

Review Article

Adolescence with Freud and Flaubert[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The text approaches two fundamental aspects of the adolescent crisis from the works of Sigmund Freud and Gustave Flaubert: their encounter with their object in desire, pleasure, sexual act, and the causes the detachment from parental authority and their effects. A study was made on the work of Flaubert on the causes of the enigma, which the author suggests in his *Memoirs of a Madman: Am I another or myself?* That feeling of strangeness the adolescent experiences on waking up in a dream, with a new feeling and desire of the love object. The ardent desire of being like a grown-up, and the motions towards their parents, influence decisions for which the young are not prepared, given their cradled education and the unsatisfactory answers to their infant sexual investigation. Lacan notes that the sexual relationship does not exist. Freud rates love as being narcissistic and childish. The first amorous manifestations, given the fantasy that cloaks them always remain the same, as explained by Flaubert and Lacan's comment to Wedekind, in *The Spring Awakening*. In childhood the enjoyment of body is not involved. For this reason, it is so simple, the adolescent would be a representation of the division of the subject, the cut made by their unconscious, which their body, in certain cases, will carry the marks. They will be surprised, puzzled by this new desire that produces their unconscious to step towards the sexual act.

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La adolescencia con Freud y Flaubert

RESUMEN

El texto aborda dos aspectos fundamentales de la crisis en la adolescencia desde las obras de Sigmund Freud y Gustave Flaubert: su encuentro con su objeto del deseo, el goce, el acto sexual y las causas del desprendimiento de la autoridad paterna y sus efectos. Se estudiaron en la obra de Flaubert las causas del enigma que el autor deja entrever en su texto *Memorias de un loco: ¿Soy Otro o yo mismo?*, ese sentimiento de extrañeza en el adolescente enfrentado en el

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despertar de un sueño, con un sentido y un deseo nuevo del objeto de amor. El deseo ardiente de ser como un grande y las mociones hacia los padres, influyen las decisiones para las que el joven no está preparado, dadas la educación acunada y las respuestas a sus investigaciones sexuales infantiles no satisfechas. Lacan puntúa que la relación sexual no existe y Freud puntúa el amor como siendo narcisista e infantil; las primeras manifestaciones amorosas, dado el fantasma que las recubre, continúan siendo las mismas, lo que se explica a través de Flaubert y del comentario de Lacan a Wedekind, en *El despertar de la primavera*. En la infancia el cuerpo de goce no está comprometido, por eso es tan simple; el adolescente sería ya una representación de la división del sujeto, del corte hecho por su inconsciente, del cual su cuerpo en ciertos casos portara las marcas, estará sorprendido, desconcertado por ese deseo nuevo que produce su inconsciente hasta el paso al acto sexual.

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In *Memoirs of a Madman*, Gustave Flaubert, in relating his awakening to love, enunciates an enigma: these pages “enclose an entire soul – is it mine, is it that of another?”¹

The author is 17 years old, an age when no one is serious (Rimbaud²), leaving us the task of imagining the reasons. Our wish here will be precisely to begin to isolate these reasons. In other words, nothing of what is in the field of the Other is serious, neither the expected thought, nor the scheduled project; rather the subject that wanders.² The dimension of the new, the unprecedented, emerges suddenly in this young man intoxicated by the awakening of desire and love, affected at the same time by the boredom and melancholy that also constitute the hallmark of adolescence. We then have to ask what it is that the awakening of love introduces like an uprising in the subject, that surprises him and pushes him to his first act?

Childhood love

First observation: love, according to Flaubert, would be plural. “There are so many loves of our life for man! At the age of four, love of horses, the sun, flowers, shiny weapons, the way soldiers look. At ten, love for girls who play with them, at thirteen, the love for a big woman with full bosom, since I remember that what all adolescents love to distraction is the breasts of a woman, white and matte (...). I almost fainted when I saw for the first time the naked breast of a woman. At fourteen or fifteen, the love of a young girl who arrives at your house; more than a sister, less than a lover. At sixteen, another woman's love until he's twenty-five. Then one loves perhaps the woman he'll marry”.¹

Then there would be the loves. Does psychoanalysis adhere to the writer at this point? Freud confirms it in a first thesis, stated in his *Three essays of a sexual theory*: The sexual and loving life of the child is characterised by the absence of the trait of otherness.³ Although the difference of the sexes can be recognised in the imaginary, it is not in the plane of desire or pleasure. In other words, childhood friendship is not distinguished from childhood loves. It is true that they may be important; children in preschool have “lovers”, without the body they enjoy being engaged. Freud, however,

recognised the existence of a sexual life in the child, as well as in the adult, except that the realisation of this desire does not go through the encounter with the Other in their sexual difference.

To demonstrate the fact, we see that in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud says desire in the child is completely egoistic.⁴ Self-love in the child is unlimited,⁴ a radical narcissism, and in this the child shows us the truth of love, always narcissistic underneath. The child, agitated by the joys that go through his body, wishes to repeat them without that desire having even turned to the Other sex. The body of enjoyment is sufficient for itself, and if it passes through the other, it will be short-circuiting its dimension of otherness. Movement games have an “extraordinary attraction” for the child, Freud tells us. “What uncle has not helped to fly a child across the room with him at full speed with arms outstretched, or swinging on his knees and extending his leg abruptly or lifting him in the air and releasing him as if withdrawing support? Children shout with joy, complain without fatigue, repetition”. “... when they see the gymnastic prowess in the circus, this memory is activated. The hysterical access of some children reproduces such feats, executed skilfully. It is not uncommon that in the course of such movement games, innocent in themselves, sexual sensations will also have been awakened. The hugs”.⁴ Thus, it is the hugs of childhood and other clashes together which, in relation to the others, will cause the sexual emotions of our children to sprout. Freud puts it this way, “The first sexual motions often find their root in fighting games and fights in the childhood years”.⁴ In Jensen's *Gradiva*, of the childhood love of the young archaeologist Norbert Hanold and his beautiful Zoé, he says, “again, (...) friends, meeting us every day to run together and, sometimes even, to exchange punches or kicks”.⁵

Childhood love is not that of a man and a woman, although his body calls to enjoy, driven by his ardent desire to be grown up, “to obtain things like grown-ups”.⁴ A subject is marked by his childhood loves without the narcissistic wounds letting him ask what it is to be a man, and what it is a woman wants. These loves are simple; the misunderstandings of sex are heard less, each one will be able to find their each one, and leave them without being very divided. It is another love that the child glimpses: that of his parents and, eager to question

them about their secret, he tries to surprise them in their act. An act from which he knows he was born, not to say that it has been a fragment as Pascal Quignard remembers.⁶

The narcissistic enjoyment then agitates the body of the child early, who will want to repeat it through his games, going to the others whom he recognises as his peers, to make a social bond of this first enjoyment that he lacks and makes him imagine himself in the place of Other. There is the reason for the hugs of childhood. The desire to be grown up is first of all the desire to access this supposed enjoyment in the Other. Freud insists on this with his *Leonardo de Vinci*: “When children feel, in the course of their sexual investigation, that the adult, in his mysterious and important domain, is capable of a great thing that he is prevented from knowing and doing, an impetuous desire is awakened in them of being capable of the same thing”.⁷ Freud also recalls, “Children’s opinions about the nature of marriage (...) are initially expressed in children’s games, in which together they do what constitutes the state of being married”.⁸

Childish love may then be true, but the act of love will be a semblance. The sexual theories of the child have consequences. The most important games for the posterior neurosis are the “playing doctors” and the “playing at mummies and daddies” games. And at puberty, “ghosts cling to abandoned childhood sexual investigations”.⁹ It is true that the child does not establish the act of love as a sexual encounter, but the style of love, that which man has,¹⁰ not the one the person wants to give himself, to restore his self, but the one that makes him a subject caused by his first object choices, although still without knowing it, which, being the basis of his fundamental phantom, will not vary. We could say then that love is childish⁹ and the intimate friendships⁹ of childhood are already whisperings of what will be the future awakening of the subject to love. In *Gradiva*, Freud reveals and interprets the passage of Norbert Hanold when he comes across his childhood love. He surprises her by clapping her⁹ like in the time of the hugs. Lacan presages the loving style of the little Hans, who “in a passive position (...), is of the generation of 1945; charming young people who wait for the companies to arrive at their door or, in other words, to take their trousers down”.¹¹

A new love?

But then, would there never be anything new in love? There would not be in terms of the cause and the phantasmal hook of love. Clinical practice with the adolescent reminds us to what extent the subject is discovered there; Another as oneself. Flaubert also distinguishes loves, knowing about his hallmark and the new desire that surprises the adolescent before whom, he himself almost faints, to disappear, and to be rubbed out^d before the object of his new desire. It is then a new trajectory of the drive that does not change, the new is in the way the unconscious surprises and divides the

subject, is its statute and its separation logic.¹² The adolescent will be surprised, baffled by that new desire produced by his unconscious. Lacan extracts this thesis from the 1891 piece by playwright Wedekind, *Spring Awakening*, “for boys to make love with girls is impossible without the awakening of their dream”.¹³ Adolescent desire is formed via the work of deciphering the unconscious, in spite of the subject itself. It is against the excess of enjoyment that the event of puberty takes place, which the unconscious will encrypt and will make a new sense from which an unprecedented desire will emerge. The unconscious, as muse, whispers to the subject the idea of being in love and the act of love via the real path of the dream. This is why the subject will discover Other than himself, even in his body, embodying the division of the subject disappearing like Flaubert in front of the new object of his desire. Will embarrassment as a form of disappearance of the subject not be the adolescent’s *princeps* affection? The adolescent would be a representation of the division of the subject, of the separation, of what makes him his unconscious, and of which his body in this case will bear the marks, as we sometimes come across in practice.

Given this, let us now see with Flaubert the consequences of that new desire that inhabits him. In the first place, the author confides that a *new meaning* is expanding in his world. Thus, when he tells us about his inaugural meeting with a woman, not young, on a beach in Picardie, he writes, “When (...) she passed near me, I heard the water falling from her clothes and the rustle of her walking, my heart beat violently, I lowered my eyes, the blood rose to my head – I choked – I felt that body of a half-naked woman pass near me with the scent of the wave. (...) I was transfixed and bemused, as if Venus had descended from her pedestal and begun to walk. It was like I felt my heart for the first time, I felt something mystical, strange, like a *new meaning*. I was bathed in infinite, tender feelings, lulled with hazy images, waves. I was at once taller and prouder. I was loving”.¹⁴ He continues, “Alas! Alas! The wave washed away Maria’s footprints. It was first of all a state of surprise and admiration; mystical sensation, the whole idea of voluptuousness aside. (...) I felt the astonishment of a heart that feels itself beat for the first time. Like when the first man realised all his faculties. What did he dream? Impossible to say; I felt new and alien to myself, a voice came to my soul: a nothingness, a fold of her dress, a smile, her foot, the smallest and most insignificant word struck me as supernatural things. I had a whole day to dream. I followed her footsteps along the wall, the rustle of her clothes made me palpitate with happiness”.

Flaubert is effectively affected, from a new sense given to things, but which in principle is enigmatic. What he dreams about, he tells us, is impossible to say. Only one thing is certain: he experiences himself Other than himself, new and strange. Flaubert frequently uses the signifier “sensation”, which we find coming from Rimbaud’s pen entitling one of his poems in which he confides his first adolescent emotions. As for Flaubert, he tells us here that he needs time to understand what these sensations were bringing with them. This could give us some clarification of Lacan’s thoughts in Wedekind, “it is by proposing an enigma that one finds the meaning of meaning. The meaning of meaning is that it is linked to the boy’s enjoyment as prohibited. Certainly not so as to prohibit the

^d Like Dalio, disappearing in the Jean Renoir film “La Règle du jeu/Rules of the Game”, when faced with the imaginary object of his desire (see *Desire and its Interpretation*, unpublished, lecture of 10/12/58 in: Lacan J. *Le Séminaire, Livre VI (The Seminar – Book 6)*. Paris: by Seuil; 1994).

sexual relation, but to fix it in the non-relation it is equivalent to in the real".¹⁵

For Flaubert, Maria is the *Prohibited*,^e a woman who is accompanied by her husband, in whom the young man also sees the mother. "Maria had a daughter. She loved her, hugged her, bored her with caresses and kisses. How I would have welcomed one of those kisses cast like pearls, like those placed on the child's head. Maria nursed her – one day she uncovered her bosom and offered her breast. A plump, round bosom, brown skin and blue veins under that lustrous flesh. I had not seen a naked woman before. Oh! The ecstasy effect of the sight of that breast".

Maria, the Forbidden, trace of whom does not remain, but a trace; "The wave washed away Maria's footsteps", "my gaze remained on the footprint of her steps". He had a whole day to dream, not without the sexual, onanist joy playing a part, which he describes with this metaphor, "I went back to my hostel room – I wanted to sleep: I always listened to the waves of the sea next to the boat, I heard the oars falling, I listened to the voice of Maria: I had fire in my veins, everything happened again before me – the walk in the afternoon, the night, – I saw Maria in bed – and I stopped there. Because the rest made me tremble. My soul boiled with lava, I was beset by all of that and lying on my back I watched my candle burn, its flickering halo reflected large on the ceiling; in a senseless stupor I saw the melted wax flow around the brass candlestick and the blackened wick lengthen in the flame".¹⁶

Separation

What to say about all this? First of all, there is a *nucleus of love*, point zero from which the subject can let himself be carried away by his reverie of infinite love. With Freud and Flaubert, we recognise this nucleus of the dream of love: we could say a first *jouissance*. It is under the basis of the first choice of object of forbidden love, in other words the mother, that the young man turned to other women who were not very different. The awakening to love in adolescence is first and foremost an awakening. "The choice of object is made as a representation", Freud tells us, "and the adolescent's sexual life extends into fantasies; in which the infantile inclinations reinforced by the pressure of somatic energy reappear, with a frequency according to laws; the sexual motion of the child towards the parents, of the son towards the mother and of the daughter towards the father". Then he continues, "By overcoming and rejecting these incestuous fantasies, one of the psychic realisations of the period of puberty is fulfilled: the crossing of parental authority, the opposition between the new and the old generation is created, indispensable for cultural progress".^f

^e In this point Flaubert has to be associated with Rimbaud, on shuddering on passing a "young lady with enchanting airs/under the shadow of the hideous false collar of her father" (Roman. In: Complete Works. p. 199), or also in "Stolen Kisses" by François Truffaut: the desire of Antoine for the wife of his sponsor, Mr. Tabar).

^f See the comments by Lacan on the "centre of the dream" on the response by Jacques Lacan to a question by Marcel Ritter, 26 January 1975. Letters from the Freudian school (Lettres de l'École Freudienne). 1976;(18).

This is what we wanted to underline and develop further. The awakening of childhood ghosts at puberty and the first choice of object will have a double consequence: not only the rejection of these incestuous fantasies, but also the opposition to parental authority. That could give us a new outlook on the generational conflicts that make up adolescence. The subject will not reject his parents; rather it is the extent of the incestuous love he has for them that he has to reject. Only, what are the reasons for the opposition between the new and the old generation?

Freud tells us his reason here: The transference of parental authority and in other texts, requires a happy consequence for the subject: an autonomy of the spirit. We deduce then, that the transference of parental authority is first of all a separation with respect to the Other supposed to know. The discourse of this Other is coloured by the aches and pains of old age, inconsistency, betrayal by the *berquinades*¹⁷ of wet nurses the Other wanted to stuff him with to avoid his embarrassing questions. Faced with the two great childhood questions of, "How are children made?" and "What is death?", the Other will always have difficulty responding. "The child refuses to believe the information given to him, (...) rejects the stork fable for example, so rich in mythological meaning, (and) its autonomy of the spirit dates from this act of disbelief. (...) The child often feels in serious opposition to adults and (...) does not forgive them in truth to have been, on this occasion, deceived about the truth".^g

Despite the ineffable feeling of betrayal that opens the relationship to the Other, the child then pretends to believe every man has "the need to rely on any authority", and this "need is so imperious that for them the world falters if this authority becomes threatened".¹⁸ This transference and rejection of authority is awakened in adolescence. The adolescent has to separate himself at the same time from his first choices of object and from the parental Other as knowing. His world falters. They told him unbelievable stories; he forgets that he asked for them to be repeated and he tells them later to his own offspring, even though these questions, by structure, remain unanswered. That is why Freud in his *Civilization and its Discontents* advises that it is better not to coddle the child with many illusions about the world, as the cold experience of disenchantment awaits him.¹⁸

It may be a first erection or a birth in childhood, which will produce the question, "Where do children come from?". In puberty, the real will be the new libido, driving the adolescent, beyond masturbation to the enjoyment of the sexual act via the Other. In both cases, a traumatic real and the disappointments will measure the inconsistency of the Other with their questions. The adolescent's opposition responds to the child's sense of betrayal. In the midst of love and new sensations we find deep disappointment, sign of a non-sexual relationship. Let's say it with Lacan, in the preface of *Wedekind*: the ado-

^g The word "berquinade" refers to the writer Arnaud Berquin, who created the genre, with the suffix "-ade". His works are sentimental in character and a bit childish. The term is used in order to say, "it seems that this prologue is a "berquinade" Can one be trapped by such horrors!" Cami Pierre Henri, 1884–1958, French humourist. Dupanloup or the wonders of love).

lescent will perceive on his own, *this first time* that sexuality makes a hole in reality.¹⁹

Would the first times be different from the first failures? The experience acquired by the subject of the non-existence of sexual relationship and the fact that the parents will always be too old to be able to answer how to be a man or how to be a woman, even how to love, and that the sexual act achieved or not, never recreates that infinite love²⁰ fantasised about. On the side of knowledge, then, as much as on the side of the act, it is difficult to become a man or a woman. Here, the inconsistency of the Other, [text scored out], about the questions of life, death and sex is revealed. Love, death, how to be a man or a woman, is what torments adolescents; without answers, they are pushed to verify through action. Flaubert testifies about the first woman he sleeps with at the age of 15. "A woman presents herself to me. I take her – and I leave her arms full of indignation, of bitterness – but I could do the "Lovelace d'estaminet",²¹ I had completed the task -the vice- and I had been praised. He talked about women and lovers. From that woman – I caught hate; she came to me – I left her; she gave me smiles that I hated like a repellent grimace (...). I wondered if those were the delights I had dreamed of, those transports of fire imagined in the virginity of that tender and childlike heart – Is that it? Is it right that after that cold enjoyment there should not be something more sublime, broader, something divine – that makes one collapse into ecstasy?"²² And it is indeed a bottomless pit that opens up for him, where he wished for the endless horizon.^h He adds, "whole hours, my head between my hands looking at the floor of my study or a spider that makes its web on our teacher's chair".²³ And "Fatigue takes over, I doubt everything. Young I was old, my heart had wrinkles and seeing elders still alive, full of enthusiasm and beliefs, I laughed bitterly at myself, so young, so disillusioned with life, love, glory, God, everything that exists, everything that can be. I had, however, a natural horror before embracing this faith in nothingness. At the edge of the well, I closed my eyes – I fell".²³

Tedium and weariness reveal the cold irony added to their burning passions.²³ The act of love, however real and desired its benefits, is deceptive, and our man takes action. He will be exiled from the sexual relationship in which he wanted to ensure a plus of being and the discourse of the Other will be reduced to his lie. Can the plan of the universe and the duties of man be revoked? And if your eyes have allowed you to guess a dream of the soul, as a child frightened by an imaginary ghost, close your eyes without daring to look. Open them, frail and proud man, poor ant that you climb with difficulty your grain of dust, you say free and great, (...)! You, free! Since your birth, subjected to paternal diseases seed of all your defects (...). Why were you born? Did you want to be? Were you consulted? (...) As big as you are, you were dirtier than saliva and the most foul of urine, you suffered metamorphosis like a worm, you came to the world, almost lifeless, crying, screaming and closing your eyes, hating that sun you are now calling".²³

^h Translation note: Lovelace, perverse and cynical seducer; estaminet, a small café bar, particularly in the north of France.

Where the young man wanted to love to be a man, he falls into the non-sense of existence, and the unanswered question that he had asked at an early stage, "Why was I born?". Flaubert shows us that in love, the subject will wake up again to the lack of a meaning in the Other. The irony in the non-sense of existence is in accord with that new meaning that is the love and desire of Another thing.

According to Freud, the adolescent takes advantage of the rebellion and his courage to say No, not deceived. He will denounce the lies of the Other, even if, as interpreted by Lacan, it is the nature of the revolutionaries, secretly, to desire a master.²³ In as far as, according to Freud, they remember their teachers, it would be worth mitigating here: "We are on the lookout for their foibles as well as their great merits, (...), equally disposed to love and to hatred, to criticism and to worship of them".²³ Opposing the Other requires that this Other makes an appearance, and that the latter agrees to make way for the new, name of the adolescent according to Hannah Arendt,²⁴ without which, it is wandering that could threaten the subject, the adolescent is left dangling between "foreboding" and "making mistakes".²⁵

In *Leonard de Vinci*, Freud salutes the courage of having renounced the father.²⁶ In regard to himself, he notes that he could not have invented psychoanalysis except on the condition that he dared to refute neurological theories. "Understanding that the work of the first name in German neuropathology had no more relation to reality than an 'Egyptian' dream book sold in popular bookstores, was painful, but it helped me to demolish a new side of that naive belief in Authority".²⁵ How can one not be reduced to wandering,²⁷ nor to its sole condition of object, but smile from inventing, against the Other?

Inventing, this could be a way, in effect, of not being serious: besides the new desire that intoxicates the subject and makes them wander,²⁸ the act by which they will be invented as a man or woman. Freud will have experienced it for himself; separate to become adolescent, "the premonition of a task, which was not outlined openly but in a quiet voice, until that could be (...) expressed out loud".²⁹

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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