

The Evolution of Guest-Host Relationships

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Introduction

As a basic means of sustenance and survival, food not surprisingly shows up in the literature and cultures of the past, oftentimes as a symbol or gesture associated with camaraderie or hospitality. Warriors drink and eat together, kings and queens entertain visitors to their kingdom, and banquets are held on feast days in early Christian literature. To all of these, this thesis will give attention. Its premise involves some basic questions: does food become a social ritual of controlling behavior? Is both good and ill will potentially at the heart of activities involving the responsibilities of guests and hosts in both the literature of the ancient world and that of the early pagan and Christian literature of the medieval period? In attempting answers to these questions and others, the following study will look at well-known texts—the early epic *Gilgamesh*, both Homeric epics, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the old English *Beowulf*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Each has something distinct to offer, whether it be the respect or disdain shown to itinerants who find themselves in a strange land on a long journey (for example, Aeneas at the court of Dido). In the case of Gawain, for instance, does the recurrent practice of this knight telling his host what he has obtained during the day imply that such a setting and its system of conduct function as life sustaining necessities to which he must return if he is to survive and succeed? Is it simply respite from the road or are the social amenities that accompany a travel break—food, hospitality, and sustenance—the keys to understanding how life was and should be lived in these early time periods? A close look at these famous works of literature can hopefully provide new ways of understanding the link between food and early social conventions. As a motif, such a link reveals surprising ways these works inform one another and constitute a pattern that arguably extends from ancient to medieval literature.

The Epic of *Gilgamesh* is a relic from a bygone age. Regarded as the oldest work of literature in the world *Gilgamesh* contains the earliest accounts of guest-host relationships and helps to solidify a perspective on future interactions in which average men and women take up the mantle of both guests and hosts. For instance, the interactions between Shamhatu and the pair of Akalla and his wife in which the story does not focus upon Enkidu (who is a focal point of the story) but rather the men and women who surround this event. *Gilgamesh* also contains examples of several extreme cases where a king is a guest to a peasant rather than a host as well as being in a self-imposed exile. One example of this would be Gilgamesh taking the place of a guest to Siduri (a peasant and innkeeper) and later again to the immortal Utnapishti. Though Gilgamesh is still a king and powerful among men, he acts differently from how he had been in earlier parts of his epic. This legend offers many insights into the most ancient incarnation of guest-host relationships and provides a broad understanding of the intricacies and responsibilities of each party.

Several thousand years after *Gilgamesh* had been transcribed, Homer writes his epic *The Iliad*. Though two millennia have passed since the events of *Gilgamesh* supposedly took place, much of the guest-host relationship retains much of its foundation while at the same time evolves in several subtle ways. A guest and a host still had personal responsibilities to one another. However, while *Gilgamesh* focuses on personal interactions (one or two people in particular) the *Iliad* contains examples of a host taking in multiple guests as a sign of respect. The *Iliad* also showcases the Trojan king as a guest to the most honored and respected soldier in the Greek army and must comport himself in a manner that would be considered potentially shameful to the people of the Greek culture. This example takes place at the end of the epic when Priam goes to Achilles to beg for his son's body and the time to give him a proper burial. While Priam is asking

this favor as a father more than a king, such is far from the only instance of a lord becoming a guest in a Homeric epic.

The *Odyssey* offers insights into the guest-host relationship that had been previously unexplored in ancient literature, that of bad host and guests. Homer's second epic reveals several occasions where guests and hosts break the traditional rules. Both the host and guest suffer. Two noticeable instances include the suitors in Odysseus's home, and the cyclops Polyphemus (who imprisoned him and murdered his crew). This poem helps to answer the question of whether or not good or ill will resides at the heart of these interactions.

Virgil writes his *Aeneid* as a conscious response to the Homeric epics. Where Homer examines bad guest-host relationships or kings demeaning themselves as guests, Virgil writes of a king who acts as he is expected to as a guest of noble birth as well as introducing an emotional aspect to the guest-host proceedings. Aeneas took up the role of a guest under his host Queen Dido and developed feelings for her. However, he prioritized his people above his own personal desires. This provides a stark contrast to many of the kings and powerful figures that have been shown in the previous works (either acting arrogantly, demanding service, or demeaning themselves in front of their guests in the hopes of a boon or favor). Through these contrasts we can begin to define the true relationships of food and whether it is a social construct designed to constrain behavior as seeing men of power and wealth act differently while under the rules of guest-hood as opposed to how they act in everyday situations.

Guest-host relationships endured not just the two thousand year gap between *Gilgamesh* and the epics of Homer and Virgil but also endured several hundred more years and can be found in the society of *Beowulf*, an old english epic, which changed the established processes of guest-host relationships in several subtle and vital ways. *Beowulf* first introduces the idea of a guest

being invited back after having left a host, and shows that women have obtained more responsibilities and respect. While women remain shadowy characters in *Beowulf*, Hrothgar's wife, plays an important part in taking care and honoring Beowulf after his battle with Grendel. This also suggests that the institution of guest rights endured into the Pagan era as the original story of Beowulf was an oral tale that was later transcribed by a Christian scholar. Though there are Christian influences in the transcribed version of *Beowulf*, it is not the only evidence that the guest-host relationships continue through the middle ages and the onset of Christianity.

The legend of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* reaffirms the aspects that *Beowulf* set forth in its text. Women are given far more responsibilities when it comes to looking after their guests, illustrated by the Green Knight's wife, Morgan the Fay, looking after Gawain during his time in the castle. It also reintroduces the idea of a guest being invited back by the host. One of the most vital changes that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* makes to the guest-host relationships involves forgiveness. In the earlier cultures and civilizations, the price for breaking the procedures usually entails a physical trial or a certain type of punishment (usually involving pain and death). Gawain introduces the notion of spiritual penitence.

1: *Gilgamesh*

As the oldest credited work of literature in existence, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* contains the first accounts of guest-host relationships. Though some cultures focus on guest-host relationships that only take place in the upper echelon of society (as in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*), *Gilgamesh* contains several accounts of average men and women playing the part of host. These cases of guest-host relationships are integral to understanding the dynamic between the guest and the host as both sides are of equal societal rank. *Gilgamesh* does not limit itself to examples of the peasant class and their responsibilities, but instead shows an exiled king as a guest. Would Gilgamesh act any differently from peasants if he assumed the role of a guest? Would he even assume the role of a guest in the first place? Though a significant gap in social standings presides over the instances where there are examples of Guest-Host Relationships, Enkidu being a man brought in from the wilderness against Gilgamesh who is the king of the country, both parties operate under the same constraints. These instances when Gilgamesh assumes the role of a guest to average men or women reinforces how such practices are necessary in ancient cultures, practices that include opportunities to repair damages and mistakes.

As a largely uncivilized society, the culture that *Gilgamesh* belongs to mostly subsists from hunter-gatherer forms of production. With physical strength highly emphasized, such a culture largely revolves around conflict: be it between humans, beasts, or gods. Instances of conflict occur throughout. The culture of *Gilgamesh* attaches priority to physical strength, and thus, the first aspect of a guest that must be exercised is restraint. Hosts will not invite in guests if there is any chance that their home, livelihood, or family will be destroyed or harmed in any significant way. This is doubly true for entities such as Enkidu and Gilgamesh who possess superhuman strength.

The story of *Gilgamesh* centers itself around the title character, but it also gives a significant amount of attention to characters from the lower classes in society. One such occurrence happens when the priestess Shamhatu and Enkidu (the Forest Man) take shelter in a village after they meet in the forest. When Enkidu and Shamhatu are welcomed into a home, it provides a pattern for future invitations. Enkidu has only recently learned how to act like a human. He had lived with animals for the majority of his life where social norms and rituals were non-existent. As a result of this, he gropes the wife of the man who was about to be his host. Enkidu has unknowingly offended his potential host and the society of *Gilgamesh* has very strict rules where these matters are concerned. These laws are conveyed to Enkidu when Shamhatu says, ““You have done no wrong; but you must apologize to Innashagga...” ‘I will not... will not touch you again without your leave.’...Innashagga stepped a little closer, though she was still more than an arm’s length away. ‘Then be welcome to our house, man of the wilderness.’” (Grundy, 155). Enkidu admits that he has committed an act that has insulted his host. He acted out of ignorance but that does not excuse his transgressions. He must still work for the trust of his host. Only after he apologizes and promises not to insult his host again, will he be welcomed as a guest. Innashagga was not physically harmed by Enkidu, but he still has to show respect for his potential hosts. To be considered a good guest in this society restraint is required to develop mutual respect.

Gilgamesh reveals the procedures governing how one acts as a civilized guest. Shamhatu instructs Enkidu how to conduct himself when she says, “Civilized people...sit down thus when they are prepared to eat. Remember that you must use only your right hand for eating, because the left is unclean” (Grundy, 156). In addition to the mutual respect necessary for an effective

guest-host relationship, other rules are in place. Shamhatu explains that eating with an unclean hand insults a host. This rule applies to the prevention of disease and keeping the society healthy.

In the latter parts of the epic, Gilgamesh goes into a self-imposed exile on a quest to find immortality. While traveling, Gilgamesh assumes the role of a guest at several key points.

Through these interactions it becomes apparent just how far the influence of guest-host relationships extend. Gilgamesh finds himself at the door of a tavern: “Angry and frustrated, Gilgamesh kicked the door-though carefully, for he was still light-headed with the strength the fruit had given him, and he knew that he could easily shatter the heavy wood with too heavy a touch” (Grundy, 528). Before the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh had been a monster of a man. He had taken whatever he wanted because he thought everything in the world belonged to him, and he showed little to no respect for any of his subjects. He had even gone so far as to demand that he sleep with a woman on her wedding night before the groom and take the king’s right.

However, this passage shows that Gilgamesh has begun to respect guest-host relationships. A man who has openly defied the Gods of his culture has relented when it comes to guest-host relationships. In the earlier section involving Enkidu learning the ways of hospitality from Shamhatu, a sense of mutual respect and restraint enforced hospitality. Gilgamesh cements this aspect in this interaction when he restrains himself from causing harm to what could potentially be his host. In this instance, Gilgamesh prevented himself from doing harm to a host, though such has not always been the case.

Near the end of his journey, Gilgamesh encounters a barrier in the form of many stone snakes. He proceeds to destroy them. Only later does he find out that these snakes are the means for his passage to his destination, and he learns this from the man who owned the snakes and whose land Gilgamesh is currently standing on, Urnashabi. The scene is described as, “It is your

own hands that have prevented the crossing, Gilgamesh. You have destroyed the Stone Things and have picked up the Urnu-snakes...Without them we cannot cross the Waters of Death.”

(Grundy, 534). In this instance Gilgamesh does not restrain himself or his temper, removing an obstacle with no thought or patience, therefore potentially dooming himself and his quest. He has also done harm to Urnashabi as those snakes and stone things belong to him. Gilgamesh acts out of ignorance, and he only sees a potential threat to himself and acts on instinct, which in a conflict driven culture is mandatory. But because of his ignorance, he has the opportunity to make up for his mistake. Urnashabi commanded, “Gilgamesh, lift up that axe in your hand. Go down into the woods and cut poles of sixty cubits...hmm three hundred of them.” (Grundy, 534). Gilgamesh has to fulfill the task that Urnashabi has given him. This state of affairs derives from Gilgamesh’s lack of restraint and harm for his host. He broke his possessions and has crippled his capabilities to travel. As such Gilgamesh has to work to make up for this transgression. Gilgamesh, of course, is not the only one who committed that crime--Enkidu also acted in a similar way while he was a guest.

While Enkidu was a guest at the village where he learned of civilized behavior, he injured a watchman while in a wrestling match. As an act of penitence for the wrong he has committed, Enkidu exclaims, “I shall watch in Ilshu’s place until he is well, to repay the harm I have done him: I meant only to beat him, not to break his bones. I shall take his place while it must be filled” (Grundy, 166). Enkidu must now risk his own life to repay the debt he incurred while a guest at a village that has fed him and given him shelter. He put their flocks at risk. Again his actions were not intentional, but he had to redeem himself regardless. He broke a rule of hospitality. Granted, none of the damage he did was permanent which is why his punishment was menial compared to others who break a guest-host relationship. (Ten years in exile remains

one of the most prominent examples.) This motif of redemption through trials and tribulations in literature remains very prominent. Both Gilgamesh, a king, and Enkidu, a Forest Man who is new to the ways of the human world; have to make up for their lack of restraint when it came to their hosts, regardless of class. The traditions of a guest-host relationship must be observed.

Can a host give a guest something as a sign of good faith or as a remembrance? At the very end of Gilgamesh's journey to find immortality, he encounters a man blessed by the Gods with eternal life. After learning that Gilgamesh can never obtain immortality, he leaves, but before he is too far away, his host tells him, "I will uncover a secret thing for you, Gilgamesh-- I will tell you a secret of the gods. There is a plant whose roots go deep, like the boxthorn; its thorns will prick your hands like a bramble. If you get that plant for yourself, you will become young again" (Grundy, 554). Utnapishti, Gilgamesh's host, bequeathes him with knowledge upon his departure. He does not need to, his responsibilities are already fulfilled and Gilgamesh is already in the boat and rowing away from his shore. Utnapishti chooses to entrust something of his to his guest as a parting gesture and as a means of allowing Gilgamesh to complete his quest. Hosts can give gifts to their guests in the Sumerian culture as reflected through this scene. It is a tradition adopted by many future cultures, and eventually such procedures are given a proper title, guest gifts. It is true that most of these guests gifts entailed gold or wealth, but this case involves knowledge and a chance for a return to youth as its gift.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu both belonged to a society considered uncivilized, but a refined culture possesses more complex rules and rituals where guest-host relationships are concerned as can be seen in future civilizations.

2. *The Iliad*

In *Gilgamesh*, guest rights were only given once someone had shown respect and restraint to their host. As civilizations evolve, this mindset changes steadily and shifts in several subtle and important ways. One of the civilizations that usher in this new outlook on guest rights is the Greek Empire. Why would these changes be important? How do minor changes affect the aspect of guest-host relationships as a whole and how do they pertain to the larger idea of guest rights? Through such works as the *Iliad*, the Greek poet, Homer, introduces the changes regarding respect and guest-hood. Where respect is required to become a guest in *Gilgamesh*, in the *Iliad*, inviting in an individual or a group is designed to show respect to the invited party: such as when Achilles welcomes Odysseus and the rest of his party into his tent in book 9 of *The Iliad*. In addition to showing this new outlook on guest-hood, the *Iliad* also presents an example of a king taking the role of a guest but acting in a manner that would be considered shameful for a King (Priam begging Achilles to release the body of Hektor).

During the course of the *Iliad* several one-on-one battles are fought: between Achilles and Hektor, Menelaus and Paris, and Patroklos and Hektor. It is during the time between when interactions take place involving guest-host relationships. After a colossal defeat by the Trojans, Agamemnon sends a small party of well respected warriors to encourage Achilles to fight alongside the Grecian forces once again. Homer describes the interaction in the following way:

Both of the men came forward, and noble Odysseus was leading,
then they stood before him; in astonishment leapt up Achilles
holding the lyre still, leaving the seat where he had been sitting.

So in the same way Patroklos, when he too saw the men, stood up.

Greeting the two men, thus spoke forth swift-footed Achilles:

“Welcome! As friends indeed you have come here-Great must the need be-
who even now in my wrath are the dearest among the Achaians.”

So he addressed them, and then they were led by noble Achilles
into the cabin and seated on couches and covers of purple;

straightway then he spoke to Patroklos, who was beside him:

“Son of Menoitios, set out a mixing bowl that is larger,
mix up drink that is stronger, and pour it in each of the goblets,
since these men who are under my roof are to me far the dearest.”(9.

192-204)

Achilles suspects what Odysseus and Nestor want from him, but he still invites them into his living space. Respect must be shown to both men who are of equal rank within the army as reflected through the gesture of serving them food and drink. There is no hesitation here as can be found in *Gilgamesh*, where several hosts are hesitant to accept a guest for one reason or another. In the *Iliad* no such fear or worry appears present. Achilles welcomes his comrades the instant he sees them. In Greek culture apparently arriving at another’s dwelling allows for an invitation to enter. These enact a symbolic truce that temporarily holds sway.

In Achilles’s mind we find a mixed sentiment--“who even now in my wrath are the dearest among the Achaians.”-- a line that emphasizes that conflicts can be forgotten or forgiven during the guest-host process. Meals can take place in harmony even if Achilles holds a coming grudge against Agamemnon, and by extension, the Greek army. Despite this, the moment that Odysseus and Nestor arrive in his home, he puts that pain and anger aside to welcome them fully

as guests. Inviting a person in as a guest never incites immediate conflict for either party, although such interactions do not guarantee a successful outcome (as evidenced by the case here where Achilles does not cooperate).

Perhaps the most substantial example of the proceedings occurs in the final book of *The Iliad* when Priam makes his way to Achilles' tent to beg for his son's body. Priam as the king of Troy in terms of status is comparable to Achilles. They represent two different roles: a king and a warrior, yet the difference is negligible: a king and the mightiest warrior. That Priam does not appear as a king reinforces the point: he does not behave in a manner that would normally be considered regal. In his interaction with Achilles, Priam

Stood there

close to Achilles and grasped his knees with his hands, and he kissed those
dread man-slaughtering hands that had killed so many of his sons.

As at a time a disastrous delusion takes hold of a man who
kills someone in his land, then goes to a country of strangers,
into a right man's house, and amazement grips the beholders,
so was Achilles amazed at beholding the godlike Priam...(Book 24, Lines 477-83)

King Priam bows to Achilles and begs him for his son's body. Achilles appears surprised to see the leader of the enemy. He is not used to this type of behavior that lacks the bravado so often found among the warriors. In this situation, Priam humbles himself in front of his enemy. However, as Priam gives way to the younger man, he acts as a father rather than an enemy king, and his appeal works. Achilles extends his protection to Priam as a guest. They dine together and

bond over their mutual pain. Priam never asks to become Achilles' guest, but Achilles freely feeds him as one. Achilles offers the same hospitality and respect he offered earlier to Odysseus and Nestor, but goes further. Towards the end of their discussion Achilles comments,

“But come now, tell me this and recount it exactly and fully-
how many days you want to be burying noble Lord Hektor,
so that I wait myself, and as well I hold back the army?”

Speaking to him then answered the old man godlike Priam:

“If those rites you are willing that I should accomplish for noble
Hektor, Achilles, in doing these things you would do me a kindness...

On the eleventh a funeral mound over him we will heap up;
then on the twelfth we will fight once more, if indeed we must do so.” (24.

656-67)

As the host in this instance who protects and feeds Priam, Achilles offers a guest gift, a keepsake and a token of friendship. In this case the guest gift is the time that Priam needs to give his son a proper burial.

Through *The Iliad*, guests receive pronounced respect from hosts within the limited setting of Troy. *The Iliad* marks progression in a process found in *Gilgamesh*. But what really makes a good guest-host relationship in Greek culture gets a much fuller treatment in Homer's *Odyssey*.

3. *The Odyssey*

This poem takes place in multiple settings and employs different contexts to define further what it means to play both roles, which involves many different examples: Telemachus and Menelaus, Odysseus and Polyphemus, and the suitors at the end of the poem. Each instance involves proper and reprehensible behavior.

The people of Ancient Greece welcome and strive for stability in the face of a life style more often transient because of war and the travel it incited. Odysseus's long return from Troy captures this lifestyle and contains numerous occasions involving the need for hospitality. One of the most developed relationships in *The Odyssey* occurs when Telemachus journeys to visit Menelaus. While on a quest to discover the truth behind his father's extended absence after the fall of Troy, Telemachus stops in Sparta at the house of Menelaus who showcases the host's willingness to take in not just travelers, but strangers:

“Strangers have just arrived, your majesty, Menelaus.

Two men, but they look like kin of mighty Zeus himself.

Tell me, should we unhitch their team for them

or send them to someone free to host them well?”

The red-haired king took great offense at that:

“Never a fool before, Eteoneus, son of Boethous,

now I see you're babbling like a child!

Just think of all the hospitality we enjoyed

at the hands of other men before we made it home,

and god save us from such hard treks in years to come.
 Quick, unhitch their team. And bring them in,
 strangers, guests, to share our flowing feast.” (3. 31-42)

In this passage Menelaus becomes annoyed and angry at the suggestion to send away guests on the grounds that they are unknown. Unlike how potential hosts in *Gilgamesh* act, Menelaus does not deliberate benefits or potential harm, nor is he simply being an open book. Menelaus considers protection and shelter for the travelers paramount. Nourishment will follow as will gifts as Homer recounts:

“But come,
 my boy, stay on in my palace now with me,
 at least till ten or a dozen days have passed.
 Then I’ll give you a princely send-off--shining gifts,
 three stallions and a chariot burnished bright-
 and I’ll add a gorgeous cup so you can pour
 libations out to the deathless gods on high
 and remember Menelaus all your days.” (659-66)

This passage contains an amiable host willing to bestow food and protection upon guests. Menelaus does not want Telemachus to have to worry about finding a safe haven for rest and recuperation. Trust is in abundance, and it increases as he discovers who Telemachus truly is and his lineage.

With this exceptional example in place, Homer moves on to showcase relationships that fall short of it. During his journey back to Ithaca, Odysseus encounters a despicable host: the Cyclops Polyphemus. In this encounter both the guest and host violate the traditions of the guest-host relationship. Earlier examples of a host reveal guests invited into residences and provided sustenance. However, in this case, we find different actions and conducts:

There we built a fire, set our hands on the cheeses,
 offered some to the gods and ate the bulk ourselves
 and settled down inside, awaiting his return... (9. 260-3)

Here Odysseus and his men assume the behavior of thieves. Odysseus makes a fire and helps himself to Polyphemus's cheese.

Odysseus's violation of the hospitality procedure is followed by the reprehensible behavior of Polyphemus as a host.

Lurching up, he lunged out with his hands toward my men
 and snatching two at once, rapping them on the ground
 he knocked them dead like pups-
 their brains gushed out all over, soaked the floor-
 and ripping them limb from limb to fix his meal
 he bolted them down like a mountain-lion, left no scrap... (9. 324-9)

This situation leaves no room for reconciliation between a guest and host. The behavior of both sides represents a breakdown of trust, the foundation of a guest-host relationship also predicated upon protection. The aftermath does little to repair matters. While Odysseus does act in self defense when he blinds Polyphemus as part of his escape plans, there remains a break in trust that Menelaus and Telemachus used to protect each other. Violence to a host condemns Odysseus to long years at sea and the loss of his crew as his newly-blinded host curses him as they flee.

Where Polyphemus remains a primary example of a bad host, *The Odyssey* also contains an account of a terrible guest, or group of guests. During the time that Odysseus is away at sea, suitors swarm his home in the hopes of winning the hand of Penelope, Odysseus's wife. During this time, the suitors ransack Odysseus's household and land. They devour food and constantly demand more. They also mistreat the household servants and refuse to leave the premises. Telemachus, who is already sick of the situation, returns with the knowledge and example that Menelaus provided him. He becomes furious and talks back to his mother about allowing the situation to get this dire. Upon his return to Ithaca, Odysseus tests the suitors to see if what he has heard from the townspeople is true. If they were to act as good guests, they would allow a beggar in to see the lord or lady who rules the home. When Odysseus arrives at his own home in the guise of a beggar the suitors send him away with nothing, an act of disrespect they will pay for with their lives. However, killing the suitors does not provide a simple solution to the problem of shedding blood within one's home violates other procedures that pertain to the guest-host relationship and require the help of the goddess Athena to resolve it. The cleansing of the household symbolically makes clear that the procedures of guest-host relationships must be carried out in civilized ways.

4. *The Aeneid*

The Roman Empire rises to power as the Greek Empire declines. As such they have their own conscious responses to Homer's works through the poet Virgil. Virgil's work, *The Aeneid*, contains an integral account of a guest-host relationship: Aeneas playing the role of a guest to Dido. Through this interaction it is possible to see the subtle differences that exist between the Greek and Roman traditions.

Much like Odysseus, Aeneas is on a journey home. As such, he cannot become a host and can only assume the role of a guest. While on his journey, Aeneas reaches Carthage and meets Queen Dido, who is one of the only women to play the role of a host in ancient literature. However, this remains a peculiar example of guest-host relationships as her relationship with Aeneas becomes much more emotional than any other. She fulfills the role of a host well, according Aeneas a high status among her people, showing him Carthage, and feeding him. This relationship departs from the others so far discussed when the two fall in love. The gods play a part in their interactions, but Aeneas and Dido have feelings for one-another. Their relationship evolves quickly into one more reminiscent of a husband and wife. This leads to many problems for both guest and host. While one god does incite the love between Dido and Aeneas, the other gods constantly berate him and remind him that his destiny lies in Italy, not Carthage. This leads to a final confrontation between Dido and Aeneas where he must choose between his responsibilities to his nation or his feelings for Dido. Until this point in ancient literature, members of royalty have acted selfishly and disgracefully : Gilgamesh destroys the property of his host and Priam disgracing himself in front of Achilles. Aeneas constitutes the first king who exemplifies what it means to take up the mantle of guest and act accordingly. The first instance

where Aeneas is shown to conduct himself in a manner that would befit a king involves his interactions with the Queen Dido. During their final exchange, Aeneas admits

The queen stopped but he,
warned by Jupiter now, his gaze held steady,
fought to master the torment in his heart. At last
he ventured a few words: "I...you have done me
so many kindnesses, and you could count them all.
I shall never deny what you deserve, my queen,
never regret my memories of Dido, not while I
can recall myself and draw the breath of life.
I'll state my case in a few words. I never dreamed
I'd keep my flight a secret. Don't imagine that.

If you, a Phoenician, fix your eyes on Carthage,
a Libyan stronghold, tell me, why do you grudge
the Trojans their new homes on Italian soil? (4. 413-36)

In this final interaction with Dido, Aeneas confesses that he owes her a great debt that he will never forget. Dido fulfills every obligation that a host must, but Aeneas has to disobey her wishes. His responsibility is to his people, not to himself. Aeneas rejects the wishes of his host (Dido desires Aeneas to marry her and help her rule Carthage instead of pressing on to Italy to found Rome). However, he only does this for the sake of his people. To the Romans, a king must

act selflessly to serve the people, even when they are a guest at another's home. Where Gilgamesh and Priam act for their own personal benefit, Aeneas lives for his people and knows that he is the one destined to lead them to Italy. He admits that he is not entirely following his own desires in this instance. Aeneas puts aside his own wishes for the sake of his battered and homeless people. It was for them that Aeneas became a guest at Dido's court in the first place. Before they arrived, the Trojan Remnants had been scattered during a storm on the sea and a vast majority of them died. His people needed a respite and Aeneas knows that Carthage is a good place for that. Priam, the former leader of the Trojans, became a guest to reacquire his son's body while Gilgamesh only became a guest on his personal quest to find immortality. Aeneas remains the only monarch who, in the ancient texts, placed the needs of his own people above his own during trying times. His allegiance to them is so great that he abandons a safe haven such as Carthage. To the Romans, Aeneas is the epitome of a leader and he represents himself in a manner that is highly emulated in the Roman hierarchy. However, while he is respected as a leader, as a guest he falls short. A guest must respect the wishes of the host and in breaking those wishes, he causes irreparable harm to Dido who takes her own life in a response to this conduct.

In *The Aeneid*, Virgil introduces the idea of an emotional guest-host relationship with Dido and Aeneas. In addition to that, he also recounts a monarch acting appropriately for the first time in ancient literature. Book 4 of *The Aeneid* provides a clearer picture of what the Romans consider proper conduct for guest-host relationships. Some of these practices turn out to be explored in *Beowulf* and the legend of *Gawain and the Green Knight*.

5. *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

As the Greek and Roman Empires dwindle a new power ascends to the forefront of civilization known as Christianity. As such, Christianity and its doctrine alter a significant portion of the traditions that belong to the Pagans religions that proceed it. Much of the folklore of the previous civilizations is forgotten or destroyed. *Beowulf* provides a becomes a bridge between Pagan and Christian texts and offers another way to consider the tradition of guest-host relationships?

In many of the previous works, the host (or prospective host) refuses to hesitate when welcoming in a guest, though some of the proceedings in *Beowulf* harken back to *Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey* with an altered order of proceedings. In earlier works, especially the Greek works, the host would feed guests before questioning them about their lineage or their purpose. This is not the case in *Beowulf* as Beowulf and his party are questioned upon entering the land of the Danes. A guard stops them and asks, “What manner of men are you, warriors in armor...Never have armed men come here more openly-yet did not have leave from our warriors, or the agreement of kinsmen. Never have I seen mightier noblemen in the world... Now I must know your lineage before you may go further, possibly spying on the land of the Danes” (Heatt, 9). Beowulf is stopped by several guards, all asking the same question before he is allowed to see Hrothgar. The Danes are in a time of strife and conflict as they contend with the monster Grendel. This introduces a level of suspicion and hesitancy that recalls in past examples the practices of *Gilgamesh*. The Danes are suspicious about newcomers to their country, nonetheless they treat strangers with respect. The guard compliments Beowulf and his band before questioning them. In the culture of the Danes, respect is paramount. The guard acts as a representative for Hrothgar and has to present himself in a manner that is befitting his lord. As

such, he does not offend a possible guest but he still acts with the purpose of defending his people. *Beowulf* also provides another notable addition the guest-host processes which is the act of a re-invitation.

While previous cultures send off guests with good will or treasures, *Beowulf* shows a host inviting a guest to return at a later date. Recall the final exchange between Telemachus and Menelaus, *The Odyssey* uses very definitive language when Telemachus leaves Menelaus. “remember Menelaus all your days.” (4. 666). Menelaus expects that Telemachus will never return to his domain, this will be their last encounter. There is not an invitation to come back, just a send off. *Beowulf* changes that model with, “Then the protector of noblemen gave Beowulf twelve more treasures, and bade him go safely to his people with the treasures and quickly return again” (Heatt, 49). While there have been instances where the host wanted the guest to stay for a significantly longer period of time, some times indefinitely (Queen Dido), but this event remains the first example of a cyclical guest-host relationship. The implementation of such an offer suggests that the world of *Beowulf* may be less profitable, less predictable, and less permanent. If so, returning guests are more likely possibilities.

In the medieval poem of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one finds ideas previously found in *Beowulf*, especially the idea of re-invitation. During Gawain’s final encounter with the Green Knight, the Green Knight says,

You shall come back to my castle this cold New Year
to revel for the rest of this rich feast... (Part XCVI, Line 2400-1)

The Green Knight acts as Gawain's host and enjoys his company so much that he wants him to return to his castle and celebrate the New Year with him. A cyclical nature to the guest-hood process has reemerged in this work and it proves that this aspect belongs to the literature of the Christian faith. One obvious way that do that is by altering the role of women in guest-host relationships.

This study has pointed out women taking up the role of a host (Queen Dido and Penelope). However, when they are not the host, or if they are married to the host, the role of women has been downplayed by the previous cultures. This not the case in Christian literature as women who are not the lord of the castle are given a much more significant role in taking care of their guest. During his time in the Green Knight's castle, Gawain is looked after by the Green Knight's wife and Morgan the Fay. These two women bring him food and look after him during the day while the Green Knight is off hunting in the woods. They are also given the task of testing their guest to make sure that he keeps his word. This is the first instance where women who are not the host are given such responsibilities. In their appearances in Greek culture women appear as war prizes, valued for visual aesthetics. A slight evolution develops in *Beowulf* where Hrothgar's wife, Wealhtheow, presents Beowulf with gifts to thank him for defeating Grendel. However, Wealhtheow's part in acting as a surrogate host ends there. Morgan the Fay and the Green Knight's wife provide Gawain with gifts while they are interacting with him as surrogate hosts but also sit and talk with him throughout the day. Giving women a more prominent role in acting as a host is not the only facet that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exemplifies; it also reintroduces the idea of penitence for breaking a guest- host relationship that has not been seen since *Gilgamesh*.

While Gawain is a guest at the Green Knight's castle, the two men make a bet. The Green Knight hunts everyday and Gawain will be given an accounting of whatever the Green Knight has caught. Gawain in turn gives up whatever he received while he was a guest to the Green Knight. Gawain receives a belt from the Green Knight's wife that he does not give to the Green Knight upon his return to the castle. Gawain was told that the belt would protect him from harm and, due to the bet he made with the Green Knight at the beginning of the poem, is about to be decapitated. Later, when Gawain abstains from giving the belt to the knight and the knight learns the truth, he says,

“In my view you have made amends for your misdemeanor;

You have confessed your faults fully with fair acknowledgements,

And plainly done penance at the point of my axe.

You are absolved of your sin and as stainless now

As if you had never fallen in fault since first you were born... (Part XCVI line

2390-4)

In this instance, the Green Knight is the wronged party as he fulfilled his word while Gawain broke his, and in so doing, broke the guest-host relationship. This passage also introduces an idea that has not appeared before: the idea of forgiveness. Before this point, very few people had ever been forgiven for breaking a guest-host relationship. Plenty of them had ended up crippled or killed (Polyphemus and the suitors at Odysseus's home). However, the Green Knight does not physically harm Gawain as a result of this broken trust, rather he foregoes punishing him for it and later invites him back. The main punishment that Gawain suffers is self-inflicted. Gawain

knows that breaking a guest-host relationship and the trust that surrounds it is a sin in the Christian faith and he chooses his own form of penitence. Gawain recounts:

“Not for the glorious gold shall I gladly wear it
 Not for the stuff nor the silk nor the side pendants,
 not for its worth, fine workmanship or wonderful honour;
 But as a sign of my sin I shall see it often... (Part XCVIII, Line 2431-4)

Gawain wants a reminder of his transgression so that both he and the people he knows will never forget what he has done. It is his own punishment that he takes, even though the Green Knight has forgiven him. Gawain cannot forgive himself and even though he is about to rejoin his kin and fellow knights at the Round Table, he wants them to know what he has done and why. The Christian faith believes that a sin is a permanent mark upon the soul, so Gawain also chose to make his a physical mark as well. In other instances where guest-host relationships were broken (Gilgamesh and Enkidu) their penitence was a single occurrence, not a life time reminder like Gawain inflicts upon himself.

Christianity provides a different interpretation upon the guest-host relationships than its predecessors, though it still kept the foundational themes of respecting a guest and honoring those traditions. Christian Literature reveals that women also can play a much larger role in taking care of guests than in previous cultures and introduce the possibility for forgiveness and penitence if a relationship is broken. Though this relationship had been touched upon in different works, Christian literature places it at the forefront.

Conclusion

Survival is often a struggle, especially in the ancient world before the onset of modern medicine and technology. As such, survival depends upon cooperation and aid from others. This spawns a series of procedures for society that strives to keep people alive while traveling. Each culture has its own distinct interpretation of these procedures, some prioritizing gifts and others wanting guests to return, but every one of them honors the protection of both the host and the guest while they assume these roles. There is also an evolution of guest-host relationships that can be traced through the literature of these ancient cultures, such as the Sumerians, to the onset of Christianity.

Gilgamesh set the foundation for understanding guest-host relationships. In an ancient culture that follows a warrior code, restraint and respect are considered paramount for creating a guest-host relationship. If someone could not or would not exercise restraint from harming a host, then he would be invited into the home or would have to offset transgression through manual labor. This idea of redemption and respecting the wishes of a host in time becomes the basis for future manifestations of guest-host relationships in later eras.

Homer's epic poem, *The Iliad*, helps outline the Greek interpretation of guest-host relationships. Where the society of *Gilgamesh* requires respect and restraint, Greek warriors did not hesitate to invite in travelers as a sign of respect. Guest gifts and an adjustment of social rank also are added to guest-host practices.

In *The Odyssey* Homer expands upon how a host and a guest should treat each other and showcases many of the consequences that await those who broke those laws. These punishments include banishment, maiming, pain, and death. *The Odyssey* contain accounts of both good and

reprehensible guest-host relationships such as: Telemachus and Menelaus, Odysseus and Polyphemus, and Odysseus and the uninvited suitors.

The Roman culture possesses a different outlook on the responsibilities that accompany the guest-host relationships with Virgil's *The Aeneid*. One of the major changes is the introduction of an emotional relationship between a guest and a host in the form of Dido and Aeneas. Aeneas treats Dido with respect during their final encounter, but he places his people before himself when it comes to respecting her wishes. This pre-Christian text will contrast those that follow in an increasingly Christian world.

Beowulf is a bridge between Pagan and Christian texts as it was translated by a Christian scholar from the original Pagan legend. This is the first instance of a guest being invited to return after they left. Before this point, no other culture contains this aspect and it appears that they thought of taking in a guest as a singular occurrence. It also shows women who were not the host or commander of the castle taking on more responsibilities than in previous cultures. This would be later expanded in another Christian work.

The legend of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* reaffirms the trends that *Beowulf* sets forth for the Christian faith and their interpretation of guest-host relationships. Women are shown more respect and given more responsibilities when it comes to taking care of a guest even when they themselves are not the lords of the castle. In addition, the idea of a guest being invited to return reappears with the Green Knight urging Gawain to return to his castle. Forgiveness is also introduced during this work. Gawain chooses to punish himself for his transgression so as to remind him of his weakness through an act of penitence. This was not a physical labor as in Gilgamesh's or Enkidu's case. This represents a spiritual trial so that he could forgive himself even though he had already been forgiven by the wronged party.

Guest-host relationships have many interpretations but they largely adhere to set foundation. A guest must respect the host and follow the laws and rules of his home. Neither party can harm the other in any manner. A host is allowed to give the guest a gift or refuse to do so depending upon their social stature, personal wealth, and the quality of the relationship between them and their guest. If these laws are broken, then the guilty party must make amends for transgressions. This can entail a physical trial or an act of penitence but the guilty party must find some way to appease the host and society as a whole or he will be ostracized, maimed, or even killed for their disrespect. Following the proper conduct for guest-host relationships is required for a person to be considered a visible member of society, regardless of the time and culture as made clear through such works as *Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *Beowulf*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

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