

IN a footnote to the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) Freud defined three stages in the homosexual's libidinal development. There is first a short but intense fixation to the mother, then a period when 'they identify themselves with a woman and take themselves as their sexual object', which constitutes a 'narcissistic basis' from which they proceed to the homosexual position, when they 'look for a young man who resembles themselves and whom they may love as their mother loved them' (p. 145). Later Freud was to describe an 'innate bisexual disposition in man' which he claimed was reflected in the masturbator's identification with both sexes (1908, p. 166).

I believe there is a third position. I refer to that person who 'seduces' members of each sex in order to gain the other's desire of his self. The object of desire is the person's own self, but a self hypercathected as part of an erotic family triangle. I propose to call this individual a trisexual, and I define trisexuality as a state of desire characterized by identification with and seduction of both sexes in order to appropriate genital sexuality by redirecting it into a threesome's love of one.

How is this position imaginable? If the bisexual stance allows identification with both sexes, the trisexual adds to this a libidinally desexualized body, its gender suspended from the categories of sexual difference in order to be converted into a vessel for a transcendent corporeality. In the final stage of trisexual seduction there are three lovers: a man who admires this person, a woman who seeks him and the trisexual himself, who is sufficiently dissociated to cathect aspects of himself as the object of desire. The trisexual's body image is without gender, it is a body stance beyond sexuality or, more accurately, the body before the knowledge of sexuality: a virgin presence, the mother's infant as sexual object.

The seduced other, in the case of a woman, for example, finds herself in a curious struggle. Having engaged in a rather intense mutual seduction with the trisexual, she finds herself in a strange competition to earn some right to perpetuate their erotics. As the trisexual gradually desexualizes the relationship and converts the erotic into the familial, she is suffused with some sense of the uncanny. This has happened before. But where? And with whom? And why is it such a sweet loss and an acceptable conversion of the erotic?

Typically, the trisexual makes himself available to a woman or a man as an object of intense fascination. This person is unusually gifted and sensual. He is insightful and knowledgeable. He is often very interested in a wide range of subjects. At the moment of seduction he shows an unusual degree of interest in his lover to be. If he meets someone at a party, his entire attention is devoted to one person, who feels this attention to be sensually enveloping. He takes the woman to his flat and for the next few days or over a week he is a devoted and expert lover. Indeed his knowledge of erotics is so considerable that he draws increasing attention to himself as a fascinating phenomenon. He slowly desexualizes the relation and gradually what had been a relation between two becomes a collaboration in which two people are absorbed in the wonder of one, the trisexual. This abandonment of sexuality is not abrupt, it is gradually superseded by other things. Instead of making love, for example, he might cook a superb meal and follow it with a discourse on the philosophy of life that leaves the lover rather spellbound. On another evening, he might take his lover to meet friends and there enrich her social life, by introducing her to people of some fame and considerable creativity. In short, his partners feel a sense of increased privilege just to be with him, and the transformation of sexuality into shared interests passes, incredibly enough, almost unnoticed.

Gradually the lover becomes aware of the fact that she is only one of many admirers. But this recognition is not traumatizing. For as he removes himself from her as a boyfriend, he has placed her in a colony of interesting people, all of whom seem in awe of him. Any new lover soon finds that her seduction, though of

course singular in some sense, is typical in another. His friends appear to have been 'seduced' by him, and are happy to have had such an experience. As the trisexual ends a sexual relation with a lover, any narcissistic blow is muted

by her realization that in being loved by him at all she has been placed in very privileged company. Furthermore, she is not just one of many women. For she can see that he has captivated men and women – indeed it looks as if all persons of culture and significance are taken in – so her envy of the others is muted.

Trisexuality differs from ordinary narcissistic self love, as the trisexual seduces both sexes first and then transforms their erotic desire into a reverentially admiring gaze. His power resides in the act of conversion. A compulsively seductive individual, he seduces and appropriates his lovers to become that psychic income that generates his narcissistic wealth, all of it coming from the exchange of the other's desire into the currency of devotion.

To some extent, of course, trisexuality does constitute the competitive presence of the narcissistic element in sexual life. If we consider the male trisexual, he appears to represent the ordinary trace of the positive oedipus complex when he seduces a woman. On the occasion when he seduces a male admirer, he dramatizes a negative oedipus complex. If he seduces both sexes and identifies with each, he appears to be bisexual. Trisexuality might be considered a third form of oedipal engagement in which the formerly repressed narcissistic position emerges to compete with both the positive and negative oedipal motifs. The trisexual's narcissistic self cathexis is so intense that he allows himself to be loved by a woman, or a man, and then dispels the illusion of love and recedes from the fields of eros. But he does not disappear. Instead, he stands at a distance as if he is the embodied memory of what has taken place. This body of desire no longer signifies sexuality but the memory of gratification. It is not accurate to say that he proceeds to take himself as the object of his own love. It is more to the point to say that he loves his function as the curator of memories.

During the course of his analysis, Sandor would describe many intense involvements with people of both sexes. Although he had no overt homosexual relations with men friends, it was clear that he had romances of a latent homosexual kind. As Sandor is a person with a commanding sensibility and striking good looks, many men were drawn to him. His expressiveness, wit, and 'in' knowledge of aesthetics, philosophy, politics and history guaranteed that he was in exceptional demand. In fact he would often show up for his analytic sessions between exciting engagements so that he would rush to see me and flee afterwards to meet up with friends. Although he allowed himself a regular and substantial amount of time to paint, he spent the rest of his time frequenting clubs, exhibitions and friends' houses. Virtually everyone loved him. Every so often he would have an affair with a woman. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that he would have a fling. For usually he would meet a woman at a party or exhibition and take her home where he would make love to her. He prided himself on being a good lover, and it was clear that the women felt they had themselves a good catch. Within a week or two he would, however, decline any further sexual involvement, but would offer in its stead intense friendships. As with his men friends, so with his women ex-lovers: he was virtually always available, extremely helpful, insightful and wonderful company. During years of analysis, according to Sandor, not one woman whom he transformed from lover to friend ever became angry with him or felt cheated by his subsequent sexual refusal and his colony of lovers. Indeed they seemed to count themselves lucky to have met him and to have had such an intense erotic experience, and they were deeply grateful to him that they could continue a compelling friendship.

A schedule of social engagements like Sandor's would exhaust virtually anyone except him. He maintained a silent but rigorous physical regime to keep fit. Every day he would jog for a few miles. Several times a week he would go to a sauna. He ate very carefully and prided himself on his diet. If he ever smoked, he would berate himself in the session.

Over a period of time, his friends became aware of his personal rituals. In fact, they rather added to his uniqueness, and many imitated his regime. Perhaps when they telephoned him and were spoken to by his hearty tape-recorded message, they imagined him either at the sauna, jogging in the park, at a club or preoccupied with a new lover.

Few knew of his occasional and private anguish, characterized by intense longing for a particular woman whom he found it impossible to seduce. Over the course of the analysis, he reported at least three such thwarted loves. They were exceedingly tantalizing and, like Sandor himself, had 'lovers' of both sexes, but in the end they remained genial isolates who withdrew their body selves from the circuit of copulation. Once, with one such woman, he managed to sleep the night with her, but the possibility of actual intercourse never arose, although in her embraces, kisses and erotic verbalizations, Sandor found himself pushed into a kind of mute erotic frenzy. In the wake of this moment he found himself greatly relieved that the woman still offered him her presence, for he was aware that beneath the veil of their passion resided an intense longing and sadness. Eventually he reckoned that such lusts for a partner constituted a curious act of love of one's double, and the failure to seduce the other acquainted him with that sadness that generated much of his trisexual activity.

Sandor's life history gives us a clue to one of the reasons for the formation of trisexual love. Both of his parents had suffered grievous losses in their childhood and each was deeply nostalgic. Each parent would tell Sandor of their past in great detail, giving their memory a certain intrusive presence in contemporary life. And each parent nursed the other with meticulous care. In subsequent years, Sandor was aware of an intense mutual need and affection between his parents, one so absorbing that neither parent created room for relating to a third person. In a way, an oedipus complex depends to some extent on parental creation of an oedipal space and, if such a space does not exist, then the child's oedipal complex will be deformed. In fact, Sandor's parents were very loving people and I am convinced that he had a close relation to his mother, but they conducted their family

life along bilateral lines of affection. If mother was loving father, then she appeared oblivious of Sandor. By our reconstructive reckoning, Sandor turned first to the mother and then to the father, to form a romance in the oedipal manner, but neither parent knew how to provide for this kind of love. Sandor was never given the status of rival, as the threesome of the family was never conceived. He dealt with this disappointment in object love by turning to his own body as the object of desire. To do so required an extraordinary intensification of imaginary life, and Sandor did this in his oedipal and latency period, always imagining himself to be the heroic object of the other's desire.

Some of Sandor's friends joked that he could have anyone he wanted in a love life since his many conquests amazed them, but on several occasions a friend would comment on his apparent indifference to partnering with someone. He seemed to have no need for the other, at least no personal need, although his active social life obscured this phenomenon to all but a few of his very closest of friends.

In analysis it became clear how essential he believed the trisexual position was for him. Passion, heterosexual and homosexual, was only an instrument to entice the desire of the other. His essential aim was what followed: a reversal of the oedipal situation so that both parents were now in competition with one another for the sexual love of the child. The trisexual's sexuality is the immaculate conception of pregenital sexuality. It is the family picture before the knowledge of sexuality erases innocence and consigns the early family to the vaults of memory. On these preoedipal grounds there are three objects of desire: the mother (heterosexual), the father (homosexual) and the child self (narcissistic). The evolution through bisexuality to apparent choice of the self as the preferred object represents the trisexual's journey in early life: from oedipal frustration back to preoedipal gratification. The aim of such a preoedipal situation is to compel the parents to love the child on his own terms: to be endlessly admiring and in awe of his presence. Thus, to some extent, one aim of trisexuality is to defeat sexuality and to transform it into admiration.

From the genitals to the eyes.

From intercourse to mutual gaze.

Trisexuality thus expresses a certain kind of infant triumph over the terms of adult sexuality.

By defeating the oedipal space, by transcending a space that never imagined him, never admitted him or allowed him to win (achieve certain identifications) and lose (lessen certain libidinal attachments), the trisexual experiences a compensatory power. As we shall see, he embodies in his being a psychic function, and in becoming a function, he personalizes that which is profoundly unconscious and makes it available to the other.

Although he always supplied his thwarted sexual lovers with enough personal gratification to mute serious disappointment, it was nonetheless true that Sandor's friends felt themselves engaged in a curious competition with his body self. In the instant of his apparent love of their body selves, the lover must have felt hopeful and gratified. In the subtlest of ways, Sandor withdrew his sexual cathexis of their body and replaced it with interest. I am sure this did not escape the lover's attention, but possibly his shift of sexual desire from the other's body to his own body may have mitigated their sense that sexuality was leaving the scene, so to speak. Sandor's very considerable expertise in making love was actually an object of interest in its own right. After the tide of orgasmic passion the lover would be in retrospective awe of Sandor's range of sexual caresses and erotic knowledge. His own body self would then become the object of intense interest and gradually the twosome would act out a fantasy: that Sandor's exquisite and passionate expertise could never be given over to the other's desire. Sandor would keep it in a safe place, within himself, not for his own pleasure, but for storage against the inclement weathering of life's disillusion. This augmented the view of Sandor as a remarkable personage since he appeared to take nothing for himself, although he took everything into himself. From his accounts it appeared as if many people counted it a privilege to have been loved by him in the first place. From this place he would cast the shadow of the object on the other.

What is the psychic function of the trisexual's particular form of narcissism? What does he bring to the other?

As each of us has been the object of an intense illusion we might say that we have all been the object of a universal seduction. We have all been the object of maternal love and care, just as each of us has been weaned from this attachment. Is it not possible that the oedipus complex constitutes a double deception? We are invited by our own intrinsic identifications into the illusion of equality of power with a father or mother, only to discover our impotence. And yet isn't the process a procedure which substitutes oedipal desire for preoedipal desire? In desiring to compete and to win, even if one does not win the oedipal struggle, one idiom of desire – the aim to achieve oedipal victory – slips in place of another form of desire, that wish to be in the solicitous and comprehensive care of the mother.

I believe it is inaccurate to say that it is sublimation that resolves the oedipal conflict. Rather, it is participation in the conflict that suggests eventual resolution. Those who cannot resolve the oedipal conflict are probably those who were never admitted into that space in the first place. Not only are they fixed, as is Sandor, in the domain of preoedipal sexuality, but they are also denied that experience of losing, of a generative triumph of the parent's world over the child's life, which, in my view, is an experience essential to repression of earlier forms of desire.

Sandor was denied access to oedipal space and conflict by the symbiotic earnestness of his parents who loved him and cared for him as the future that embodies the past. Both parents were so deeply involved in the reciprocal recollection of their relation to their parents that their memories suffused their relation to Sandor. Although they gave him undivided attention, they often absorbed him in nostalgic, though painful, recollections from the past. Sandor's true oedipal opponents were the ghosts of his ancestors who displaced him in his relation to his parents. But like his parents he eroticized the function of memory.

Sandor needs to put a present lover into the past. He prefers

to reflect on the lover than to live with her in the present. She must become a memory. From there he can love her without anxiety, the anxiety that an intense involvement in the present will divorce him from affiliation with his parents' erotics. He repeats, then, what his parents seem to have accomplished. He enlivens the present, through a love relation, in order to give it sufficient vividness for it to survive like a beacon in the past. Like his parents, who were preoccupied with their pasts, Sandor vigorously uses the present to create his past.

So Sandor is left to bear the erotic function of memory. He reacquaints his lovers with some prior knowledge, as each of them is revisited by traces of their own infant desire and by the apparitional appearance of that extraordinary object that conferred privilege and gratification in a self-contained moment of time. By using erotic capability the trisexual invites the other into genital sexuality in order to dispel it and compel it to disappear from two-person relating. The trisexual converts erotic passion into a living mnemonic presence. By soliciting the other's desire, he becomes the master of the other's sexual destiny and signifies the mortality of ecstasy. His body bears the memory of the other's gratifications, and is not the object of desire but its mnemonic province. In this respect he has understood the parents' parenting to embody the trace of their parents and their grandparents, as his mother and father unconsciously testify to their need for early maternal and paternal care. This is an erotics of absence.

'I am the memory of what you desire.'

'I am the memory of your desire.'

'I am the desire of your memory.'

In the sweet secrecy of the early loves that are lost to us the trisexual finds his voice. He speaks to us in that place where each of us knows of the love of mother and mother love.

THE NARCISSIST AND THE TRISEXUAL

If trisexuality is a form of narcissism, how does it differ from narcissism proper? The question requires that we consider how it is that a narcissist conducts his erotic life.

Although it is a conventional explanation – in that it is not

particularly psychoanalytic – I think it is useful to begin by establishing that the narcissist appears to love only himself. If we imagine that the narcissist's relation to himself has been a loving one and one of some considerable duration, then we are closer to the contemporary psychoanalytic understanding of the narcissistic personality if we say that after a while the narcissist no longer looks into the mirror, but assumes the other to be the mirror. Kohut (1971) has written about this form of mirror transference. The narcissist's fragile assumption of the intrinsic beauty of the self differentiates this particular individual from the trisexual. Where the narcissist assumes love the trisexual works actively to seduce the other. Modell (1969) has written an account of the narcissist's effect on the other; in particular, he acquaints us with how boring such a person can be. As the narcissist assumes he has all that is needed, he expends no effort. He seeks no object. Objects are assumed to be part of the self system, a point Kohut makes in his formation of the concept of the 'self-object'. This assumption is not true of a trisexual. Nor is the trisexual either overtly self preoccupied or boring. Indeed, he is usually very interesting, highly seductive and interested in the other. If anything, he plays Echo to Narcissus.

Further, narcissistic characters tend to seduce the other in passive ways, by presenting the other with the image of the narcissist's self. One patient who fits this category of person tends to place himself next to a woman, such that she is meant to fall in love with his simple presence. She is invited to be curious about him and to ask him about his life. He obliges by spilling out his life history, which is fairly interesting, and gradually she falls in love with the picture he gives her of himself. It is my view that such narcissistic characters do not yield themselves to the other in a relationship; instead they give the other a picture of the self that is equivalent to the object that the narcissist holds of himself. It is a subtle distinction, but an important one, to note that the narcissist puts an image to the woman, one of his own making, so that as she contemplates him, she falls in love – if she does at all – with the image of the self. At all times, the narcissist is in control and does not surrender to true intimacy. He insists they go hand in

hand in life with him leading. If a woman attempts to seduce the narcissist, and if her seduction is object-differentiated so that she is not simply admiring the narcissist's self, then the narcissistic character can become panicked.

With one patient, this became clear when a woman who was very attracted to him also had very different views of him than he had of himself. A struggle ensued. Either she accepted his image of himself as the only possible one, or the relation was to be over. Fight as she might for her image of him, this was effectively refused. Each day when this patient came to a session he would say: 'Can you believe that she said this about me?' Or, 'she thinks I am like . . .'. He was so overcome with narcissistic rage over her different view of him that he was never able to consider the merits of her perception.

For the narcissistic character, either the other falls in love with the narcissist's image of himself – as is he – or there will be no partnership. The image of the self and the self are, of course, not the same; indeed, the narcissist's image of self is ultimately a defence against facing the reality of the self. To be sure, it is true that the trisexual is equally in dread of intimate partnership, but where the narcissist gives the other a picture of himself to be adored, the trisexual gives the other an encapsulated experience to be remembered.

The narcissist: 'In it you have found me wonderful.'

The trisexual: 'In me you have found it wonderful.'

The narcissistic character visits the other with need and invites the partner to share in his fulfilment. The trisexual visits the other with memory, with an ache, a jolt, that awakens the loss of something known to the other. The trisexual suggests to the other the intensity of mother love, when the nature of being feels inspired by eros itself. To be the memory of the other's desire, to convert eros from generative procreativity (division into further multiples) into the desire of memory (a unity) is the trisexual's aim.

What family has Sandor created for himself? To him it is not the post-oedipal family, a differentiated group of people with independent desires and interests who are capable of mutuality.

Sandor's experience of his group is as a pre-oedipal family. As he converts his lovers into friends, as he transports them back from differentiated erotics to the spiritualism of uncanny fusion states, he penetrates frozen memories and de-represses through acting out the affective state of self in early object life.

As Gear, Hill and Liendo (1983) have suggested, however, one of the neglected features in our literature on narcissism is the degree of power and authority that the narcissist aims to exert in his object relations. By inviting the other to fall in love with his image of himself, the narcissist aims to control the other's eventual effect upon him. Behind the question, 'Who has the power to establish the version of the self?' lies another: 'Who has the right to determine the fate of the child self?' It is my view that because of early conflicts in relation to the mother, the narcissistic character is determined to appropriate the mother's position. He takes over her function and mothers himself in an intense and rigid manner. We all assume some aspects of the mother's idiom of caretaking, in that continuing process of relating to oneself as an object of our own consideration and care (as I have explored above, in chapter 3), but in the narcissistic character's case, there is considerable frustration and rage with this mother, so in assuming his own care of himself, the narcissist feels a sense of triumph at gaining control and power over the sources of self esteem.

But where the narcissist gains power by assuming control over his version of himself (and all that comes with it), the trisexual finds power by refusing authority or direct influence. It is not in what he acquires or possesses but in what he gives up that the trisexual gains position. He finds power in appearing to be Echo. He gives to the other, but in so doing, limits both his function and the other's influence. He becomes the testimony of memory, the witness of history, the representation of a repressed area of the other's self. Former lovers look upon him as storing valued parts of themselves, and when they meet up, there is always this secret pleasure of shared memory.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

I often puzzled when listening to Sandor's account of his many different lovers, why there was so little protest from anyone. Didn't someone feel exploited? Certainly I think he used people.

Then I realized that each of his lovers knew of his specialness in advance. They knew this before they became the object of his seductions. Further, they understood that he was admired and 'loved' by persons of both sexes and no one was in any doubt that Sandor enjoyed being himself. I believe that his lovers were predisposed both to being loved by a **unique person**, by a person of glamour and sensuality, who signified a particular kind of erotics, and to the narcissistic achievement of having 'had' such a fabulous love – to the satisfaction of having used him to their own narcissistic benefit.

Sandor acts out in the course of a few days the whole of preoedipal life. Lovers are born into the relation. They are carried off to a special place (his flat) where they are the object of a kind of bizarre maternal preoccupation. As this love life takes place between two adults, it would appear that mutual love is gratified through genital sexuality, but this is an unconscious representation of an intense feeding situation. As the lover is 'weaned' from this erotics, she is placed in a society where she regards this Sandor-mother from some remove. There appears to be no loss, no regret, no anger. Only a sense of wonder and gratitude. Clearly one can see here how a person like Sandor tries to utilize the illusions of unconditional love to effect a delusion: that such love is indeed there, so much so that the child feels no pain, no loss, no rage. Only by distorting preoedipal life, by exploiting narcissistic self states, can Sandor perpetuate his effect upon his lovers and friends. I think it is likely that Sandor's lovers are aware of the fate that awaits them, and perhaps they too seek an intensification of the past as they know that their love affair with Sandor will only be momentary. Amongst fragile people, or persons who seek to find evidence of the presence of unconditional love, a Sandor can ply his trade. For some he is a second coming.

A trisexual is a rare but unmistakable person. I have distinguished him from an ordinary narcissistic character. It is im-

portant to emphasize that such an individual is quite glamorous, extremely popular, and known to be enamoured of himself without being obviously grandiose. A clinician working with such an individual might seek respite from the complexity of the person's character by assuring himself that a trisexual is actually very shallow. But such a countertransference judgement would, in my view, reflect a wish on the analyst's part to simplify the complex and reduce the difficulties of working with a trisexual. For such a person is genuinely intelligent, gifted, well educated, insightful, and socially cohesive. He does not 'come across' as a Don Juan. It is quite understandable that he is often the object of considerable speculation. Try as people might to understand him, to place him in some collectively known position, they fail. His ability to survive knowing is part of his mystery. So, speculations that he is 'gay' or 'bisexual' do not stick. No one really knows.

Can we say, then, that people who fall in love with a Sandor are in any sense of the term in love? The answer must be no. No, if we mean in the mature sense of love. But love does seem to be around. It is there as memory, as each of us bears some trace of early object love. Those who 'fall' in love with a Sandor commit themselves to something of a mistaken act of identity. Perhaps these people have an experience rather like all of us do, one time or another, when, whilst walking along the street in a crowd, we see a face in the distance. Surely it cannot be! It is X, a childhood friend, whom we haven't seen in thirty years. The heart races. We pick up speed. We fumble for words to speak our introduction after such a long time has elapsed. And in the penultimate moment, as we cry out their name, we find . . . our mistake. Yet we have also seen our dear friend, and as we walk away from this scene, no doubt disappointed (even if slightly relieved), we may find ourselves remembering the many moments spent with our childhood chum. The same experience, although lived out in an obviously different way, can occur when we see someone who reminds us of a loved one who has died. It can be a shocking but profound mistake.

Those who fall for Sandor commit themselves to the error of

mistaken identity. The feelings in the lover, however, are often profound and intense, just as in the case of the mistaken identity above. Sandor knows this. It is his function. He knows that he is a figment of memory's desire, and in this he finds

a sense of power, significance and compensation.

On a rare and unannounced occasion, Sandor would visit one of his former lovers. In a night of intense erotics he would come out of the past and provide a lover with a vivid visitation of former gratifications. As he left early in the morning, his partner would feel she had been inside an intense erotic dream, in which the past had been relived. On these rare occasions, the lovers share not just the memory of eros, but the eros of memory. It is in that psychic place that the trisexual lives and functions, as the imagined keeper of memory.

II Moods