

## What did Freud really say?

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When 1980 began, I had been working as a counsellor for a number of years. We drew on the popular theories of the time: transactional analysis, gestalt therapy and psychodrama. Conferences were attended, books read, supervision with leading psychotherapists of these persuasions was undertaken, peer group discussions were engaged in enthusiastically. Below the surface in all of these encounters was the name of Freud. He was there but more as a father who had been superseded, whose ideas identified the sexual in absolutely everything that humans did and we could all see quite clearly that encounters between people were dynamic and multi faceted. What on earth was Freud thinking of to be so single minded about human relationships! And so Freud was dismissed in ignorance and we were in that way relieved of any challenge with which he may have confronted us.

I went to work at Citizens Welfare Service in Carlton. After a year or so, Fay Johns, who was the Senior Social Worker went into an analytic group and she used to talk about what she was discovering. We began to read psychoanalytic works from the Object Relations school and some went into psychoanalytic therapy. Freud remained unread and was considered less significant than Winnicott, Bion or Klein.

In 1980, I attended a conference on Lacan. I am not sure now why I went to it. I certainly did not understand very much of what Oscar Zentner spoke about. But two things were clear. There was a lot more to Freud than sex. And that Freud, together with Lacan, addressed many questions that I had about being and living and loving and dying, about dysfunction and therapy.

A year or so on I met Leonardo and was fortunate to be asked to join a Freud reading group. Thus began a period of ten or so years in which a group of us met with Leonardo each week, reading the works of Freud. And when we had reached the last of Freud, we began on Lacan but life has not been long enough for all of Lacan's works to be studied.

Originally for me it was an answer to the question: What did Freud really say? I bought my Standard Edition at Karnacs in Gloucester Road, London and had it shipped out. It was marginally less expensive than buying it here but considerably more romantic. Something like visiting Marsfield Gardens and seeing Freud's consulting room, standing by the couch and tapestries, looking over to his desk and shelves with their forest of antiquities, and to the wall where the bas relief of Gradiva hangs: Gradiva, the girl who steps along. My standard edition breathed with the essence of Freud and inspired me as I began to read. And in this reading, and I must add, an analysis, I stepped along.

We began at the beginning with works that are seldom read or referred to by those writing psychoanalytically: the letters to Fliess and the Project for a Scientific Psychology. This was exciting stuff. Here was Freud venturing into the unknown with questions which led him to observations and experiment; Freud at his most adventurous and courageous. Here he was speaking to Fliess of thoughts which took existing thought and knowledge further, to he knew not where. We write papers and have our thesis in hand

before we begin. Freud moved onwards taking up the next thought as it came. This of course we can recognise as the essential movement in analysis. In the letters to Fleiss he explored the architecture of hysteria, the unconscious, phantasy, obsessional neurosis and the structure of symptoms, anxiety and paranoia. The kernel of his future discoveries are there. In developing the ideas around the 'gripping power of King Oedipus' in one letter to Fleiss, Freud said that 'to be completely honest with oneself is a good exercise.' He had been dredging up early erotic feelings for his mother, which in 1890's was an even more courageous honesty than it would be today.

The Project was rather discounted by Freud himself. However, in reading it carefully, we can find the nucleus of his later theories. As the Standard Edition editor states, it throws light on Freud's fundamental hypothesis. It is an invisible ghost which haunts the whole of the series of Freud's theoretical writings to the very end. And as I read on and moved historically and developmentally with Freud on his long and productive journey I discovered where honesty and courage could take one.

In reading the works of Freud, and my much noted Standard Edition bears witness to this long and persistent endeavour, I found that I began to understand to some degree what Freud said. My engagement with life, love, ethics and mortality has much to thank Freud for. The human condition became a reality which I could embrace with interest, with curiosity, with compassion, with respect for the mystery which is always present in the other.