

THE MEETING OF THE MINDS: FREUD AND FORSTER

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ABSTRACT - The main purpose of this paper is to connect Freud's and Forster's ideas, examining the common ground shared by their conceptual development through an analysis of Freudian theory on "Three contributions to the theory of sex" (1905) and Forster's fiction in *Maurice* (1913/4); publication (1971). There is no coincidence so far detected in terms of characters and plot; this article, then, suggests the process of self-analysis and catharsis as part of Forster's debt to Freud.

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

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Introduction

Forster's creative life remains an oddity, to say the least; the first novel he wrote, *A room with a view* (1908), was only published after *Where angels fear to tread* (1905), and *The longest journey* (1907). On the other hand, *A passage to India*, published in 1924, remained in manuscript for ten long years, and was published only after Forster's second trip to India and a process of extensive revisions. But the most peculiar case still is *Maurice* (FORSTER, 1985a); written in 1913-1914, it was revised several times and kept private until its publication in 1971, a year after the author's death. Forster's apparent silence was really no silence at all - he was writing extensively, essays and short-stories, while he kept his cherished manuscript all to himself. *Maurice* as a text is unknown to most Brazilians.

This article then is an attempt to rescue Maurice from ignorance and oblivion, and to restore it to its proper place in English fiction and inside the Forsterian canon. It also advances in its purpose to "connect" Forster with Freud, a matter so far ignored and a method of reading so far neglected in Brazil. Contemporaries, Freud and Foster were both giants of the mind, and both shared a love for English literature and an interest in the human mind.

Intellectually, they met on that universal ground common to genius; what one courageously did in coining a new science field, psychoanalysis, the other dealt with the loneliness of his studio and his artistic creation; and the common ground shared is still the main interest of this article.

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1.0 The British Society for the study of sex psychology (BSSSP)

Forster's knowledge of the sex reforms occurring in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century was, no doubt, more than probable. By that time Magnus Hirschfeld⁵ for example, founded the first homosexual reform organization in Germany, and he practically launched in 1897 a campaign with the aim of collecting as many signatures as possible of important political, social, artistic, medical and scientific people on a call for the decriminalization of male homosexual acts. "(...) By June, 1908, more than five thousand homosexuals had been in touch with the committee, and it had over one thousand members by 1910." (WEEKS, 1983) Hirschfeld was often in touch with Carpenter, one of the first public figures to discuss homosexuality openly in England. Carpenter acted as a bridge linking the new German tendencies with psychologists and social reformers in Britain.

Forster was a member of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology (BSSSP) founded on July 12, 1914, by a group convinced of the serious need to study human sexuality. Weeks (1983, p. 115-143) says that BSSSP came from a secret political society, 1890's "The Order of Chaeronea", interested in protecting homosexuals from undue personal persecution and social discrimination in the eighteen-nineties.

The Fourteenth International Medical Congress in London, in 1913, certainly was a landmark at that time. Magnus Hirschfeld was one of the leading speakers, and important points were made at that congress. Weeks (op.cit., p.131) says that "Ellis occurred admission for Carpenter, and Carpenter encouraged others to attend. Housman recorded that it was a letter from Carpenter which brought him to the congress, there to hear Hirschfeld lecture and see his exhibits." Carpenter, in the meantime, was invited to speak on homosexuality at the First International Congress for Sexual Research planned to take place in Berlin, in November, 1914. The meeting never took place, as it was cancelled due to the outbreak of the war.

Among the members of the BSSSP there were doctors, scientists and the so-called "progressive intellectuals, such as: Edward Carpenter - the first president, Havelock Ellis, Dr. Ernest Jones, Dr. Eden Paul, Dr. Norman Haire, Dr. Marie Stopes, E. M. Forster, George Bernard Shaw, Maurice Eden, Cedar Paul, Miss F.W. Stella Browne, A.E. Crawley, Lawrence Housman, Dr. F.A.E. Crew, J.C. Flugel, G.C. Ives, H.D. Jennings White to mention just a few of the members residing in England. Foreign members included Hirschfeld and his colleagues in Germany, Hargaret Sanger in the United States, Alexandra Kollontai in the URSS, besides other distinguished scholars from other countries.

The year following the Medical Congress in London, Lawrence Housman set the general principles established by the BSSSP. In short, the principles aimed at the promotion of scientific and objective studies of sex psychology, from a legal, medical and sociological approach. The study of problems of sex through lectures and the publication of pamphlets had as a social overall purpose to promote public sexual education.

The BSSSP meetings were often attended by a considerable number of people - from forty to fifty members per session. The pamphlets had wide circulation, mainly among members.

A list of fifteen publications issued by the society from the first day of its foundation to 1933 was collected by: C.W. Beanmont & CO⁶

⁵ HIRSCHFELD was one of the pioneering modern sexologists, and the inspirer of the German homosexual movement after 1890

⁶ Source: The British Library Archives

1. Policy and principles general aims. Lawrence Housman.
2. The social problem of sexual inversion. For members only.⁷
3. Sexual variety and variability among women. F.W. Stella Browne
4. The relation of fellow-feeling to sex Lawrence Housman
5. The erotic rights of women, and the objects of marriage. Havelock Ellis
6. The Marquis de Sade: a study of algolagnia. Montague Summers. M. A. F., F. R. A. L.
7. The social value of the study of sex psychology. The Rev. H. Northcote, M.A.
8. The origin of sexual modesty. Professor Edward Westermarck, Ph. D., LL. D.
9. The play-function of sex. Havelock Ellis.
10. The sexual life of the child. Eden Paul. M.D.
11. Rejuvenation: Steinach's researches on the sex-glands. Eden Paul, M.D., and Norman Haire, Ch.M., M.D.
12. The morbid, the abnormal and the personal. Harold Piction B.Sc.
13. Some friends of Walt Whitman: a study in sex psychology. Edward Carpenter.
14. Sexuality and intersexuality. F.A.E. Crew, M.D., D.Sc., Ph.D.
15. Psychological causes of homoerotism and inversion, H.D. Jennings White, M.A., Ph.D.

Forster's interest in German culture dated from 1902, when he traveled to Germany on holidays and spent most of his time visiting museums. His knowledge of German was not good at that time, but, according to his letters, he dedicated part of his time to learn it in the three subsequent years. (LAGO & FURBANK, 1985, pp.41-136). Furthermore, from April to September of 1905, Forster lived in Germany working as a tutor at Nassenheide in Pomerania, where he made good progress in his German. Forster's visit to Germany in 1905 closely coincides with Freud's publication of *Three contributions to the theory of sex*, (BRILL, 1938) in October, 1905; later, it was translated into English in 1910. At present, it is impossible to determine whether he actually knew or heard of Freud's theory then and there, on account of insufficient information derived from diaries and biographies; however, it is really unlikely that he had not had some knowledge of it before Maurice's composition as we are to give evidences later on. The fact that he was a member of the British Sexological Society is sufficient evidence of Forster's interest in matters of sex in the period preceding the genesis of Maurice.

Forster's own words at the beginning of the thirty-sixth chapter of Maurice, right after Maurice's appointment with Dr. Barry, confirm his knowledge of scientific studies on homosexuality in German when he criticizes Dr. Barry's ignorance regarding Maurice's case. The textual evidence, then, points out that Forster himself was aware of the contemporary German studies:

Dr. Barry had given the best advice he could. He had no scientific works on Maurice's subject. None had existed when he walked the hospitals, and any published since were in German, and therefore suspect. (FORSTER, 1985, p.140).

Forster's view of homosexuality, at the time he wrote *Maurice*, was singular. He was closely connected with Hirschfeld's, Ellis' and Carpenter's work, on account of BSSSP meetings, but his personal approach differed from that of the other members. The main point is that most members regarded homosexuals as a third sex, as if they were somehow diseased. Weeks (1983) illustrates this point thus: "Hirschfeld put a central emphasis on the importance of the sex glands (testicles and ovaries) in determining sexual characteristics, and the 'internal secretions' (hormones) were given a central role. He made strenuous efforts to explain homosexuality in terms of the irregularities of hormonal secretions, in the belief that sexual

⁷ Translation from the pamphlet, 'Digest' published in Germany in 1903, by Dr. M. Hirschfeld.

characteristics could be seen as resulting from hormonal balances.” (WEEKS, 1983, pp.116-143)

Forster, however, held the opinion, far advanced for his own times, that homosexuals were 'different' from the rest of mankind, and that they should be left alone to live out their lives the best way they could. For this is, in a nutshell, the main argument of the novel *Maurice*. If homosexuality was merely a matter of glands, then, it would be very easy to cure; the evidence, however, is that it was a matter of personal choice or circumstantial context, leading to a psychological attitude and behavior. As far as Forster is concerned, he is closer to Freud than his Britain colleagues of BSSSP, as the novel *Maurice* seems to indicate. And this interrelation between Freudian theory and Forster's fiction is the specific object of the next section of this article.

2.0 Freud's theory and Forster's fiction: a parallel of “Three contributions to the theory of sex and *Maurice*”.

It is important to consider the evolution of the main characters in Forster's *Maurice* in order to determine the parallel lines of Freud's theory and Forster's fiction. To start with, the structure of both works corresponds: both take into account the physical and psychological development of human beings. The stages of evolution of Maurice (childhood, puberty and adulthood) coincide with Freud's studies of human sexuality. Freud and Forster considered homosexuality as something congenital in everybody, its awareness depending on later influences in life.

Freud's characterization of possible external factors that may determine the nature of inversion is in every way similar to the development of Maurice's homosexuality. Maurice's father died at an early stage of his childhood and he lived with his mother, who was affectionate and overprotective; he lived in a feminine world which included his two sisters.

Freud says that the disappearance of the paternal figure and the fixation on an elderly woman are important factors to determine the nature of sexual evolution.

During puberty, Maurice exposes his confused feelings. Dr. Dulcie presents sex as something evil or dirty, with the sole purpose of reproduction. Then, Maurice's friends were exclusively school boys. Maurice's dreams become symptomatic as they reveal his psychological need for a male friend and lover. Once more, Maurice's incidents are close to Freud's theory; exclusive relations with members of the same sex and an intimate feeling of companionship naturally lead to inversion.

Later, as an adult, due to external influences, Maurice gets involved with different types of inverts. Freud's classification of inverts (absolutely inverted, amphigenously inverted and occasionally inverted) corresponds to the three main characters of *Maurice*. Maurice's sexual object is one of the same sex since the very beginning; on the other hand, Alex's sexual object is, at first, a member of the other sex; later, he gets involved with a member of the same sex, thus he is amphigenously inverted; finally, Clive temporarily had the sexual object of a person of the same sex at first, but then he found sexual gratification in females, thus becoming a classic example of those occasionally inverted.

The two doctors in the novel are also a case in point. Through them it is possible to evaluate the stage of medical knowledge about homosexuality in Britain at the time by making a comparison of Maurice's family doctor (traditional / 'Pre-Freudian') and the doctor with a psychoanalytic background in its initial stage. Dr. Barry's reaction to Maurice's testimony “I'm an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort”. (FORSTER, 1985, p.139) was a

sample of medical prejudice in the late part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth. He judged Maurice's confession "rubbish"; then, he said that that subject would never be mentioned again, and related it to "evil hallucination" and "temptation from the evil" that would never occur again. Dr. Barry's knowledge of sex was that of ordinary people especially on the subject of homosexuality, in spite of his medical experience: he had not read scientific works on homosexuality at the time he was working (he had been retired from practice for six years), and he ignored German publications for he knew no German.

Dr. Lasker Jones, the hypnotist, on the other hand, represents the beginning of medical research on sex psychology. He seems to be acquainted with Maurice's case and at no moment looks surprised or annoyed with the "problem", as the passage below registers:

He (Dr. Lasker Jones) asked several questions about 'Mr. Cumberland', Maurice's pseudonym for Clive, and wished to know whether they had ever united; on his lips it was curiously inoffensive. He neither praised nor blamed nor pitied: he paid no attention to a sudden outburst of Maurice's against society. (Op.Cit., p. 157).

Dr. Lasker Jones diagnoses Maurice's problem as "congenital homosexuality", prescribes a treatment, and says that fifty percent of patients are successful with it. Through his medical skill, he earns Maurice's confidence as Maurice accepts the regular treatment for his case. The medical/patient interaction is excellent. The failure of hypnosis does not imply the failure of the treatment.

Maurice learns about himself and his own life. As a critic once suggested, "Maurice's differences force him to develop his intelligence and to question society's arbitrary judgment."(FINKELSTEIN, 1975, pp.151-152)

At the end of the novel Maurice seems to have accepted his own condition, rejecting society's imposed arbitrary sexual roles; he learns, at the end, that one should be faithful to oneself and act according to one's nature. This seems to be Forster's formula for joy, as *Maurice* dedicated 'to a Happier Year', and Forster asserts in the Terminal Note that "Happiness is its keynote".

3.0 Final Considerations

Maurice is a complex psychological work of art. Its distinctive value is unquestionable, mainly considering the massive prejudice of the period of its composition against homosexuality and contemporary medical knowledge implicit in it. It is a novel about homosexuality, a relevant product of the Edwardian Era and Edwardian England, firstly because it reveals the intensity of social pressure against homosexuality at the time that Forster wrote the novel; then, because it portrays sexual phobia, especially against homosexuals, and class phobia, particularly against the lower classes.

Forster's style in *Maurice* differs from that of his other novels. Conflicts particular to his best fiction are apparently absent, as its main purpose is to present the case objectively. Forster is far more interested in the reader's knowledge and understanding of the situation than in the development of the complexity of characters.

Forster's major task has been to write a novel full of peculiarities: basically, it is a medical case-history. He compared two opposite views on homosexuality, namely popular prejudice and scientific knowledge.

The novel never offends or disgusts the reader. In terms of composition, it is

contemporary to Forster's best fiction and is somehow intimately connected with the early self-portraits of the artist, as Maurice Hall is a later and amplified version of the intellectual Philip Herriton of *Where angels feared to tread*, 1905 (FORSTER, 1980a), the sacrificial Rickie Elliot of *The longest journey*, 1907, (FORSTER, 1980b) and the supercilious Cecil Vyse of *A room with a view*, 1908, (FORSTER, 1984). Spiritually, he is related to the Wilcoxes of *Howards end*, 1910, (FORSTER, 1983) and socially, he is a forerunner, having a lot in common with Fielding of *A passage to India*, 1924, (FORSTER, 1985b). All those characters somehow represent the matrix, Forster himself, as he once was as an intellectual and member of the establishment, and yet fantastically dreaming with the ideal union of male lovers regardless of their social classes. Such unions would restore vital energy to the upper classes.

Forster did not shock readers as Lawrence twice did with *The rainbow* (1915) and *Lady Chatterley's lover* (1928). He kept his story proper, and wrote it with good taste; he was not writing for his contemporaries but for our own times, steeped as we are in Freudian theory and practice. The writer wrote fantastically in the novel, the analyst wrote objectively in the Terminal Note. And its peculiar structure including both approaches is unique in English fiction.

Thus one of the purposes of this paper has been achieved: to reevaluate *Maurice* as an important part of the Forsterian canon, not only on account of the peculiar circumstances of composition, but also as an important work of literary creation. A second important aspect was pointed out: its so far unperceived connection with Freud's "Three contributions to the theory of sex" both in structure and content. Furthermore, it has corrected the misleading notion that Forster had no information on Freud, for there is an intriguing correspondence between Freudian theory and Forsterian fiction that goes beyond mere coincidence. So far, no evidence has been found that Forster himself undertook treatment; we suggest, then that his peculiar treatment was the writing of the novel, endlessly revised at different stages of his long life. The novel was the process of catharsis, the product of self-analysis that lasted throughout life.

A careful comparison of both texts reveals that Forster fully endorses the best part of Freudian theory, and the characters closely correspond to the types described by Freud. Forster presents clinical cases, and yet he makes them enjoyable through the freedom of literary creation. They are believable, and yet they are also fantastically free in the world of the greenwoods. The metamorphosis of the stockbroker into the woodcutter may be Forster's peculiar daydream, yet Freud would listen and understand - for, as Shakespeare (1906) once said through "Prospero",

(...) *We* are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

(*The Tempest*, IV, i, 156-8)

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