorts to using childlike phrases like 'pretty please' to her father to make her revenge seem more valid. Although she does obtain the bull of heaven to unleash its wrath, she is not shown to be sympathetic due to the immature way and reasoning for which she obtained it.

Whereas Ishtar is unleashing wrath towards Gilgamesh for his rejection, Calypso continuously tries to coerce Odysseus to stay on her island even when Odysseus does not return her feelings. Calypso wants to protect Odysseus from the cruel outside world yet that conflicts with her attraction to him. Her sense of protection becomes controlling due to the uneven power she has over him. She holds this power since they first met as Odysseus was shipwrecked and Calypso “saved his life, prying him from the spar he came floating here on”(Ody tr. Lombardo 5.130-131). Calypso first meets Odysseus who is in a physically vulnerable state. If Calypso has saved Odysseus, and gave him the time and direction to return home she would have been truly protecting and aiding him. Instead, she takes advantage of the fact that Odysseus is weakened, lost, and thankful for his rescue as a way to convince him to love her.

Eventually, Odysseus wants to go home and be with his family and is thus in sorrow for being on the island for so long. Calypso shows her lack of understanding to Odysseus’ needs by ignoring said sorrow and continuing to embrace him. Odysseus is found sulking on the beach with, “his life draining away in homesickness (Ody 5.153). Odysseus is drained from being away from home so long and his wish is not heard. As Calypso was with Odysseus for seven years, she should have noticed this change in behavior(Ody 7.277-280). Odysseus could not return Calypso’s feelings as he was an “unwilling lover [who] mated to her eager embrace” (Ody 5.155). Odysseus being unwilling suggests that he did not want to be with her at this point but they still had sex anyways. By being eager while Odysseus is unwilling, she is not seeing how Odysseus is not pleased with her embrace anymore.

A key factor in Odysseus’ homesickness is that he wants to see Penelope. This is explicitly said when the storyteller who called onto Memory, the mother of the Muses, recites

“Odysseus still longed to return to his home and his wife”(Ody 1.15-16). By pointing out his wife instead of just saying home, it shows how much Penelope means to Odysseus as he has been longing for her for so long.

Calypso acknowledges that Odysseus has been longing for Penelope yet instead of helping him reach her, she shows signs of jealousy. Calypso did not find out about Penelope the day she let Odysseus go as Hermes only told Calypso to free Odysseus so he can return to his “friends” and “dear ones” (Ody 5.112-115). Hermes did not say ‘wife’ or Penelope’s name at all during this encounter, so Calypso knew about Penelope beforehand as moments later she tries to convince Odysseus that he should stay with her “no matter how much you missed your wife and wanted to see her again”(Ody 5.209). Calypso openly tells Odysseus that he should stay on her island instead of being with Penelope as “she’s not my equal in beauty, no matter how you measure it“(Ody 5.211-212). Calypso knows that Penelope is one of the main reasons why Hermes told her to let Odysseus go and she is not pleased. Thus, Calypso gets jealous as she mentions Penelope when trying to convince Odysseus to stay as she does not want to be denied her love because of another woman. Her jealousy causes her to claim that she is better than Penelope, both on the inside and outside. Yet not having met Penelope before, this becomes an empty claim on a woman she never truly knew.

Odysseus knows Penelope and Penelope is the one that exhibits the love that she earned from Odysseus and vice versa. Odysseus’ sums up his feelings about Calypso clearly when he says to Alcinous that Calypso “never touched my heart”(Ody 7.276). There was no heart in this relationship as Odysseus did not return her feelings. Because of this, Odysseus denies Calypso’s offer and pursues Penelope, the one who did touch his heart.

Being able to leave Calypso's island was never truly difficult. Calypso tells Odysseus that it is dangerous to go back home yet she offers Odysseus immortality at one point (Ody 5.134-135). If she can make him immortal then that would be the ultimate protection against whatever trials the gods cooked up. Calypso did not want to truly protect Odysseus from the outside world, she wanted to protect herself from losing Odysseus to Penelope. Calypso wanted this immortality for Odysseus to be an immortal husband, but again, she had not earned his love. Odysseus had no use for immortality if it was not for the love he had back at home.

Ishtar and Calypso are both immortal divines who seek the admiration of a mortal. Yet when denied this connection, they show that unrequited love is painful and can hurt the one they were trying to pursue. Ishtar resembles the wrath and emotional intensity of this pain as she fails to get Gilgamesh's hand in marriage due to her lack of understanding of what love is. Gilgamesh's rejection is a statement about how friendship is required to be in a truly loving relationship instead of just having love be a means for sex. In turn, Calypso resembles the lies one tells themselves that the person they like will love them eventually. Odysseus' rejection ends up being a retaliation to this notion as he shows that love had to be earned and not taken as he remains loyal to Penelope. The messages the two women bring ultimately form the idea that love is built on the foundation of friendship and teamwork, that one has to be able to accept and acknowledge the others feelings, and that one should accept rejection rather than holding on to a love that is not there or planning revenge. Love can be a painful, complicated, concept but it needs to be respected, mutual, and mindful for it to truly blossom.