

# WAS ANNA FREUD A “FRIEND OF DOROTHY”? A QUEER PHENOMENOLOGICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ANNA FREUD AND DOROTHY BURLINGHAM’S PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP

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*The nature of Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham’s 5-decade-long personal and professional relationship has always been subject to speculation. This paper considers the historiography of this important and enigmatic relationship from 1920s Vienna to today. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenology, which theorises sexual orientation and whiteness in spatial terms, I illustrate how the relationship was seen as deviating from the ‘straight lines’ of mid-20th century heteronormative society. I extend this queer phenomenological approach to think about cultural orientations to the relationship through an examination of its depiction in biographies published in the 1980s, the collections at the Freud Museums in London and Vienna, and a fictionalised account of Anna Freud’s life published in 2014. Extending Ahmed’s queer phenomenological vocabulary, I identify examples of ‘straightening up’, ‘straightening devices’ and ‘straightening up by queering’. The possibility of finding ‘queer angles’ in Anna Freud’s early clinical writings, in contrast to the normative tendencies of her later writing on ego psychology, is explored as a counterbalance to discussions about non-normative sexuality and gender in psychotherapy which typically position these as something new. The relevance for clinical practice today is considered through the lens of an ethical imperative to find space for queer angles in the history of psychoanalysis.*

**KEYWORDS:** PSYCHOANALYSIS, QUEER THEORY, ANNA FREUD, PHENOMENOLOGY, HISTORY OF PSYCHOANALYSIS, GENDER AND SEXUALITY

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Anna Freud is often seen as an austere and spinsterish figure, the guardian of her father's legacy of psychoanalysis, one side of the 'controversial discussions' with Melanie Klein which split British psychoanalysis in the 1940s, and founder of the Hampstead Clinic which later became the Anna Freud Centre for child psychoanalysis. In addition to her important work on child psychoanalysis, her contribution to psychoanalytic theory established the field of ego psychology. Alongside this professional image, there has always been subdued speculation about her sexuality and romantic life due to her 5-decade-long personal and professional partnership with Dorothy Burlingham. A more open attitude to queer relationships in psychoanalytic circles, and the release of the film *Freud's Last Session*, which portrays Anna as 'avowedly gay and in love with the last Tiffany heiress' (Zeavin, 2023)<sup>1</sup>, mean that questions about the nature of this relationship are resurfacing. We are turning our 21st century 'queer eye' onto Anna and Dorothy, trying to understand what their relationship means to the history of British psychoanalysis, and to the clinic today. In the context of the homophobic environment of psychoanalysis in the UK and US in the post-war period, the idea that Sigmund Freud's daughter might have been a 'friend of Dorothy'—if we stretch the terminology more commonly used to described gay men at that time—has some emotional charge to it. Perhaps building on this, some popular culture is queering the history of psychoanalysis by framing Anna and Dorothy's relationship as queer.

Given the decades of silence around queer sexuality in psychoanalysis (Dean & Lane, 2001; Newbigin, 2013) and the particular silencing of historic lesbian relationships, both generally and in psychoanalysis (Czyzelska, 2022; de Lauretis, 1994; Jennings, 2007), it does feel important to acknowledge the possibility that the two women were in what we might call today a lesbian relationship. In the period following the *Well of Loneliness* obscenity trial in 1928 and the 'Gessman case' in Vienna, in which a well-known society woman was accused of poisoning her husband so that she could be with her female lover (Neue Freie Press, 1924), lesbians were seen as promiscuous, predatory and even psychopathic. Many women rejected the term 'lesbian' even if their primary romantic or sexual relationships were with women. This means that queer re-evaluations of historic relationships have to read between the lines of straight society (Hubbard, 2019). In doing so, we risk applying labels that the historic characters themselves would not have appreciated, and finding queerness where they would not have seen it.

In writing this paper, I have tried to avoid the temptation of queering the relationship between Anna and Dorothy from my 21st-century perspective. Instead, I want to make visible some of the ways that their relationship has been thought about, written about and responded to in cultural objects, and to think about what these different responses mean for the psychoanalysis as a body of theory and a clinical practice today. In this exploration, I draw on Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), which sets out how sexual orientation and racialisation can be understood spatially in the orientation of bodies towards each other, asks us to pay attention to

the way that queer and non-white bodies become visible against the straight lines of a heteronormative, majority white society, and to consider how those straight lines are constructed by patterns of behaviour, thought and perception, including attitudes towards theory. Ahmed's approach allows us to think about how a historic individual or relationship might appear queer to us, without drawing conclusions about the individuals' identity, orientation, or sexual activity (Pasek, 2013). Through the lens of queer phenomenology, I will explore how people oriented themselves towards Anna and Dorothy's relationship during their lifetime and in biographic material published after their deaths, as well as how their living spaces have been preserved in the Freud Museums in London and Vienna. I will consider how the author of a contemporary novel about Anna Freud's life orients herself to psychoanalytic theory of sexuality, and how Anna Freud herself wrote about queer sexuality in an early clinical paper. In constructing this patchwork of responses to Anna and Dorothy's relationship, I am intentionally turning the lens away from these two women's lives, and towards others' orientations to them, following Ahmed's queer phenomenology in 'attend[ing] to the flow of perception itself' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 37). Ahmed points out that 'Heterosexuality is not ... simply an orientation toward others, it is also something that we are orientated around, even if it disappears from view' (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 90-91). By paying attention to how Anna and Dorothy's relationship is seen, including examples of what I will shortly define, following Ahmed, as 'straightening up', 'straightening devices' and 'straightening up by queering', I intend to bring the heteronormativity that has surrounded psychoanalysis for decades into sharper view, and to think about how that is changing. In identifying queer angles in Anna Freud's early clinical papers, I hope to challenge the prevailing narrative that queerness in psychoanalysis is something new, and to re-foreground the tensions between unconscious desire and socially accepted expressions of that desire which have been present since Sigmund Freud's earliest work on sexuality.

#### QUEER ANGLES IN PSYCHOANALYTIC HISTORY

Dorothy Burlingham travelled from New York to meet Anna Freud in Vienna in 1924 to ask to her to analyse her son, Bob Burlingham, who was very unwell (Burlingham, 1989; Young-Bruehl, 2008)<sup>2</sup>. The women's mutual involvement in the education and development of Dorothy's four children soon led to a close personal and professional relationship. As the daughter of Sigmund Freud, Anna developed the theory and practice of child analysis in schools and clinics in Vienna and then London. Dorothy partnered Anna in this work for more than 50 years, moved alongside the Freud family to London in 1938, and lived with Anna for nearly 30 years in the house in Maresfield Gardens which was converted into the Freud Museum after Anna's death in 1982.

This brief introduction already raises many questions about the nature of Anna and Dorothy's relationship, since co-parenting and co-habitation were practices followed almost exclusively by heterosexual married couples in mid-Century

Vienna and London. Their relationship is out of line with society's expectations, which is unsettling. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes a man seeing a room through a mirror which reflects it at a 45° angle, in effect seeing the room 'slantwise', creating an oblique, unsettling effect which Merleau-Ponty describes as 'queer'. In this thought experiment, the subject reorientates his perception of space so that the initial slantwise orientation becomes vertical, straightened up, and the man is able to move his body effectively in space. Ahmed, in *Queer Phenomenology*, encourages us to read Merleau-Ponty's 'queer' in terms of non-heterosexual sexual orientation, and 'straightening up' of the man's perceptual reorientation in terms of the field of compulsory heterosexuality which Adrienne Rich (1980) identified. Ahmed asks us to explore the initial, disorienting effect of seeing the world slantwise as a moment full of queer potential, and encourages us to consider what might happen if the straightening devices of heterosexuality were not in operation. She goes on to consider the spatial aspects of sexual orientation and racialisation, highlighting how some bodies are drawn together in ways that do not conform to the well-trodden paths and straight lines of heterosexuality and whiteness, and how we might pay attention to how difficult it can be for queer, non-white bodies to move effectively through space.

In a predominantly heteronormative and cisnormative society, there is an assumption that male and female bodies are easily distinguishable from each other and automatically attracted to each other, both sexually and spatially, and this is reflected in living arrangements where married men and women usually cohabit, and often share a bed. Writers such as Siobhan Somerville in the US (2000) and Sita Balani in the UK (2023) have demonstrated how these expectations about gender and sexual orientation were inextricably linked with racial identities through the colonial structures that were still very much in place in the first half of the 20th century.<sup>3</sup> From the moment of their first professional meeting in 1924, Anna and Dorothy were oriented towards each other in ways which made their relationship stand out from the heterosexual ground. Through her involvement with Dorothy's children's education and her analytic sessions with them, Anna took on what could be seen as a queer parental role as a second mother. Dorothy became deeply interested in Anna's work, starting to attend seminars with her at the Vienna Institute. The two women arrived and left lectures together, people knew Dorothy as 'Anna's American friend', and gossiped about the nature of their relationship. They had a joint holiday home outside Vienna and made weekly visits together to collect butter and milk from the farm. Their living arrangements become closer over time: Dorothy moved into an apartment in the same building as the Freuds in Vienna, and a direct telephone line connected her bedroom to Anna's so that they could speak to each other after bedtime. The telephone line connecting their bedrooms, which is visible to visitors to the Freud Museum in Vienna today, can be read queerly as a symbol of the tenuous orientation of these two women towards each other in a heteronormative environment: it was a physical connection between the intimate spaces of the women's bedrooms, but one which the Freud and Burlingham families could tolerate because it did not involve physical contact between Anna and Dorothy's

bodies. It conjures up fantasies of what the two women might have discussed, late at night, in privacy, away from family members. Did they discuss the children's progress? Plan their next holiday trip? Or were their discussions even more intimate? Michael J. Burlingham poignantly records that after Dorothy's death, Anna would wear Dorothy's sweaters and walk around her house, stroking them gently. It appears that it was easier for Anna Freud to acknowledge the depth of meaning of her relationship to Dorothy after her death; it was certainly more socially acceptable for Anna to stroke the sleeve of Dorothy's sweater after Dorothy was no longer wearing it.

As we have seen in these examples from the two women's biographies, thinking about queer aspects of the relationship between Anna and Dorothy produces a disorienting effect which feels close to the queer moments identified by Ahmed in her reading of Merleau-Ponty. It can feel as if the women's history is being viewed slant-wise, because we find their relationship difficult to classify. This disorientating effect creates a pressure to 'straighten up' their history by finding an appropriate label for it so that the reader, in understanding how the two women were oriented in respect of each other, can orient themselves. However, as Ahmed points out, we should not assume that deviation is always on the side of the progressive, and I would like to suggest that labelling Anna and Dorothy as lesbians can in fact represent a 'straightening device', albeit a relatively queer one. In other words, if we queer these relationships by labelling them in today's identity-focused terms, I think we risk straightening them up, and moving away from the productive possibilities of the disorienting queer moments produced by thinking about their history. We can extend Ahmed's vocabulary of queer phenomenology and call this 'straightening up by queering'.

#### 'STRAIGHTENING DEVICES' IN PSYCHOANALYTIC INSTITUTIONS

Anna was in a vulnerable position with respect to her relationship with Dorothy when the two women arrived in London in 1938 with their families. She and Dorothy faced a double precarity as refugee psychoanalysts, one of whom was Jewish, and as women in a close emotional and professional relationship, although this precarity was mitigated by Anna's status as the daughter of Sigmund Freud, and Dorothy's social status and wealth as a Tiffany heiress. In the late 19th century, it was not uncommon for two white, middle-class, professional unmarried women to live and work together: such arrangements were known as 'Boston marriages', and were treated as a socially acceptable alternative for women who did not wish to marry (Rothblum & Brehony, 1993). In London, the partnership between Jessie Murray and Julia Turner was at the heart of the Medico-Psychological Clinic, the first public clinic in Britain to train psychoanalysts and offer free analysis, and an important predecessor of the British Psychoanalytic Society between 1913 and 1923 (Valentine, 2009). However, during the 1920s and 1930s, the increasing tendency to identify people in non-normative relationships with stigmatising terms such as

'lesbian' or 'female homosexual' meant that Boston marriages became less socially acceptable and more noticeable.

Mid-Century British psychoanalysis had very heteronormative expectations about sexuality. In particular, Melanie Klein, Anna Freud's professional rival in the 'controversial discussions' of British psychoanalysis in the 1940s (King & Steiner, 1992), held that heterosexuality was one of the desired outcomes of a successful analysis (O'Connor & Ryan, 1993). The analysis of a patient's Oedipus complex—the heterosexual familial triangle in which little girls falls in love with their father and little boys wish they could marry their mother, and which was a central part of Freud's analytic theory from the 1920s onwards—was supposed to produce socially acceptable heterosexual men and women, and can be seen as a 'straightening device' in Ahmed's language. In this context, accusations by Klein and her followers that Anna Freud was not analysing children with sufficient depth because her own analysis was incomplete come very close to accusing her of being a 'female homosexual' with an incompletely analysed Oedipus complex (Jones, 1993). These accusations had the potential to undermine Anna Freud's professional standing.

The arguments over the future of psychoanalysis between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein and their respective followers were, therefore, infused with ideas about permitted forms of sexuality, reproduced by a successful resolution of the Oedipus complex. Recent work with the archive of Anna Freud's personal letters at the Freud Museum, London has shown how anxiety about the effect that revelations about Anna Freud's personal life could have on her legacy permeated Dorothy Burlingham's work in archiving their personal correspondence. Burlingham stated that she withdrew any of Anna's letters that were deemed 'too personal' from the archive (Burlingham, 1975; Meadows, 2022). However, a 1963 letter from Anna to Dorothy in an envelope marked 'to destroy' by Burlingham—and therefore presumably considered too personal by her—has survived. The letter is described as 'not exactly a love letter (though it is loving), and ... not erotic (though it emphasizes a private intimacy)' (Meadows, 2022, p. 222). It contains Anna's expression of concern about whether Dorothy was well enough (at the age of 72) to drive 4 hours from their holiday home in Norfolk to London, and the signature 'Love, Anna' instead of her more usual 'ANNAFREUD'. These quiet intimacies were seen as so revealing by Dorothy Burlingham that she intended to destroy the letter, giving us some measure of how potentially dangerous perceived intimacy of any sort between these two women was in the 1970s. These deviations from the straight line of heteronormative society were deliberately straightened up by Dorothy Burlingham in an attempt to safeguard Anna Freud's professional legacy. This might be one of the reasons why the early activities of the Freud Museum have been described as 'deeply defensive' (Young-Bruehl & Schwartz, 2012).

#### 'STRAIGHTENING DEVICES' IN BIOGRAPHY

Anna and Dorothy's biographers in the late 1980s, the decade of Anna's death, were both interested in the nature of their relationship, and felt it necessary to come to a

conclusion about whether it was a sexual relationship. In the first edition of her biography of Anna Freud, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl concludes that Anna's sexuality was intentionally sublimated into her professional work by her two analyses by her father, with the result that she was an 'ascetic in a monogamous relationship with Dorothy Burlingham' (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 3, also see pp. 137–139). Michael J. Burlingham, in his biography of his grandmother Dorothy, comments on the speculation that was 'logically' caused by Anna and Dorothy's cohabitation 'like a married couple' (Burlingham, 1989, p. 291) for nearly 30 years. He concludes that Anna's opposition to homosexuality, and Dorothy's sublimation of her sexuality through her analysis with Sigmund Freud, means that they were unlikely to be in a sexual relationship, and suggests that we think about them as 'intellectual lesbians' (Burlingham, 1989, p. 292). However, in the preface to the second edition of Anna's biography, written 20 years later in 2008, Young-Bruehl changes position slightly, concluding that the question of the nature of their relationship 'can....be seen as both unanswerable (since neither women answer it) and as only a strand in the great weave of their remarkable love and work' (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 3). Both Young-Bruehl and Burlingham, writing in the 1980s, felt it necessary to 'straighten up' Anna and Dorothy's relationship according to the heteronormative structures of the time; both concluded that it was impossible that they were in a sexual relationship. It is interesting that Young-Bruehl later expressed a wish to leave the nature of the relationship more open, and also chose to see their life and work together as significant in themselves, regardless of our curiosity about the exact nature of their relationship. In this, she neither straightens up the relationship (by labelling it as non-sexual) nor straightens it up by queering it (by labelling it as a sexual lesbian relationship).

#### ORIENTATIONS IN SPACE AT THE FREUD MUSEUMS

The Hampstead house which Anna and Dorothy lived in together 'like a married couple' for nearly thirty years has been preserved as 'The Freud Museum'—referring to her father. Sigmund Freud's enormous two-room study and consulting room on the ground floor has been immaculately preserved, and is the main focus for most visitors, even though Freud only lived in the house for a year before his death. Anna Freud's study and consulting room on the second floor has not been preserved as it was during her lifetime. The room known as the 'Anna Freud room' on the first floor, where Anna's relocated desk, couch, and weaving loom can be seen by the public, was in fact Dorothy's bedroom and study; Anna's bedroom next door is a meeting room that is normally closed to the public. However, the relationship between Anna and Dorothy is beginning to be acknowledged by the Museum; their professional relationship was centred in an exhibition about the Hietzing School (Danto & Steiner-Strauss, 2018), and the open questions about the nature of their personal relationship were acknowledged during a guided visit to the Freud Museum to celebrate Anna's 40-year death anniversary in October 2022.

The arrangement of Anna's private rooms in the apartment that she shared with her parents in Vienna until 1938 has also been examined in the context of her sexuality. Taking up Young-Bruehl's reading of Anna's sexuality as sublimated in her professional work, Amelie-Elisabeth Pelly explores, through a reading of Foucault, how Anna's asceticism is expressed through the arrangement of her personal and professional rooms in Vienna. Pelly assumes that patients and other visitors had to pass through Anna's corridor-like bedroom on their way to her consulting room, and this is taken as a visible demonstration of her asceticism: '...what Anna was accomplishing by exposing her bedroom, as domestic and private a space as it should be, was to demonstrate that even if she did not officially fulfil the traditional roles of motherhood nor wife, she was closest to the ascetic; devoted to psychoanalysis as can be' (Pelly, 2019, p. 48). Anna is seen to 'grant her professional ambitions the most room (both figuratively and literally)' (p. 48), and also as 'relieving the analysand of any concerns (such as potential homosexuality) pertaining to their analyst's private life' (p. 65).

Pelly is able to explore the expression of Anna's asceticism through the arrangement of her personal space because in the Vienna Freud Museum—in contrast to the London Museum—Anna's consulting rooms have been laid out as they were during her lifetime. A display case captioned 'Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham: Together, Before and After the War' and a panel showing the intercom between their rooms draw visitors' attention to her relationship with Dorothy. In contrast, a visitor to the Freud Museum in London might not realise that the room labelled as Anna's was actually Dorothy's<sup>4</sup>. The superimposition of Anna's personal objects in Dorothy's room in Maresfield Gardens has the double effect of erasing Dorothy spatially, and of merging her identity with Anna's. The history of the two women's orientation in space towards each other—which would be read phenomenologically by Ahmed as lesbian desire—is physically erased, and this feels very significant. It is also a spatialised repetition of the trope of the 'lesbian merger' in which the closeness of two women in a relationship is seen as problematic in a heteronormative world. The queer angles in Anna and Dorothy's relationship have made it subject to silencing in the 40 years since Anna's death; this silencing is especially profound given the difficulty that psychoanalysis has in conceptualising lesbian sexuality in a way that is not pathologised as pre-Oedipal (de Lauretis, 1994; O'Connor & Ryan, 1993). It is important that the Freud Museum, London, has begun to recognise this, and in doing so, to reverse some of the defensiveness identified by Young-Bruehl and Schwartz in their 2012 paper.

#### LESBIAN FANTASIES AND 'STRAIGHTENING UP BY QUEERING' IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

Contemporary fascination with Anna Freud's sexuality is strongly expressed in Rebecca Coffey's novel *Hysterical: Anna Freud's Story* (2014). Coffey's novel is a fictional memoir, supposedly written by Anna and left for her maid to publish after her death, in which she tells the story of her life, including her analysis by her



father, and sexual relationships with Eva Rosenfeld and Dorothy Burlingham. Coffey draws on historical sources, including letters and biographies, but also creates ‘dialogue, scenes, and situations based on fact and imagination’ (p. xiv). She acknowledges that the novel is a product of her curiosity about Anna Freud’s ‘accomplishment’ of partnering and co-mothering children with another woman, given the ‘theoretical prison her father had constructed around her’ (p. xiv). It contains a fictionalised history of Anna’s psychosexual development as a lesbian starting many names from the history of psychoanalysis including Sabina Spielrein and Princess Marie Bonaparte. It is also a fictionalisation of many stories about Sigmund Freud that Elisabeth Young-Bruehl has called ‘Bad Freud’ stories (Young-Bruehl, 2008), including Freud’s move away from his early theory that childhood sexual trauma was at the root of all hysterical symptoms, and his inadequate understanding of female sexuality. However, Coffey goes beyond these familiar feminist critiques of Freud in fantasising that Freud raped a young female cousin when he was a teenager, and twice attempted to rape Anna.

Coffey’s novel was celebrated by the American LGBT+ community when it was published, and was granted an American Library Association award in 2015 as an example of LGBT+ literature. It is therefore not unreasonable, I think, to take it as a cultural object that expresses something about early 21st century Western queer perspectives on Freud and psychoanalytic theory. Following Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*, if we pay attention to the flow of Coffey’s perception, and the orientation of objects and bodies in the fantasies that she constructs around the Freud family, we can subject the novel to a queer phenomenological analysis.

Coffey is preoccupied with the domestic details of Anna Freud’s life, and describes in some detail how her fantasy version of Anna Freud finds time and space for sexual relationships with first Eva Rosenfeld—a family friend in Vienna—and then Dorothy Burlingham. Domestic and childcare duties provide excuses for spending time together during the day, and she describes Anna eating at the dining table with Eva and her children. Lesbian desire, in Coffey’s fantasy world, is hidden in a domesticity that parodies heterosexual domesticity, finding space for physical pleasure in stolen moments in the garden at night.

Coffey appears preoccupied with finding appropriate labels for the sexual orientation of the women in her fantasy; Anna’s lesbian desire is traced from her early masturbation fantasies, which also play with gender, through interactions with various women including Sabina Spielrein, to a sexual relationship with Eva Rosenfeld in Vienna and then her long relationship with Dorothy Burlingham. Although the novel depicts Freud as holding pathologising views about homosexuality, Coffey constructs a genealogy of homosexuality in the Freud family, inventing a female lover for the young Martha Freud, as well as emphasising the homosexual counter-transference in Sigmund Freud’s analysis of *The Rat Man*. Homosexuality is depicted as running in the Freud family, reproducing—I assume unconsciously—the prevailing antisemitic connections of the late nineteenth and early 20th century between Jewishness and effeminacy, passivity and homosexuality (Boyarin, 1995). Dorothy, who is a Gentile, is described by Coffey’s fantasy Anna Freud as ‘by

nature heterosexual'; and their relationship as 'not fundamentally physical' (Coffey, 2014, p. 294). This description of Anna and Dorothy's relationship leaves the reader wondering whether Coffey means that Anna 'turned' Dorothy lesbian, perpetuating heteronormative myths about predatory lesbians, and then repeats the trope of lesbian relationships as nonsexual. Although Coffey's novel relies on the frisson of queerness generated by portraying Anna Freud as a lesbian, it also inadvertently reproduces normative cultural tropes about Jewishness, homosexuality and lesbians; I would therefore see it as an example of what I earlier called 'straightening up by queering'. Whether any of these parts of Coffey's fantasies come close to the truth is not the point. Instead, I am interested in why these tropes appear in the novel.

Their lineage is clear: the novel is a fictionalisation of feminist and queer suspicion of psychoanalytic theory, which is seen as inherently repressive of any non-heterosexual forms of sexuality. This suspicion is entirely understandable, since many psychoanalysts—including Anna Freud—deliberately tried to bring about heterosexual orientation in their patients, including some patients who were happy with their queer sexuality (Dean & Lane, 2001; Mitchell, 1981). However, recent careful scholarship of the first 1905 edition of Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905) has shown that he was 'not the heteronormative ideologist he is sometimes made out to be' (Van Haute & Westerink, 2020, p. 114); his early theory was full of radical queer potential, since it often rejected the teleological claims of many 19th century sexologists about the natural, heterosexual reproductive nature of the sexual drive. His views about female homosexuality, as set out in his 1919 case *Psycho-genesis of a case of female homosexuality*, can also be seen as less normative than some of his contemporaries<sup>5</sup>. The reasons for the eventual suppression of this radical potential in Freud's later work are racial, theoretical, institutional and social, and have been explored elsewhere (see Boyarin, 1995; Davidson, 1984; Van Haute & Westerink, 2020). In portraying Freud as the anti-queer father of a lesbian daughter, Coffey paints over the inherent tensions of Freud's writing about sexuality, and drastically oversimplifies it. In 2008, Young-Bruehl suggested that these 'Bad Freud' stories had died out; Coffey's novel suggests that they live on well into the third decade of the 20th century in some queer feminist depictions of Freud.

Although the novel's representations of psychoanalysis are somewhat oversimplified, the appearance of fantasy version of a lesbian Anna Freud in 2014 does signal something important. There has been very little space for wondering about Anna and Dorothy's life in the collective imagination of British psychotherapy—to the point where their relationship has been physically erased from their shared home in the house that is now the London Freud Museum, as discussed above. Although Coffey's novel was lauded as an example of LGBT+ affirmative literature, its publication was not noted—either positively or negatively—in mainstream psychoanalytic press or journals<sup>6</sup>, indicating that the psychoanalytic mainstream was not yet ready—at the time of publication in 2014—to imagine Anna Freud in a sexual relationship with another woman. Perhaps the only space that this fantasy could appear was in a novel published outside of heterodox psychotherapy. The novel could

therefore be seen as a symptom of the failure of imagination of psychoanalysts about Anna and Dorothy's relationship, reappearing in the distorted form of fantasies about Freud as the sexually violent father both of Anna and of psychoanalysis<sup>7</sup>. I will return later in this paper to the question of how psychoanalysis might institutionally find imaginative space for queerness in its historiography so that it can manifest in a non-symptomatic way.

#### ORIENTATIONS TO ANNA FREUD'S CLINICAL WORK WITH HOMOSEXUALITY

Part of Anna Freud's austere reputation relates to her clinical theory. Her best known theoretical work, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (Freud, 1992), describes how the ego exercises control over the id's impulses, affects and instinctive urges. Laubender (2017) has examined the politics of her theory of child psychoanalysis, arguing that in ego psychology: 'the analyst's work is about using her or his authority to transform socially unacceptable instinctual urges into what she or he understands to be socially useful and gratifiable ones, thereby reproducing stable, 'civilized' society'. The form of ego psychology that developed in the United States from Anna Freud's work was preoccupied with these internal conflicts between ego and other parts of the psyche, and became well known for its normative and even at times coercive tendency with patients, especially queer patients (Chodorow, 2002; Stewart-Steinberg, 2011). Assessments of Anna Freud's clinical work and theory have often linked her personal life to her clinical approach, seeing parallels between her theory of ego defences against the urges of the Id and the way that the young Anna's wishes in life were repressed by her father's wish to have a psychoanalytic heir. In her biography of Anna Freud, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl focuses on the defence of altruistic surrender, in which the person sublimates their own desires and wishes in favour of someone else who is better able to fulfil them. Her psychohistory of Anna Freud suggests that Anna's analysis by her father had the effect of sublimating her erotic and maternal desires in favour of others', although this sublimation was 'slow in coming, and complicated' (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 130). In Young-Bruehl's account, Anna Freud eventually finds fulfilment through continuing her father's professional work, through raising other women's children (the children of Eva Rosenfeld, then of Dorothy Burlingham, then war orphans) and through overseeing Dorothy's relationships with men, all three activities representing different forms of altruistic surrender to others' desires.

Stewart-Steinberg has evaluated this tendency to link Anna Freud's personal life so closely to her theory, suggesting that 'hers seems to be a deeply personal theory, indeed a *theory of the personal and therefore of the ego*, so that her theories continuously raise the question of what Ernest Jones had called 'unanalysed resistances' and many of her other critics pointed to as her unresolved father complex' (Stewart-Steinberg, 2011, p. 173, italics in the original).<sup>8</sup> Stewart-Steinberg has also suggested that although Anna Freud is often accused of repressing her father's most important discovery—that subjects will always be undermined by their unconscious

desires—instead turning towards a theory in which the ego can successfully defend itself against unconscious desires, the reality was more complex. She argues that Anna Freud's altruistic surrender can rather be seen as a 'dramatic enactment of an impious fidelity in relation to her father' (p. 216), implying that her surrender of her own desires in favour of others' may not have been complete.

Stewart-Steinberg's re-evaluation of Anna Freud's work in relation to her father is important from a feminist point of view because it seeks to establish a sense of her own agency, clinically and institutionally, within her role as the guardian of her father's legacy. However, she does not engage with Anna Freud's theory of homosexuality, or her relationship to Dorothy Burlingham, beyond a brief statement acknowledging the relationship but stating that she has 'no desire to speculate on the question of whether Anna Freud herself was a lesbian' (p. 88). Returning to Young-Bruehl's biography, we find a detailed examination of Anna Freud's heteronormative theory of sexuality which points out rather apologetically that it was in line with others' views at that time and notes that she worked with gay male patients with the aim of producing a heterosexual orientation. In this, Anna Freud went further than her father, who doubted that it was possible to change someone's sexual orientation (Freud, 1920). Michael J. Burlingham's biography of his grandmother also spends some time setting out the disastrous effects of Anna's analysis and co-parenting of Bob Burlingham, in which she was concerned about what she saw as his homosexual tendencies, and deliberately steered him away from men and towards women. As biographers, Young-Bruehl and Burlingham have to deal with the paradox of a woman who had a long relationship with another woman, yet worked actively to repress her patients' homosexual desire, wrote clinical papers on how best to accomplish this (Freud, 1968a; Freud, 1968b), and whose theory of the ego's defence mechanisms turned into one of the most normative branches of psychoanalysis. As noted above, they do so by concluding that the sublimation of Anna Freud's sexuality in her work was complete, and the relationship between her and Dorothy was therefore chaste. When Young-Bruehl changed her position on the relationship in writing the preface to the 2008 edition of the biography, leaving more space for the possibility of a lesbian relationship, she did not consider what this might mean for her arguments about the sublimation of Anna Freud's sexual desire. Stewart-Steinberg's re-evaluation of Anna Freud's agency in her clinical work, and her claims that her surrender to her father's wishes was impious and incomplete, therefore need to be extended into her writing about sexuality.

#### ANNA FREUD'S ORIENTATION TOWARDS QUEER SEXUALITY

Anna Freud's first clinical paper was on the subject of a young woman's fantasies and attempts to stop masturbating. She presented *The relation of beating fantasies to a day-dream* (Freud, 1923) as her graduation paper for the Viennese Psychoanalytic Society, building on her father's earlier paper *A child is being beaten* (Freud, 1919). Following Young-Bruehl's detailed analysis in her biography of Anna Freud, it is now widely accepted that Anna was one of the cases that her

father discussed in his paper, and that her paper was autobiographical (Person, 1997). It is therefore easy to read Anna Freud's paper as an account of her own psychosexual development, including her struggles to repress her masturbation fantasies, and their eventual sublimation into her writing and professional work. At first glance, in this paper, Anna Freud was orienting herself towards the straight lines and sexual norms of Viennese society, which frowned on any sort of sexual activity in an unmarried woman.

However, I would argue that the paper is not entirely written along straight lines. Much space is taken up with describing the young female patient's fantasies centred around the Mediaeval story of a young nobleman who is captured by an older knight, imprisoned and threatened with torture, but eventually freed. The energy of the fantasies lies in the dread of torture and the pleasure of eventual reconciliation. Although these 'nice stories' lack overt sexual content, and the patient initially claims that they are not masturbatory, they have all the features of a BDSM dungeon: a struggle of wills between a powerful and a weak character (who could be read as the 'top' and 'bottom' in a BDSM scene), mediaeval costumes, a torture rack, physical confinement, being tied up, a prison and even tender moments of what could be seen as 'after-care' (in BDSM terminology) between top and bottom after the story has concluded. The structure of the fantasies is described as a series of single scenes, each with a climax, mirroring the structure of a series of BDSM scenes<sup>9</sup>.

Anna Freud takes great pains to make it look as if she is walking along the straight lines of psychoanalytic theory of that time, orienting herself away from the excitement of these queer and sado-masochistic scenes by stressing that their function was to suppress the patient's earlier masturbatory beating fantasies. She apparently orients herself towards normative heterosexual desire in arguing that 'The sublimation of sensual love into tender friendship was naturally favoured by the fact that already in the early stages of the beating-phantasy the girl had abandoned the difference of sex and was invariably represented as a boy' (Freud, 1923, p. 100). However, the 'naturalness' of tender feelings, rather than sexual feelings, in the same-sex pairings in the paper's fantasies is undermined by the main argument of the paper<sup>10</sup>. Anna Freud identifies a direct link between the sado-masochistic same-sex fantasies, which are supposedly non-sexual, and the patient's underlying beating fantasies, which are sexual, and asserts that her patient's analysis proves that the transformation of beating fantasies into sado-masochistic fantasies is a successful sublimation, not a simple repression. But the patient's sublimation is not complete; she eventually admits that 'in hard times, when things were difficult' (p. 98), the sado-masochistic 'nice stories' have a strong sexual charge, and turn into beating fantasies which result in her masturbating to climax. This doesn't sound like tender friendship or courtly Mediaeval love; it is queer, sado-masochistic desire, repressed by a veneer of respectability, and reappearing at moments of stress.

Perhaps mindful of this, in the final section of her paper, Anna Freud describes a further sublimation of queer desire through her patient's novelisation of the fantasies. She claims that in the process of writing, the story's sexual energy is dispelled;

'Reading the story had no more effect on the girl than reading a story with a similar content produced by a stranger' (p. 101). This is a rather puzzling statement: the huge success of erotic sado-masochistic literature, from the *120 Days of Sodom* (Sade, 1785) to *Fifty Shades of Grey* (James, 2012), demonstrates that a sado-masochistic story written by a stranger can be powerfully erotic; indeed, Anna Freud herself could have read the contemporary Viennese erotic novel *Josephine Mutzenbacher* (Anon., attrib F. Salter, 1906). She closes by emphasising the pleasure that the young woman takes from imagining the good impression that her story will make on her readers, stressing the social aspects of this pleasure in contrast to the sexual excitement of the earlier fantasies, which have now been sublimated. However, we can also find queer angles in this pleasure, since the author of an erotic story may derive sexual excitement and pleasure from imagining their readers' arousal. It is not clear whether this ambiguity is intentional. But Anna Freud's partial orientation to societal norms appears to leave space for queer angles and even queer pleasure which is difficult to find in her later writing and clinical practice. The reasons for this deserve further exploration.

#### A QUEER PATCHWORK AND THE ETHICS OF THE PSYCHOANALYTIC CLINIC

Throughout this paper, I have drawn on Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* to explore how people have oriented themselves to Anna Freud's relationship with Dorothy Burlingham during and after their lifetimes by working with what might be seen as a slightly messy queer patchwork of different texts and cultural objects. I have suggested that we might find the traces of historic straightening devices in how mid-Century psychoanalysts saw their relationship, how they spoke about Anna Freud's supposedly 'unanalysed resistances', and in the physical merger of Anna's possessions with Dorothy's room in the Freud Museum, London. I have, however, suggested that contemporary labelling of their relationship as queer in fictionalisations of Anna's life may risk 'straightening up by queering', reducing the possibility for us to experience the disorienting queer moments that can be brought about by considering this long, unique and productive relationship. And I have explored queer angles in Anna Freud's early clinical writing, wondering what it would mean for ego psychology if the sublimation of her (homo)sexual desire was not, in fact, as complete as most historians of psychoanalysis have assumed.

I have deliberately tried to avoid neat conclusions in creating this queer patchwork because I want to complexify the historical and contemporary relationship between queer people, queer theory and psychoanalysis. Following Elisabeth Freeman's work on erotohistoriography (Freeman, 2010), I am trying to think about what a queer historiography of psychoanalysis might look like. The ethics of this project are strongly rooted in the psychoanalytic clinic. The increase in openness to queer sexuality amongst psychoanalysts in the United States and Britain is welcome, although it is surprisingly slow and incomplete. More than 40 years after Stephen Mitchell's early papers highlighting the non-analytic nature of many analysts'

clinical technique with homosexual patients (Mitchell, 1981), and 30 years after O'Connor and Ryan pointed out the lack of countertransference analysis in respect of analyst's attitudes to their lesbian patients (O'Connor & Ryan, 1993), the British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC) has still not issued a full apology to queer people for the harm done by conversion therapy practices. The BPC issued a statement in 2011 that 'it does not accept that a homosexual orientation is evidence of disturbance of the mind or in development' (British Psychoanalytic Council, 2011). In 2021, the BPC Council issued a 'statement of regret' that 'it has taken so long for more appropriate and progressive theories and practice about homosexuality to evolve and gain support within the profession' (British Psychoanalytic Council, 2021). However, the statement was not signed by all Member Institutes, and was not a full apology for the harm caused to patients in psychoanalysis. It also did not reference trans people, an exclusion that was 'loud in its absence' (Kentridge, 2022, p.15 ). These difficulties are not unique to the UK: Ann Pellegrini and Avgi Saketopoulou were awarded the first Tiresias Award from the International Psychoanalytic Association's Sexual and Gender Diversity Studies Committee for a paper discussing psychoanalytic work with a gender diverse child, which should have resulted in its publication in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. However, Pellegrini and Saketopoulou report that publication was eventually refused by the Journal because they wished to acknowledge the problems that generations of queer and trans analysts and patients had faced within psychoanalysis<sup>11</sup>.

Alongside this difficulty in acknowledging the harm that psychoanalysis has done to some queer and trans patients, there is a tendency to see queer and trans movements in psychoanalysis—however incomplete—as recent, and the past of psychoanalysis as completely normative in terms of gender and sexuality. However, as discussed above, recent work on Freud's early theory reminds us that the current tensions in gender and sexuality have been present in different forms since the very beginning of psychoanalysis. As Soreanu writes in the context of Sandor Ferenczi's writing on hybrid and intermediate states of gender and sexuality from the same period, there is 'a moment when the affective force of the past can erupt into the present, speaking of a desire from another time and placing a demand on the present in the form of an ethical imperative' (Soreanu, 2023, p. 45). The past can, and indeed should, influence the ethics of clinical practice today .

But this is especially complex for psychoanalysis as a field. Young-Bruehl and Schwarz argued in 2012 that traumatic ruptures in the history of psychoanalysis—many of which related to sexuality—mean that psychoanalysis does not have a history in the normal sense of the word. The historiography of psychoanalysis is written and rewritten by each generation. A significant problem for those of us who look back at the history of psychoanalysis from a queer or trans perspective is that, with the notable exception of Magnus Hirschfeld, who was an early member of Freud's inner circle, there are no obvious queer or trans figures in the history of psychoanalysis. The reasons for this gap, which can be seen as part of the traumatic non-history of psychoanalysis, are clear: the strongly normative forces active in psychoanalysis in the mid-20th century ensured that people with non-normative

expression of gender and sexuality were either excluded from psychoanalytic training or had to hide their gender or sexuality in order to train as analysts (Ellis, 1994). I, therefore, suggest that in addition to the ethical imperative identified by Soreanu to re-evaluate early psychoanalytic theory from a queer perspective, it is equally important to re-evaluate our relationship to historical figures in psychoanalysis who have elements of queerness in their lives and work. In this context, the paradoxical relationship between Anna Freud—daughter of Sigmund, a key figure in both British and American psychoanalysis who promoted the conversion of homosexual patients to heterosexuality—and Dorothy Burlingham—American Tiffany heiress, analysand of Freud, and child psychoanalyst—is very significant. As I have tried to make sense through my construction of this queer patchwork of a paper, I am not suggesting that we label Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham as queer psychoanalysts. But if we can find space for queer angles and deviations from the straight lines of heteronormativity in their lives and work, perhaps this movement towards a queer historiography of psychoanalysis will help to create greater imaginative space for queer sexuality and gender in the psychoanalytic clinic today.

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#### NOTES

1. The film had not been released in the UK at the time of writing this article in January 2024, but was released and reviewed in the US in late 2023.

2. Detailed biographies of Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham were published in the late 1980s, within 10 years of their deaths. Psychoanalyst Elisabeth Young-Bruehl published a biography of Anna Freud, which drew on her personal papers, letters, and clinical papers, in 1998, with a second edition – unchanged, but with an updated introduction – published in 2008. Dorothy Burlingham's grandson, Michael J. Burlingham, published a biography of his grandmother in 1989, also drawing on personal and clinical papers. I have drawn extensively on both biographies in this paper, and will discuss their orientation to Anna and Dorothy's relationship later.

3. Given that Anna Freud was Jewish and Dorothy Burlingham was Gentile, questions of racialisation are important when considering their lives, and will be discussed later in the context of Rebecca Coffey's novel. For a sensitive exploration of how we can think about race and sexual orientation in the context of Anna Freud's life see Vyrgioti (2020).

4. A small sign explaining this was in place during a visit in October 2022, but had been removed by July 2024.

5. See Michal Shapira's recent historical analysis of Freud's, 1919 case which highlights some of the ways in which Freud's approach to his young patient, Gretl Csonka-Trauteneegg, could be seen as less normative than some contemporary analysts and sexologists (Shapira, 2023).

6. A PEP-Web and Google scholar search returned no hits for reviews of the novel.



7. And, ironically, illustrating the enduring power of childhood Oedipal fantasies which was the touchstone of Freud's later work on sexuality, and much criticised by feminists due to what they saw as Freud's lack of recognition for actual childhood sexual abuse.

8. The fact that Anna was analysed by her own father – which had become unacceptable as psychoanalysis was institutionalised in the mid twentieth Century – also perhaps encouraged heteronormative wild analysis from those including Ernest Jones who assumed that Anna Freud's incomplete Oedipal resolution, due to her analysis by her father, had something to do with what they saw as her unfortunate inability to have a heterosexual relationship with a man.

9. Strangely, the content of these fantasies is almost ignored by the many psychoanalytic and queer theorists who have written about this paper, including Teresa de Lauretis (1994), in favour of a structural analysis of the transformation of auto-erotic fantasies, or an analysis of the sado-masochistic elements in the analytic relationship between Anna and her father.

10. The gender complexity of a girl dreaming that she is a boy in a same-sex relationship also deserves further consideration.

11. Pellegrini and Saketopoulou subsequently published a book, including a revised version of the paper, which described this painful experience in detail (Saketopoulou & Pellegrini, 2023).

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