Civ. And Its Discontents And Gilgamesh Comparison Essay, Research Paper

Freud and Mason: Religion and Freedom Theme

Themes such as religion and freedom are prevalent in both Gilgamesh by Herbert Mason and Civilization and Its Discontents by Sigmund Freud. Throughout Gilgamesh the character Enkidu is portrayed as an easygoing creature who has an overwhelming sense of freedom in his everyday life. This is comparable to Freud’s understanding of the “oceanic feeling” which is “a sensation of ‘eternity’, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded the source of religious energy” ( Freud 11). Also, Freud presents a concept involving the feeling of freedom when he talks about the libido. He speaks of its ability to make a man and woman happy and how it is the ultimate free feeling. This idea is parallel to Enkidu’s experience with the prostitute in Gilgamesh, giving him a whole new idea of his body and feelings. This is a different kind of freedom, sexual freedom. This sexual freedom can also be described as a religious feeling too. Some people feel that the actual act of sex is a very free and religious feeling because of the deep love felt between the two people involved. And this concept of love leads me into the next point that both books talk about love between two people and how it is a very unrestrained feeling. This is shown in Gilgamesh between Enkidu and Gilgamesh, men who feel a very deep connection to each other. Also in Civilization and Its Discontents when Freud talks about how “at the height of being in love the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away” (Freud 13) basically saying that love is a very intense feeling that makes people feel boundless.

One main idea presented in both writings by Mason and Freud is the religious feeling one gets when they are in an environment that has no limitations. In Gilgamesh, Mason describes how Enkidu acts and feels when he is one with nature. “Enkidu was ignorant of oldness. He ran with the animals, drank at their springs, not knowing fear or wisdom” (Mason 17). This quotation demonstrates how Enkidu is a free soul when he is in his element, nature. And the way that Mason describes it one gets the feeling that nature is almost a religious experience for Enkidu. This is shown when Enkidu opens a trap for a gazelle and runs beside the freed gazelle “like a brother and they drank together at a pool like two friends sharing some common journey not needing to speak but just continue” (Freud 17). This shows how the animals make living a religious experience for Enkidu. This excerpt from Gilgamesh is similar to Freud’s understanding of the ‘oceanic feeling’. The oceanic feeling as described by Freud “is a feeling of something limitless, unbounded the source of religious energy one may rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this feeling alone” (Freud 11). This feeling or emotion that Freud describes seems very similar if not identical the feeling Enkidu experienced when running with the animals. This religious theme is talked about throughout both books in many different forms.

Another component in the freedom theme of Mason and Freud’s books is the libido. When Freud discusses the libido he understands it as sexual energy. He says that it is a man and woman’s drive to be happy and that both are directly related. The libido is so that both sexes strive for sexual interaction because of the way it makes them feel. This is comparable to religion because religion also gives people a certain feeling that they strive for time and again otherwise they would not go to church repeatedly. This is like sex because people strive for interaction time and again. This idea is shared in the book Gilgamesh also. Enkidu comes in contact with sexual situations for the first time in the book. Enkidu learns first hand that libido is a very powerful thing because it gives you a feeling of freedom and pleasure. This is when he comes in contact with a prostitute who guides him into the world of sexuality. He learns that sexual pleasure (libido) can give him a feeling he had never felt before, one that can be thought of as religious. Both Freud and Mason show in these books that the libido can be considered both a religious and boundless feeling.

Love for another human being is another “oceanic feeling” according to both texts. In Gilgamesh, Enkidu and Gilgamesh are soul mates who find eachother in the last days of Enkidu’s life. Almost from the moment they first saw eachother they had a feeling that is comparable to the love one would feel towards a long lost brother. Gilgamesh “looked into his eyes and saw himself in the other, just as Enkidu saw himself in Gilgamesh” (Mason 24) there was a realization that something was special between the two men. This situation corresponds with the concept of the oceanic feeling because it is such a deep moment in both the men’s lives that it can be only justly described as religious. This is also true about the whole time that both men spent together because they grew a deep connection between each other in such a short time. This religious feeling made them feel untouchable and they learned the hard way that sometimes we are as inviolable as we think. This is the same idea that Freud discusses in Civilization and Its Discontents. He talks about man and how “against all evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that ‘I’ and ‘You’ are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact” (Freud 13). This shows how love can make people feel like they are untouchable or free to become one. This has a religious essence because religion makes people feel happier and safer like love. Also, because they have something to believe in just like religion. These two stories show how a strong connection between two people can give them a feeling of security, which is religious and boundless at the same time.

In my opinion both these stories have strong religious implications if you look at them from such an angle. I decided when looking at these two stories to look at it from a religious standpoint and realized that most of these concepts are true of anyone. I know that from my own experience that love is a very intense pious feeling.