

The “A” is for Archetype: Gilgamesh as the Source for Captain America

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I investigate the archetypal roots of the modern American superhero who has been so popular of late in film, and find that they are located in Ancient culture, specifically in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In that context, the hero is an individual who must grapple with “an exploration of the inevitable conflict between, on the one hand, the forces represented by the absolute commitment of the powerful and heroic male to energy and battle and...the forces that represent some newly emerging situations and value systems” (Abusch). By employing that frame, I find there are narrative similarities between Captain America and Gilgamesh, and the arc of characterization followed by the latter from god-brute to wise king anticipates Captain America's characterization as a god-like savior of American values, who must learn through suffering and loss how to relate to normal humans. Additionally, I examine how the loss of Enkidu in the *Epic* plays an especially important role as an archetypal model of friendship and sacrifice, particularly in relation to the character of Bucky Barnes. I conclude that while there is no direct causality, Captain America and other American superheroes exist within the archetype of the hero related in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

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Matthew Heider is a senior at Valparaiso University majoring in English. His primary research interest is in the literature of mid-20th century America, especially the poetry of the Beat movement. He also is interested in literary theory and philosophy, especially as they come into collision with pop culture. He plans to move to Charleston, South Carolina after graduation, marry the woman of his dreams, and apply to graduate school in literature after a gap year.

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