

NWRPA Newsletter October 2020

Tell me the Truth about Love

9 October 2020

An online study group with Dr Mark Fisher

Summary by Frank Kelley

A few months ago it was hard to imagine the NWRPA continuing to present our monthly evening seminars. So it has been a pleasure to see everybody again for our first two online meetings. Thank you to my colleague Paul Melia for organising and hosting our Zoom meetings.

Most importantly can I thank Dr. Mark Fisher for presenting this online study group. This is a series of four discussions on transference which take us to December 2020. The richness and challenge of these seminars is a tribute to Mark's depth of experience as a psychoanalyst.

The October seminar built on its' predecessor. In September Mark spoke of a classic view of transference as an unconscious reliving in the present and in analysis of a significant early relationship. A transference can be rendered into consciousness as analysis progresses. In Freud's early writings this classic view of transference is complemented by a wider picture of transference. Mark spoke of transferences in the plural and noted this classic type of transference emerges in therapy less often than we would think. Intriguingly he thought that this classic view of transference could be a therapist's fantasy.

Technical problems prevented Mark from playing a song about love by Benjamin Britten and W.H. Auden. Both men were born in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Despite their great artistry and profound social contributions both men were censured and devalued as gay men were at that time.

There has never been a unitary concept of love. Over two thousand years ago Socrates wrote about many forms of love. More recently C. S. Lewis wrote of four kinds of love.

Empathy

We identify with the struggles and satisfactions of others. This is similar to the empathy of person centred psychotherapy.

Friendship

Relationships of friendship offer what you need in life through people connected by community. Lewis lived through times of great hardship for many and where there was no NHS or Social Security. Friendship was invaluable and necessary.

Romantic love

This is not just sex and includes friendship, compatibility and fellow feeling.

Agape

This is a Greek word for a Christian concept. It is the love of God and love from God within a community.

There is a Jewish concept of the love of God for a people who piss him off but this love means God and his people can always come back together.

Platonic love is purely an effect and does not necessarily involve sex. There is a medieval notion of courtly love where a knight loves a married aristocratic woman. This love is always unrequited, frustrated and never fulfilled.

There is an Islamic concept of a love that is passionate, existentialist and embraces the whole of life and is expressed through poetry and daily religious devotion. It is a love for an entity that is unknowable, unseen, inaccessible and yet powerful.

Twenty years ago Mark attended discussions about whether gay men should train as analysts. Psychoanalytic organisations welcomed gay men into treatment but did not invite them into training. Psychoanalytic theory viewed homosexuality as perverse, an imperfect resolution of the Oedipus complex and unlikely to be cured through analysis. He knew a gay analyst who had a pseudo resolution of his homosexuality and who married a woman and had two children.

This view of gay men, and gay candidates for analytic training, has parallels with current conversion therapies. However thirty years ago this psychoanalytic devaluation of gay men was the prevailing attitude. Now it is a practice which is not accepted as a genuine therapy by therapists' professional bodies.

In contrast with these earlier times Mark has been able to offer his gay clients extensive psychoanalytic treatment. Reflecting on this absorbing seminar I wondered how many forms of love were involved in this profound change in psychoanalysis and our wider world.

Mark then turned to his enquiry about the classic view of transference. Is transference complete like a Christmas gift you can unwrap?

A long analysis reached the final session. The psychoanalysis wanted to know about the effectiveness of the wonderful insights he offered. His client said in a great crisis he had told her *where there is a way, and where there is a will, there is a way out*. For all his analytic theory and skill this client insight had little relation to the analyst.

Mark had an eye infection that evening. Like our eyes our bodies have many physical entries and exits that connect us to the world. They can all come into the client's relation to the analyst. They may be fascinated by your scent or bodily odour, by the way you breathe through your nose or mouth. The analyst may not be the whole object of classic transference but bits and pieces that can be objects of desire and envy. All this can be outside the awareness of the psychoanalyst.

Our clients are addicted to talking about themselves. Clients love analysts' ability to listen to them. Like other addictions there can never be enough. This is what Lacan called *jouissance*, the search for pleasure, a desire for more and more, which can be never be satisfied. This leads to suffering and can drive us to extreme circumstances.

Thank you to Dr. Mark Fisher. Writing this summary reminds me of how much can be found and refound in the richness of his talks on psychoanalysis and transference.

Each study group discussion is followed by a networking event. This event is an online version of the informal discussions we used to have precovid following the end of our sit down together monthly seminars. For October this was ably chaired by **Kieran Nolan**.