

## Pre-phobic Anxiety \*

“My dear Professor, I am sending you a little more about Hans-but this time, I am sorry to say, material for a case history.”<sup>1</sup>The boy woke up one morning in tears; asked why he was crying, he said to his mother: “When I was asleep I thought you were gone and I had no Mummy to coax with” [The child’s word for caress. It is therefore,] “An anxiety dream.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1909 the publication of the case-history “caused a great stir and even greater indignation”. Would the findings of a psychoanalysis of a suffering child meet with the same agitations and scorn as Freud’s case history of the analysis and recovery of Little Hans? Or, can we learn from it and find hope? It’s my hope that this paper, rather than giving a chronological account, can remind us of the mental activities driving the anxious and fearful child before calling up the intervention of his phobic object.

Freud writes: We must regard [this dream] as a genuine punishment and repression dream and, moreover, as a dream which failed in its function, since the child woke from his sleep in a state of anxiety. We can easily reconstruct what actually occurred in the unconscious<sup>3</sup>.

Thanks to Freud’s monumental gift we remember that “The Interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind”.<sup>4</sup>

As the most common victims of anxiety dreams are children<sup>5</sup> how are we to understand Hans’s distress given that Freud asserts “Children’s dreams prove beyond a doubt that a wish that has not been dealt with during the day can act as dream instigator”<sup>6</sup> [?] “But it must not be forgotten that it is a *child’s* wish, a wishful impulse of the strength proper to children.”<sup>7</sup>

How are we to hear the wish expressed in the anxiety of the infant’s nocturnal thoughts? Could there have been an unconscious appeal, an unconscious wish for the *Law* of the father, given his imminent phobic intervention? The psychoanalyst warns against rushing to find an explanation, instructing that “It is not the least our business to ‘understand’ a case at once: this is only possible at a later stage, when we have received enough impressions of it”.<sup>8</sup>

Reports of the boy pre-date the suffering recorded in his father’s notes, to a period when he was not quite three years old. He was a cheerful, good natured, lively and straightforward child. “So long as he was able to carry out his researches in a state of happy naïveté, without a suspicion of the conflicts which were which were soon to arise out of them, he kept nothing back<sup>9</sup> ... Like all children, he applied his childish sexual theories to the material before him without having received any encouragement to do so. These theories are extremely remote from the adult mind.”<sup>10</sup> Freud reminds us that “When a physician treats an adult neurotic by

---

\* This paper was presented at the conference *What Is Anxiety? Treatment Challenges; Approaches In Dialogue* in the Education and Research Centre at St Vincent’s University Hospital, Elm Park, Dublin 4, on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

The paper has been sent for publication in the next edition of *The Letter – Irish Journal for Lacanian Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>1</sup> Freud, S. *Analysis Of A Phobia In A Five-Year-Old Boy*. (1909). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume X, London, Hogarth Press. p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 118

<sup>4</sup> Freud, S. *The Interpretation of Dreams (Second Part) and On Dreams*. (1900-1901). S.E. V. p. 608.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, S. *Ibid (First Part)*. (1900). S.E. IV. p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> Freud, S. *Ibid (Second Part) and On Dreams*. S.E. V. p. 552.

<sup>7</sup> Freud, S. *Ibid (Second Part) and On Dreams*. S.E. V. p. 552.

<sup>8</sup> Freud, S. *Op. cit.* Vol. X. p.22-3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 105.

psycho-analysis, the process he goes through of uncovering the psychical formations, layer by layer, eventually enables him to frame certain hypotheses as to the patient's infantile sexuality; and it is in the components of infantile sexuality, that the motive forces of all neurotic symptoms of later life are to be found."<sup>11</sup>

One day while Hans was in the street he was seized with an attack of anxiety. He could not say what it was he was afraid of; but at the very beginning of his anxiety state he betrayed to his father his motive for being ill, the advantage he derived from it. He wanted to stay with his mother and coax with her.<sup>12</sup> The outbreak of his anxiety did not appear all of a sudden but can be traced back to the previous summer when the child displayed moods of longing and apprehension. Freud writes: "We may assume that since then Hans had been in a state of intensified sexual excitement, the object of which was his mother."<sup>13</sup>

In *Totem and Taboo* we read that psychoanalysis has brought to light the wishes, the thought-structures, and the development processes of childhood. All earlier attempts in this direction have been in the highest degree incomplete and misleading, because they have entirely overlooked the important factor of sexuality in its physical and mental manifestations. "The incredulous astonishment which meets the most certainly established findings of psycho-analysis on the subject of childhood...is a measure of the gulf which separates our mental life, our judgements of value, and indeed, our processes of thought from those of even normal children."<sup>14</sup>

The second of the Three Essays is a timely reminder of this harmful chasm. It begins: *One feature of the popular view of the sexual instinct is that it is absent in childhood and only awakens in the period of life described as puberty. This, however, is not merely a simple error but one that has grave consequences, for it is mainly to this idea that we owe our present ignorance of the fundamental conditions of sexual life. A thorough study of the sexual manifestations of childhood reveal the essential characters of the sexual drive and show us the course of its development, and the way in which it is put together from various sources.*<sup>15</sup>

In his Fourth lecture at Clark University Freud asserts that "There is no difficulty in observing the manifestations of the sexual activities in children; on the contrary, it calls for some skill to overlook them or explain them away".<sup>16</sup>

In a footnote in his second essay on *Infantile Sexuality* Freud confirms that "It has become possible to gain direct insight into infantile psycho-sexuality...The 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old-Boy'...has taught us much that is new...for instance, the fact that sexual symbolism extends back into the first years of possession of the power of speech...showing that children between the ages of three and five are capable of very clear object-choice."<sup>17</sup>

Little Hans's sexual organization and object-choice was becoming clear. In his discussion of the case Freud confirms that the genital zone was, from the outset, the one among his erotogenic zones which gave him the most intense pleasure. As an infant Hans "had obtained this pleasure with the help of the person who had looked after him – his mother, in fact; and

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> Freud, S. *Totem and Taboo and Other Works. (1913-1914).* S.E. XIII. p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> Freud, S. *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. (1905).* S.E. VII. p. 173.

<sup>16</sup> Freud, S. *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works. (1910).* S.E. XI. P. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Freud, S. Op. cit. *Three Essays.* S.E. VII. n2 pp. 193-4.

thus the pleasure already pointed the way to object-choice.”<sup>18</sup> In the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud writes: “Children behave from an early age as though their dependence on the people looking after them were in the nature of sexual love. Anxiety in children is originally nothing other than an expression of the fact that they are feeling the loss of the person they love...A child, by turning his libido into anxiety when he cannot satisfy it, behaves like an adult.”<sup>19</sup>

In his 2014 seminar on *Phobia and the pre-Oedipal Mother*<sup>20</sup> Dr Charles Melman analyses Freud’s case history of Hans’s phobia, and examines Lacan’s commentary of the case in *Object Relations and Freudian Structures*.<sup>21</sup> In placing phobia as an independent structure Dr Melman affirms: “Phobia has a pre-oedipal determinant, whereas neurosis is a refusal, contrary to paternal law– a challenge. To say this differently, we can say that phobia is independent of what could be called a structuring intervention –of the father.”<sup>22</sup>

Analysing Little Hans’s pre-oedipal, pre-phobic anxiety we examine the mental activity in the object of his love; that is his relationship with his mother. ““This is one of the fundamental experiences of the child that if his presence commands even just a little of the maternal presence that is necessary to him, it is because he introduces something very important.....the child will bring her a satisfaction of love.””<sup>23</sup>

This is a pre-oedipal stage beyond comparison where, Dr Melman asserts “Something is going to teach him that in the presence of the mother he is not alone. It is the fact that the mother retains to a degree...a penis-neid....the third term... and before any intervention of daddy. The child will come to be inscribed in this relationship with a third term which is manifested by penis-neid.”<sup>24</sup> In this sense the child is not loved by the mother for who he is, rather he is loved as a substitute for the phallus.

Little Hans, or to call him by his name, Herbert Graf, bathed ecstatically in the luring relationship with his mother, without much reaction from his *gentle* father. Hans was an indispensable appendage which his mother enjoyed having with her, especially when she was undressing, in the toilet, or indeed in bed. We know that “His beautiful mother fell ill with a neurosis as a result of a conflict during her childhood.”

In outlining *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes*, Freud states:

*More and more stress is laid on the necessity that the analyses of neurotics shall deal thoroughly with the remotest period of their childhood, the time of the early efflorescence of sexual life. It is only by examining [these]...that we can accurately gauge the motive forces that have led to neurosis, and can be secure against the errors*

---

<sup>18</sup> Freud, S. Op. cit. S. E. X. pp 107-8.

<sup>19</sup> Freud, s. Op. cit. *Three Essays*. S.E. VII. p. 224.

<sup>20</sup> Melman, Charles. *Phobia. École Pratique Des Hautes Études En Psychopathologies (Ephép)*. Seminar March 20<sup>th</sup> 2014. Translated by Helen Sheehan.

<sup>21</sup> Lacan, J. *La Relation d’objet et les Structures Freudiennes*. Seminar IV. 1956-57.

<sup>22</sup> Melman, C. Op. cit. P. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 7-8.

*into which we might be tempted by the degree to which things have become remodelled and overlaid in adult life.*<sup>25</sup>

The little girl's recognition of the anatomical distinction between the sexes can lead to the development of femininity...the girl's libido slips into a new position along the line "of the equation 'penis-child'. She gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child."<sup>26</sup> The child's psychosexual life is easily observed; at that time, not yet three years old, by means of various remarks and questions, he was showing a lively interest in that portion of his body which he used to describe as his 'widdler'<sup>27</sup>, Hans's word for the penis. "This interest aroused in him the spirit of enquiry, and made it possible to differentiate between animate and inanimate objects. As we know, he assumed everyone was like himself, and possessed a 'widdler'."<sup>28</sup>

His curiosity prompted him to ask: 'Mummy, have you got a widdler too?' With grave repercussion for her son, she replied 'Of course. Why?' 'I was only just thinking'<sup>29</sup> acknowledged our vulnerable young enquirer. About nine months later, aged three and three-quarters he asked: 'Daddy, have you got a widdler too?' 'Yes, of course' his father affirmed. Another time he was looking on intently while his mother undressed... 'What are you staring like that for?' she asked. 'I was only looking to see if you'd got a widdler too' said Hans. His mother, nurturing his expectation in the register of the imaginary order replied: 'Of course. Didn't you know that?' Hans: 'No. I thought you were so big you'd have a widdler like a horse.'<sup>30</sup> An important signifier for the child-phobic to be bearing in mind that the arbitrary has no existence in mental life.

In the lure of the desire for the mother he can respond in four different ways<sup>31</sup>: He can identify himself with the mother.

- He can identify himself with the phallus.
- He can identify himself with the mother as bearer of the phallus.
- Or he may present himself as bearer of the phallus.

The text is a striking reminder for us of the grave consequences of the denial of infantile sexuality, the acknowledgement of sexual difference, and the role of *penis-need*. As Dr Melman champions "It's therefore good that the baby is able to be assimilated to the instrument".<sup>32</sup> Did Hans's mother impede her son's desire in search of the symbolic? As Freud asserts "The efforts of the childish investigator are habitually fruitless, and end in a renunciation which not infrequently leaves behind it a permanent injury to the instinct for knowledge."<sup>33</sup> Hans was trapped in an imaginary position with his mother; remaining, as his name suggests her Bert - *Ihre Bert!* Totem and Taboo reminds us that children are never

<sup>25</sup> Freud, S. *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes*. S.E. XIX p. 248.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 256.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, S. *Op. cit. Little Hans*. S.E. X. p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Weber, Samuel. *Return to Freud*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> Freud, S. *Op. cit. Little Hans*. S.E. X. p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9-10.

<sup>31</sup> Melman, C. *Phobia*. *Op. cit.* P. 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Freud, S. *Op. cit. Three Essays*. S.E. VII. p. 197.

ready to accept a similarity between two words as having no meaning; they consistently assume that if two things are called by similar-sounding names this must imply the existence of some deep-lying point of agreement between them. Children “do not, like us, regard names as something indifferent and conventional, but as significant and essential. A man’s name is a principal component of his personality, perhaps even a portion of his soul”.<sup>34</sup>

The young Herbert Graf’s structuring existence was taking shape. Jacques Lacan reminds us that Freud discovered “that developments as important for man as the suppression of sexuality and psychic sexual identity were subject to regulation and accidents of a psychic drama in the family”.<sup>35</sup> The delay in the youngster’s inscription into the symbolic, is, therefore no accident. In the real of general anxiety and apprehension, he was abandoned. He developed a specific fear that a horse was going to bite him. Condensation takes place in the process of the formation of a phobia... the unconscious thoughts underlying it representing the symbolic father and his structural absence in the child’s psyche.

*It was with the outbreak of Hans’s illness, and during the analysis, that discrepancies began to make their appearance between what he said and what he thought. This was partly because unconscious material, which he was unable to master all at once, was forcing itself upon him, and, partly because the content of his thoughts provoked reservations on account of his relation to his parents.*<sup>36</sup>

Aged three and three-quarters the most important influence upon the course of Hans’s psycho-sexual development was the birth of his sister, Hanna. This accentuated his relations to his parents and gave him some insoluble problems to think about.<sup>37</sup>

In his seminar on Anxiety, Lacan employs the German word *eingewurzelt*<sup>38</sup> translating as a deeply-rooted or deep-seated mistrust. Evidently, it is not the scalpel which assigns the trapped subject his place; it is the symbolic order which is the field of speech and movement. Professor Freud became the true symbolic father of this family and that is what cured little

Hans.<sup>39</sup> The psychoanalyst suggested to the father that he should give Hans enlightenment in the matter of sex knowledge.<sup>40</sup> Hans’s many unconscious phantasies allow us to appreciate the work, to appreciate the struggle the child has to do in finding his place.

In conclusion and appreciation of Freud’s symbolic discovery therefore, will the child’s anxiety-dream help us in treating psychoanalytically, the complex mental activities of the countless little Hans’s of today? “The old assertion that the increase in nervous disorders is a product of civilization is at least a half-truth. Young people are brought into the demands of

---

<sup>34</sup> Freud, S. *Totem and Taboo and Other Works*. S.E. XIII. (1913 [1912-13]). p. 112.

<sup>35</sup> Lacan, J. *Family Consequences In The Formation Of The Individual*. Translated by Cormac Gallagher. p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> Freud, S. Op. cit. Little Hans. S.E. X. pp. 103-4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 113.

<sup>38</sup> Lacan, J. *Anxiety. Book X*. Translated by Cormac Gallagher. Seminar 7. p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Melman, Charles. Op. cit. p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, S. *Little Hans* Op. cit. p. 28.

civilization by upbringing and example.”<sup>41</sup> As Freud maintains “We have mistakenly imagined the bond between instinct and object in sexual life as being more than it really is”!<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Freud, S. Totem & Taboo. Op. cit. p. 188.

<sup>42</sup> Freud, S. Little Hans. Op. cit. p. 110.