



PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FANTASY: A THEORETICAL/PRACTICAL APPROACH

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**“England has always been disinclined
to accept human nature.”**

E.M. Forster, *Maurice*

ABSTRACT

The well known epigraph to one of Forster's books - *Howards end*, 'only connect', is a perpetual appeal to any student, to undertake it as a task in an examination of works of art. This is particularly true in an examination of Forster's work - Forster's fiction in *Maurice* (1913/4); publication (1971), and it becomes quite challenging when the particular task is to connect Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, with Forster, the father of fantasy in modern times. This sets a question to be asked and a problem to be solved, and this is my initial purpose here.

KEY WORDS: psychoanalysis, Freud, homosexuality, *Maurice* - E. M. Forster

FREUD and FORSTER: psychoanalysis and fantasy

1.1 The problem

Forster's canon is, to say the least, intriguing; the basic fact is that he wrote a novel, *Maurice*, in 1913/4, and only allowed its publication a year after his death in 1970. Furthermore, the novel deals with psychoanalysis, and it was first composed when that science was at its initial stages.

Sigmund Freud had written *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* in 1905; the work was translated into English in 1910.

Forster's version of *Maurice*, on the other hand, coincides with Freud's diagnosis of 'Congenital homosexuality', and describes the process used by the Viennese doctor when he was still connected with Breuer and the practice of hypnosis in his therapy. Notwithstanding all these facts, bibliographies point out Forster's connection with English disciples of Freud, but not with Freudian theory directly.

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Critics usually relate Forster to Carpenter⁵, but they seem to ignore any direct link with Freud, according to the bibliographic survey in Publication of the Modern Language Association of America – PMLA – International Bibliography from 1971 to 1986 – period covering the years following the first publication of *Maurice* in 1971. The first author to discuss this possibility briefly does it in an inappropriate way:

But a far more certain influence is Jane Austen. From her Forster learned, what he could hardly have learnt from Meredith, to write elegantly; from her he learnt the possibilities of domestic comedy, though, unlike her, he ‘tried to hitch it on to other things’. Later, he read Proust, on whom he has written perceptively and admiringly and who he says has given him ‘as much of the modern way as I could take. I couldn’t read Freud or Jung. ‘That last admission is a reminder of the historical distance between us and Forster’s novels, though we should recall that Lawrence wrote *Sons and Lovers* without having read Freud, and that Freud himself regarded all his most important discoveries as having already been made by artists, the true innovators in the (emphasis added).(GRANSDEN, 1962, pp. 9-10).

K. W. Gransden, then, quotes only part of Forster’s interview, and leads the reader to the incorrect belief that he had no knowledge of Freud whatsoever. Gransden is negligent, omitting the last part of Forster’s answer. He, indirectly, misleads a number of researchers. This fact almost changed the course of the present investigation, were it not for an examination of the original text of interview, as follows:

Interviewers - You have said elsewhere that the authors you have learned most from were Jane Austen and Proust. What did you learn from Jane Austen technically?

Forster - I learned the possibilities of domestic humour. I was more ambitious than she was, of course; I tried to hitch it on to other things.

Interviewers. And from Proust ?

Forster - I learned ways of looking at character from him. The modern subconscious way. He gave me as much of the modern way as I could take. I couldn’t read Freud or Jung myself; it had to be filtered to me. (emphasis added).(FURBANK, P. N. & HASKELL, F. J. H, 1970)

“It had to be filtered to me” implies that Forster, himself, once admitted he had some knowledge of Freud. This passive statement is full of clarification, because the use of the verb “to filter” implies that Forster knew Freud’s theories indirectly. It remains to us to find out what did he actually know, as well as the circumstances and the consequences of this of this implicit knowledge of Freud.

Altman (1977), on the other hand, also refers to the Forster/Carpenter/Freud triumvirate, as the passage below registers:

Now Carpenter, in common with other progenitors of the homosexual movement, regarded homosexuals as a ‘third sex’, destined since birth to

⁵ ALTMAN, Dennis. *The homosexual vision of E. M. Forster*. Meanjin, 37. 1977pp.532-40; hereafter cited in abbreviated form, ALTMAN, with an indication of page numbers.

homosexuality. This is, of course, in contradiction to the post-Freudian view, which sees homosexuality as part of every human's potential, and its overt manifestation as a product of certain social and familial structures. It is highly unlikely that Forster was aware of this view when he wrote *Maurice* – although Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* (sic) were first published in 1905 and were translated into English in 1910 – but it is equally unlikely that he did not learn of them later on.

Still in this article Altman (Op.cit, pp 533-4) suggests that “(...) Forster had, as early as 1913, a notion of homosexuality as something that was potential in everyone, and whose expression was repressed by social factors.” Then, according to Altman's, point of view, Forster's knowledge of homosexuality is neither Carpenter's point of view, nor does it seem to be Freud's own; According to Altman, Forster probably had his own views on the matter.

The objective of this article, then, it, through an examination of Freud's sexual theory, as exposed in *Three Contribution to the Theory of Sex*, tr. Brill, 1938, to study Forster's *Maurice* and investigate: first, the extension of the coincidence of Freud's theory and matter will Forster's novel, as revealed by an examination of characters and incidents in *Maurice*. Next, the purpose is to check whether Forster had endorsed Freud's theory fully. In addition, there is an attempt at establishing the circumstances under which the author could write a literary piece that was, essentially, a clinical case and yet, how he could give it literary credibility at the same time. Finally, the aim is to verify the state of medical knowledge about the subject in 1905 and 1913-4, by making a comparison of Maurice's family doctor (traditional/pre-freudian) and the doctor psychoanalytic background at its initial stage (Freud/Breuer).

To the best of my knowledge, this has not been done yet at least not though the use of medical background and knowledge in order to evaluate the accuracy of Maurice's clinical case and the literary treatment given to it. According to Brill (1938) Freud's *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* consists of three parts, namely: 'The sexual aberrations', 'Infantile sexuality' and 'The transformation of puberty'. It was edited twice (1905-1909) in German, before it was translated into English in 1910. The alterations made is the newer editions were added to the in the form of footnoting, so that, in reality the text remains original, the way Freud once wrote it is 1905.

The examination of the Freudian text is particularly relevant in its first part in a critical evaluation of Forster's last novel, *Maurice*; however there is no doubt that occasional remark in the second and third parts are also pertinent. The next section will be dedicated to a general view of Freud's theory, stressing the main points to be considered in relation to Forster's *Maurice*.

1.2 Freud's theory

In order to examine the matter of sexual aberration Freud starts with an evaluation of the sexual instinct in reference to its object and aim. He defines the sexual objects as “the person from whom the sexual attraction emanates, and sexual aim – the aim towards which the instincts strives”. (BRILL, 1938).

In contrast with the popular theory that a human being is either a man or a woman, Freud studies a third group – inverts – all persons who behave differently. In accordance with their behaviour, inverts are classified as: absolutely inverted, i.e., their sexual object must be always of the same sex; amphigenously inverted (psychosexually hermaphroditic), i.e., their sexual object may belong indifferently to either same or the other sex; and occasionally

inverted, i. e., when the normal sexual objects is inaccessible, and they take as sexual a person of the same sex, thus finding sexual gratification. Regarding temporal relations, Freud says: "The inverted character may either be retained throughout life, or it may occasionally recede, or it may represent an episode on the path of normal development. A periodical fluctuation between the desire for the normal and that of the inverted sexual object has also been observed". (op.cit. pp. 554-5).

The earlier, pre-Freudian studies of sexual inversion had concluded that, fundamentally, homosexuality was a sign of innate nervous degeneration. Freud, however, rejects this idea, based on the fact that inverts could be divided into different groups: either they were people whose showed no marked deviation or else they were whose mental capacity had not been disturbed – on the other hand they singularly distinguished by especially high intellectual development and specific ethical culture; most cases belonged to ancient nations at the height of their culture, though there were also cases among savages and primitive races.

In order to explain the origin of inversion, Freud considered two basic assumptions: inversion was either congenital or acquired. The first one mentioned occurred when, at no definite point of time in the inverts' life, their sexual instinct followed a different course; in other words, their homosexual tendency was consistent throughout, since the day of day of their birth. The second case occurred when the inversion was determined by external circumstances of life, such as: exclusive relations with members of the same sex, to take place in an intimate feeling of companionship in war, or else, detention in prison or episodes of danger in heterosexual intercourse caused by previous and prolonged celibacy, genital weakness, and others. In such cases Freud (op.cit.p.557) says:

The nature of inversion is explained neither by the assumption that it is congenital nor that it is acquired. In the first case, we need to be told what there is in it of the congenital, unless we are satisfied with the roughest explanation, namely, that a person brings along a congenital sexual instinct connected with a definite sexual object. In the second case it is a question whether the manifold accidental influences suffice to explain the acquisition, unless there is something in the individual to meet it half way. The negation of this last factor is inadmissible according to our former conclusion.

One important fact observed by Freud in all cases of inverts was that they went through their childhood with a very intense but short-lived fixation on a woman, usually a mother or an elderly lady. They identified themselves with this woman, and made themselves their sexual object. Then, they looked for younger men resembling themselves in persons whom they wished to love as their mother had once loved them.

Another important observation made by Freud then was, that, among the accidental influences of object selection, the existence of both parents played an important role in a child's life. Besides, the disappearance of the strong figure of the father in childhood frequently favoured inversion.

As to the sexual aim itself, the union of the genitals in the characteristic act of copulation is taken as the normal sexual aim; Freud, however, adds that whatever facts may occur distinguishable from normal occurrences then, these facts may lead to sexual aberrations described as perversion. According to Freud's theory, "the perversions represent either (a) anatomical transgressions of the bodily regions destined for sexual union, or (b) a lingering at the intermediary relations to the sexual objects which should normally be rapidly passed, on the way to the definite sexual aim." (Op.cit. p.564.)

Freud's last comment on the first essay is that there is indeed something congenital at the basic of perversion; it is something which is congenital in all persons; which, as a predisposition, may fluctuate in intensity, and may eventually be brought into prominence by later influences in life. So, considering that congenital homosexual roots are part and parcel of the sexual instinct in all human being, accidental experiences and occasional perversions may either not determine the natural development of a series of perverts, or they may only, incidentally, give origin to an otherwise normal sexual life.

Freud begins his second essay on 'Infantile Sexuality' reminding people that sexuality is not absent during childhood, and that if we study sexual activities of children, we may have a correct view of what is really congenital, and what is proper of childhood. Freud explains that most people think this way because essentially most of them forget the first years of their childhood, as if such a period had never occurred.

Apparently different, the study of 'Infantile Sexuality' is, however, of great importance in order to understand the nature of perversions. It is necessary to know the children's own development, the first manifestations of their sexuality (thumbsucking, autoerotism), their sexual aims (characteristic erogenous zones), the masturbatory sexual manifestations, besides the development of phases of sexual organization and sources of infantile sexuality (mechanical excitation, affective process, muscular activity, intellectual work), to mention just a few.

These manifestations occur chronologically. Freud ((Op.cit. p. 622.) says:

Oral erotism stands in the foreground in a first, very early phase; a second of these 'pregenital' organizations is characterized by the predominance of sadism and anal erotism, and only in a third phase (which the child develops merely as far as the primacy of the phallus) is the sexual life determined also through the participation of the true genital zones.

Thus, based only on the possible alternations of the organizations of the sexual instinct components, will we be able to conclude which sexual manifestations are disturbed, and to determine which are the consequences to follow.

Freud's last essay on the theory of sexuality refers to the transformations of puberty. The autoerotic sexual instinct is put aside, and the sexual object takes its place instead. Sex then becomes determined, as Freud (Op.cit. p. 604) says:

The normality of the sexual life is guaranteed only by the exact concurrence of the two streams directed to the sexual objects and sexual aim. It is like the piercing of a tunnel from opposite sides.

The greatest problem of puberty, then, is the effect of the 'Infantile Object Selection'. It is not easy to escape the risk of incestuous fixation influence completely; on the other hand, the breaking away from parental authority is very important in terms of future sexual development. Without abandoning infantile sexual values, a boy, for instance, may not reject his mother's will, and thus may become fixed on his mother, and eventually may make a sexual of her and be, at the same time, totally unaware of the process.

As a means of conclusion to his essays, Freud cites many factors such as heredity, repression, accidental experiences, sexual maturity, and parental fixation, to mention but a few factors that may change the course of sexual development. He adds that the unsatisfactory

conclusion of his research was due to his little knowledge of biological processes of sexuality proper, and coincidentally, the difficulty to distinguish what was really normal from what was, indeed, pathological.

At last, it is necessary to say that there is a parallel the structure of Freud's *Three contributions to the theory of sex* and the structure of *Maurice*. Both consider the three stages of life (childhood, puberty and adulthood) regarding sexuality, although they differ in their in their form of presentation and method of approach. Freud presented his theory scientifically, while Forster did it literally through fiction, but having a theory implicit in it.

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