

Sándor Ferenczi – the first intersubjectivist

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Sándor Ferenczi MD (1873-1933) has been a controversial person in the history of psychoanalysis. He was on the one hand closely attached to Freud, on the other he experimented with a methodology different from Freud's, that led to a schism between him and many leading analysts. Contrary to his contemporaries, who saw countertransference as an impediment to analysis, Ferenczi emphasized that the analyst has to concern himself with the experienced trauma of the patient in order to find the core of the relationship between analyst and analysand. By placing the personal relationship between patient and analysis as the essence of treatment, he aimed to refine the gold of psychoanalysis itself. Today there are few analysts who do not accept that intersubjectivity is central to psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, in spite of his undeniable importance to psychoanalysis, none of Ferenczi's numerous publications have been translated into any of the Scandinavian languages.

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Sándor Ferenczi lived from 7 July 1873 to 22 May 1933. His father, Baruch Fraenkel, was born in Kraków, Poland, in 1830, and moved to Hungary when he was 14. There, he started to work in a bookshop, of which he became the owner in 1856. The bookshop also served as a library and a publishing house. Sándor was the 8th of 12 children, all of whom worked in the shop. Sándor reputedly enjoyed sitting on top of a ladder reading books late into the evening and writing poems in the style of Heinrich Heine. Here, Ferenczi also developed an interest in hypnosis, and experimented with it on the apprentices who worked in the shop¹. He studied medicine in Vienna between 1890 and 1896 and received his first job at the department for venereal diseases at St. Rokus Hospital in Budapest. From 1910 Ferenczi started working as a private practitioner in psychiatry and later as a psychoanalyst. He had already become a prolific writer, publishing 104 articles between 1897 and 1908. The first was *The metapsychology of*

tourism (1897), in which he emphasized that wandering through nature stimulates the mind and invigorates the idle *fin de siècle* soul. Whilst at the department for venereal diseases, Ferenczi also met a homosexual transvestite (Rosa K alias Robert), whom he asked to write an autobiography (published in 1902 as 'Homosexualitas Feminina') – thereby already showing his characteristic interest in the patient's own perspective. Ferenczi wrote about a wide range of subjects, and several of his more prominent titles are as follows: 'Spiritismus'; 'Consciousness and development'; 'The use of morphine among aged persons'; 'Observations on cerebral haemorrhages and their therapy'; 'On coordinated and assimilated mental diseases'; 'Reading and health'; 'On the therapeutic value of hypnotism'; 'On how much healing is influenced by belief' and 'On female dressing.' As is evident, Ferenczi's broad interests produced far-reaching work. Between 1908 and 1933, Ferenczi wrote a further 142 publications (references can be found in 'Sándor Ferenczi's Bibliography 1899-1926', Ferenczi, 1926a, pp. 451-460 and Ferenczi, 1955, 378-386).

1 One of these was Samuel Fischer – who became the founder of Fischer Verlag in Germany.

FRIENDSHIP WITH FREUD

When, in 1907, Ferenczi read Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of dreams* (1900), he became deeply interested in psychoanalysis and wanted to meet the author. Via Carl Jung, Ferenczi received an invitation to visit Freud on 2 February 1908. They became friends, with Ferenczi joining the Wednesday Society at once. He became profoundly close and attached to Freud and related to him as to a father figure; Ferenczi admired and had great affection for Freud, but nevertheless repeatedly tried to assert his independence from him, although never going so far as to break with him. In 1908, Ferenczi gave his first papers on psychoanalysis for the Royal Hungarian Medical Association and for a psychoanalytic conference in Salzburg, where he talked about the influence of Freudian thoughts on how to bring up children. Ferenczi emphasized in his lecture, *Psychoanalysis and education*, that "only if we succeed to free ourselves from our hypocritical mendacity about sexuality and only if everyone can uphold his knowledge about body and soul, can our instincts be regulated and sublimated" (1908, p. 280). It is worth noting that Ferenczi referred in this paper to Dr Czerny, a Swedish paediatrician who stressed nursing as fundamental for establishing the necessary attachment between child and mother. This bond between children and parent and the bond between analysand and analyst was already and has remained the central tenet in Ferenczi's work.

In 1909, Ferenczi crossed the Atlantic with Freud and Jung to visit Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, where Freud had been invited to give a number of lectures. Their crossing from Germany to America later became famous for the way in which the three of them interpreted each other's dreams while walking on the promenade deck. This practice had started back in Bremerhaven on the night before the crossing, and a painting representing Freud's dream can be seen in the Kunst-Museum in nearby Bremen. As for the lectures at Clark University, Freud later described Ferenczi's input: "In the morning, before the time had come for my lecture to begin, we would walk together in front of the University building and I would ask him to suggest what I should talk about that day. He thereupon gave me a sketch of what, half an hour later, I improvised on in my lecture. In this way, he had a share in the origin of the Five Lectures" (Freud, 1933, p. 227).

At the second meeting of psychoanalysts in Nuremberg in 1910, Ferenczi proposed to form an International Psychoanalytic Association. He emphasized that:

Most scientific, social and political organisations show that childish megalomania, vanity, admiration of empty formalities, blind obedience and personal

egoism prevails instead of quiet, honest work in the general interest. Thus it seems that man can never rid himself of his family habits, that he really is a gregarious animal, who constantly and inevitably seeks to re-establish the old order, and to find his father again in an admired hero, a party leader, or a person in a position of authority over him; to find his mother over again in his wife; and to find his toys again in his children. But [he continued] the psychoanalytically trained are surely best adapted to found an association, which would combine the greatest personal liberty with the advantages of family organisations. It would be a family in which the father enjoyed no dogmatic authority, but only that to which he was entitled by reason of his abilities and labours. His pronouncements would not be followed blindly, as if they were divine revelations, but, like everything else, would be subject to thoroughgoing criticism, which he would accept, not with the absurd superiority of the paterfamilias, but with the attention it deserved. Moreover, the younger children united in this association would accept being told the truth to their face – however bitter and sobering it might be, without sensitivity and vindictiveness. (1911, pp. 302-303).

Members of the meeting decided to form the association that Ferenczi proposed.

In 1913, Ferenczi also founded the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Society. As in Vienna, intellectuals met in coffee-houses, where they had long, daily discussions about poetry, literature, art, philosophy and politics, and where psychoanalysis also became more and more a subject of interest. Consequently, as in Vienna, the members of the new society were also authors, artists and members of the cultural elite.

The period between 1908 and 1918 was a highly explosive one in Ferenczi's life. He published about 80 articles, several of which ought to be named: 'Introjection and transference'; 'Dream analysis'; 'The psychoanalysis of wit and the comical'; 'On the part played by homosexuality in the pathogenesis of paranoia'; 'Goethe on the reality value of the poet's fantasy'; 'On onanism'; 'On the ontogenesis of the interest in money'; 'Dread of cigar and cigarette smoking'; 'Talkativeness'; 'Two types of war-neuroses'; 'Nakedness as a means of inspiring terror'; 'On the technique of psycho-analysis'; 'Taming of a wild horse'; and 'Philosophy and psychoanalysis'. (Cf. Ferenczi, 1955, 378-380).

During World War I, Ferenczi was called up for military service and served as a doctor in a brigade of husars. From his garrison, he wrote to Freud about his daily riding lessons: "I started to do an analysis of a captain while riding. He became neurotic after being wounded during a battle, but he does also have libidinal conflicts. Imagine – the first equestrian psychoanalysis in history"

(Letter to Freud February 22, 1915 in Brabant et al, 1993, p. 57)

Freud analysed Ferenczi for a total of six weeks, spread out over three different periods in October 1915 and in the summer and autumn of 1916. The two also frequently exchanged letters, and they were both exceptionally open about themselves, their lives, their thoughts, their ideas and their fantasies, in particular Ferenczi. He accompanied Freud on many journeys and was invited to spend vacations with Freud and his family. Freud wrote of Ferenczi: "There was a close feeling of security between us, which was not even disturbed when he – though in the later years of his life – established a connection with the woman who mourns him today as his widow" (1933, p. 226).

This deserves some comment. In 1904, Ferenczi fell in love with a married woman seven years his senior, Gizella Palos (1866-1949), with whom he had a relationship for many years. In 1911, Ferenczi began to analyze Gizella's daughter, Elma, who had become depressed after the suicide of her fiancé. Ferenczi could not, as he expressed it "maintain the cold superiority of the analyst with Elma" (Letter to Freud December 3, 1911, *ibid.*, p. 316) and asked Freud to take over the analysis because he wished to marry Elma. Freud disapproved of the marriage and at first said no – he had no openings – although, when Ferenczi insisted, he relented and took Elma into analysis. After Elma's sojourn with Freud between January and Easter of 1912, Ferenczi terminated her analysis "with the same courage that he was to show each time he had to admit that he had made a mistake" (Haynal, 1993, p. 56). Elma did later marry an American gentleman (Hervé Laurvik). Back in 1912, Ferenczi expressed regret at losing his self-control vis-à-vis Elma, but later in 1922, in a letter to his friend Groddeck he wrote, that Freud had spent a few hours with him discussing the problem, and that the latter had pointed out Ferenczi's inability to handle the hostility felt for him, as he (Freud) acted like a father in preventing Ferenczi from marrying the younger of two Palos ladies, and that Ferenczi had murderous feelings toward Freud (Dupont et al., 1982, p. 64). In 1919, Ferenczi married Elma's mother on the same day that her ex-husband died of a heart attack.

Before the end of World War I, Ferenczi's work with war-neurotic soldiers came to the attention of the Ministry of War, and he received a medal for his efforts. The Ministry also ordered that all soldiers suffering from war-neurosis and in need of treatment should be treated with psychoanalysis. At the 5th Psychoanalytic Congress in Budapest in September 1918, Ferenczi was elected president of the IPA, and in the autumn of the same year, a large number of medical students petitioned for psychoanalysis to be included in the University's curriculum. By 24 April 1919, Ferenczi was appointed as Professor of

Psychoanalysis. However, due to the counter-revolution and new government policy, he, like many others, was considered to be a dangerous radical and a liberal free-thinker and was expelled from the Medical Society. Due to the changing political and economic situation in Hungary, it seemed dangerous to have Budapest as the centre of the psychoanalytic world, and so Freud appealed to Ferenczi to hand over the presidency to the British analyst, Ernest Jones. In spite, or perhaps because of Jones' analysis with Ferenczi back in 1913, the relationship between the two was strained and argumentative.

COOPERATION WITH RANK AND THE ACTIVE TECHNIQUE.

More and more engaged in his analytic work, Ferenczi began to disagree with Freud about the essence of psychoanalysis, a disagreement that centred upon the notion of 'active technique'. Having both initially stressed that the analyst should control his counter-transference, Ferenczi increasingly considered countertransference as the main expedient in work of an analyst in addition to his view that the analyst should take an active part in the analytic relationship. The differences in outlook between Freud and Ferenczi no doubt played a part in this divergence. Although Freud did mention 'active technique' in his 1918 Budapest lecture on *Wege der psychoanalytischen Therapie* (Lines of advance in psycho-analytic therapy) (Freud, 1919), he was primarily a scientist and theoretician, while Ferenczi was intensely sensitive towards pain and suffering, and was driven by his wish to help and heal his patients. Many who met him described him, among other superlatives, as warm, open, witty, extremely intelligent, a man of genius and of extensive reading, always probing, curious and playful, driven to explore feverishly and a fascinating lecturer. According to Michael Balint (1968), Ferenczi could not be put in any prearranged category, as he was always searching, experimenting, looking for new ideas and answers, which frequently underwent changes, as did Ferenczi himself. This inspired him to consider areas that infuriated some, who called him 'the enfant terrible of psychoanalysis'.

An example of Ferenczi's theoretical experimentation was his *Thalassa: a theory of Genitality* (1924), in which he speculated on an onto-, phylo- and perigenetic parallelism in the steps of evolution against the backdrop of enormous natural catastrophes; how from a one-cell organism, a complex organism came into existence with differentiated gametes (reproductive cells); how life was developing in the oceans; how different species adapted to life on land and how the human race then made its entrance after the ice age. He did include in his thesis the

existence of a biological unconscious as well as a primitive desire to reproduce the intrauterine and 'Thalassa' situation, a regression back to the prenatal or even to an anorganic existence and a desire that could be called the death drive.²

After the Budapest congress, encouraged by Freud, Ferenczi began to work with Otto Rank. Rank was a kind of adopted son to Freud, working as his secretary, as the manager for the Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, and as co-editor for the two most important psychoanalytic periodicals, *Imago* and *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*. Rank also wrote the minutes for the Wednesday Society. In 1924, Ferenczi and Rank published an essay entitled *The development of psychoanalysis* (1924), in which they emphasized that recovery, feeling and living through (*Erlebnis*) should precede remembering and insight; or rather, they argued that a phase of living through which will always come before a phase of understanding. As a result of this paper, a controversy started between Freud's collaborator Karl Abraham, who believed in the centrality of insight, and Rank and Ferenczi, who stressed living through and the trauma of birth. The pair conducted active therapy and experimented with a fixed date for termination, assuming that this would enable both them and the patient to work through separation anxiety, an anxiety to which they attributed more importance than castration anxiety. For Ferenczi, the relationship with the mother and the importance of regression became key to analysis, although this did not supersede the importance of the evolving relationship between analysand and analyst, and how this relationship is influenced by both of them. Ferenczi's experiences as analyst with Elma Palos and as analysand with Freud no doubt influenced him in arguing how transference and real relationships become intertwined during the psychoanalytic process, and that not only the analysand but also the analyst becomes entirely involved. Since, in Ferenczi's eyes, it was difficult to separate professional from private relationships, he recommended that all analysts should themselves undergo analysis for at least as long and as intensely as they offered their patients.

The conflict between Freud and Rank and Ferenczi worsened when the latter two started not only to theorize but also to employ active technique. A Committee, which had secretly been created in 1912 to deal with Jung and his deviations, and which consisted of Karl Abraham, Hans Sachs and Max Eitington from Berlin, and Ernest Jones from London, criticized Ferenczi and Rank for their joint paper. But in particular they attacked Rank for his article on the birth trauma (1924). The committee was embar-

assed that Rank and Ferenczi would treat birth trauma as real and not as symbolic and felt strongly against their theory, that the recurrence of birth trauma was central for treatment during analysis as well as their technical recommendation, that the analyst should take an active part in analysis; a measure which, in the committee's eyes, could tempt less experienced analysts to cross ethical boundaries. What infuriated Abraham and others most was Rank's idea that fear of the mother was not caused by the phylogenetically-given incest-taboo, but by birth trauma. Rank and Ferenczi tried to defend themselves at first, stressing that they did not question the significance of the Oedipal conflict, but added that it received its dynamic power from the experience of the birth trauma. However, Rank's emphasis on birth trauma was interpreted as a deviation from 'authentic' psychoanalytic theory, and, in spite of Freud's attempts to mediate between the conflicting parties, this led to a schism and contributed to Rank's emigration to America, where he stayed for the rest of his life. Ferenczi, meanwhile, stayed 'in line,' and, according to legend, ignored Rank when he later saw him by chance on a railway platform at Pennsylvania Station in New York.

Ferenczi was invited to America by the New School for Social Research, and he stayed there from October 1926 to July 1927, giving lectures in New York, Washington and Philadelphia. During this time, Ferenczi also conducted psychoanalyses and supervision. On the whole, he was highly appreciated, but, due to his support of lay-analysts, he also suffered criticism and made enemies. In what could be seen as an effort to appease his critics, Ferenczi did, in one lecture; openly dissociate himself from Rank, saying that the theories of birth trauma were "not sufficiently anchored in observations" (Ferenczi, 1926b, p. 36). Later, Ferenczi emphasized that to be born is a triumph for the child and not a trauma, since she has lungs to start breathing with, a heart to beat on its own, and parents who are more-or-less prepared to receive her. "The trauma is when the parents have no place for the child, who was not expected or longed for" (1927a, p. 64). Ferenczi admitted that, even if anxiety can have roots in experiences at birth, the former is a signal created by the ego; fantasies and dreams about the mother, the uterus and birth are only symbolic substitutions for sexual intercourse, a situation which is perceived as dangerous because of the threat of castration.

Although Ferenczi continued with his further explorations and experimentations to help and heal, he remained strongly attached to Freud, and he was deeply troubled by the growing rift between them. In his homage at Freud's 75th birthday, Ferenczi expressed his joy and wish to be able to convey his deepest respect and gratitude to the master, the originator, who gave psychoanalysis to the world (Ferenczi, 1926c).

2 It might interest Scandinavian readers that he mentions Paul Bjerre in his article.

THE 'REAL TRAUMA' AND THE CENTRALITY OF THE ANALYTIC RELATIONSHIP

Ferenczi was mainly concerned with practicing analysis, and his interest for and ingenuity in working with gravely disturbed patients became well known. Many specifically sought his guidance, coming from as far afield as America. Among these were Clara Thompson (herself an MD, an analyst, and founder of the William Alanson White Psychoanalytic Institute) and Elisabeth Severn, with whom Ferenczi became very engaged. Ferenczi also had a number of noteworthy analysands, including Ernest Jones, Therese Benedek, Alice and Michael Balint, Georg Grodeck, Melanie Klein (who lived in Budapest between 1911 and 1919, before moving to Berlin, and later to London in 1926), Vilma Kovács, Izette de Forest, Sándor Loránd and Geza Roheim.

Ferenczi placed the therapeutic goal in the centre and considered the relationship between the analysand and analyst progressively more and more. He admitted that introjections, projections, transference and countertransference had important rôles and functions in the therapeutic dialogue, but he found the shared experience to be the essence of psychoanalysis. For this reason, the self-knowledge of the analyst, his ability to abstain from narcissistic gratifications, his openness to perceive his own idiosyncrasies and to accept how and what the patient recognizes are central. The analyst has to be able to admit his mistakes without shame. Ferenczi emphasized again that every analyst should undergo analysis (1927b, p. 84). He also felt that it was important not to be authoritative, but tentative, and that humility had to be sincere and not artificial. The analyst should oscillate between empathy and self-observation before forming an opinion about the material. Most important for Ferenczi was the working through, which should be done in such a way that both the analyst and the analysis itself slowly became part of the patient's life history. Ferenczi gave increasing emphasis to the 'real trauma' behind neurotic conflicts and sufferings. This he expressed clearly in his lecture in Oxford in 1929: "To-day I am returning to the view that, beside the great importance of the Oedipus complex in children, a great significance must also be attached to the repressed incestuous affection of adults, which masquerades as tenderness" (1930, p. 121).

Ferenczi started this presentation by calling himself a combination of a pupil and a teacher, which gave him the right and the ability to point out biases in psychoanalysis – without foregoing that which has proved its value in the past. Introducing a new technique called 'relaxation and neocatharsis,' he granted that he could be attacked for it. As ever, he acknowledged that the aim of analysis is both

to cure and to provide a deepened insight, but that the most important service that analysis can provide is to increase tolerance of pain. To reconstruct the past, within the emotional experience of the here and now, means remembering in an authentic mode, so that the part of the personality that has been split off can be re-integrated. Ferenczi deliberated the possibility that it was not necessarily the traumatic event as such that was pathogenic, but the very experience that the child was denied to "live it through" by persons of primary importance, predominantly the mother. He emphasized that the analyst therefore had to concern himself with the experienced trauma and that the gold of psychoanalysis was refined by his technique, stressing the personal relation between patient and analyst.

However, the more he focussed on the significance of the trauma and the need to re-experience it in the presence of the empathic (maternal) psychoanalyst, the deeper the conflict between Ferenczi, Freud and the Committee became. Although this saddened Ferenczi, he nevertheless stuck to his method. In his paper, *Child-analysis in the analysis of adults*, which he read on 6 May 1931 before the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society at a meeting to celebrate Freud's 75th birthday, Ferenczi referred to the fact that he had been dubbed 'the enfant terrible of psychoanalysis' and described himself as being open to new experiences, keen to experiment with new aspects of psychoanalysis, and as maintaining a fanatical confidence in the effectiveness of the psychoanalytic science. Ferenczi, it seems, thought it better practice to change his technique rather than to blame the analysand:

I have had a kind of fanatical belief in the efficacy of depth-psychology, and this has led me to attribute occasional failures not so much to the patient's 'incurableness' as to our own lack of skill, a supposition which necessarily led me to try altering the usual technique in severe cases with which it proved unable to cope successfully. It is thus only with the utmost reluctance that I ever bring myself to give up even the most obstinate case, and I have come to be a specialist in peculiarly difficult cases, with which I go on for very many years. I have refused to accept such verdicts as that a patient's resistance was unconquerable, or that his narcissism prevented our penetrating any further, or the sheer fatalistic acquiescence in the so-called 'drying up' of a case. I have said to myself that, as long as a patient continues to come at all, the last thread of hope has not snapped. Thus the question constantly forced itself upon me: is the patient's resistance always the cause of the failure? Is it not rather our own convenience, which disdains to adapt itself, even in technique, to the idiosyncrasies of the individual? (1931, p. 128-129).

The more I read of and about Ferenczi, the more I wish I had met him in coffeehouses, at conferences and clinical seminars and had had the opportunity to listen to and discuss with him. But I would not have chosen him as my analyst. His very strong desire to heal, his ‘furor sanandi’, would have worried me, as it takes on the characteristics of an obsession. This I can elucidate by using Ferenczi’s *Clinical diary*, which he wrote between 7 January and 2 October 1932, and which concerns the treatment of the patient called BN (Ferenczi, 1932a). BN was born Leota Brown in 1879, was a sick child, often bedridden, prone to severe migraines and had eating problems. From puberty she had been treated for neurasthenia and placed in sanatoriums several times. She was married for some years and gave birth to a daughter. Leota, or Elisabeth as she chose to call herself after her divorce, sought treatment from different physicians with psychological practices, and in 1907 decided to work as a healer. First she moved to Texas and then during the war to New York, where she rented a hotel apartment, printed a calling card bearing the title *Elisabeth Severn, Metaphysician* and started to see patients. In 1913, she published her first book, *Psychotherapy: its doctrine and practice*, which mainly focused on positive thinking. Brown/Severn also suffered continuously from severe depression, confusion and hallucinations, and was often close to suicide. She continued to seek help from many physicians, including Otto Rank, who had moved to New York in 1924. It was possibly through Rank that she contacted Ferenczi, whom she considered to be her “last chance”. Between 1924 and 1933, she was in analysis with Ferenczi for various periods of differing lengths, both in Budapest (where she stayed in the most exclusive hotels and treated some of her own patients, who had followed her to Hungary to continue their treatment), as well as in New York during Ferenczi’s stay there from 1926 to 1927. Furthermore, she would sometimes accompany Ferenczi on his journeys, including one to St Moritz, where he conducted analyses of some patients. Ferenczi describes BN as his most valued patient, colleague, training analysand, and, towards the end of her treatment, as his central partner in his system of “mutual analysis”. Despite many years of contact, BN’s condition did not improve, while the relationship between them became more and more challenging and Ferenczi had to intensify his efforts to support her and to meet all her needs and demands. Analytic sessions could go on for four or five hours; frequently he had to be available for weekends and holidays. She could accuse him of being cold and inimical and insincere with his empathy, and demanded to take over the analysis. In his diary, Ferenczi wrote: “The first real step of progress

in regaining the confidence and devotion of the analysand was when I could openly admit my feelings towards her, to confess that despite my friendliness I could hate her, and as I could acknowledge the limits of my capabilities, was she able to reduce her demands on me” (Ferenczi, 1932a, p. 26).

Ferenczi’s ‘breakthrough’ with BN took place in March 1928 when, due to his new technique of promoting relaxation and regression, her amnesia lifted and she could put together most of the details from her traumatic childhood: her father had abused her physically, emotionally and sexually, and she had even been forced to take part in the killing of a black man. Although he had some reservations, Ferenczi was on the whole convinced that BN’s traumatic experiences were factual; but more essential was his conviction that she could re-experience these traumas in his warm, compassionate and emotional presence. In the *Clinical diary*, Ferenczi stressed that BN helped him to come in contact with his “emotional deafness, which I constantly try to overcompensate with love and kindness. In my case, an infantile aggressivity and refusal of love towards my mother became displaced onto the patients. But as with my mother, I managed with a tremendous effort to develop a compulsive, purely intellectual superkindness, which even enabled me to shed real tears (tears that I myself believed to be genuine)..Could it be that my entire relaxational therapy and the superkindness that I demand from myself towards patients are really only an exaggerated display of compassionate feelings that basically are really lacking? Instead of feeling with the heart, I feel with my head. Head and thought replace heart and libido.” (1932a, p. 86).

Ferenczi made many notes with similar connotations, demonstrating quite clearly how he was open to critical observations not only about his patients but also about himself.

Nevertheless, Ferenczi suffered a lot when Freud questioned his methods. When Clara Thompson, whom Ferenczi analyzed between 1928 and 1933, told Freud that she was permitted to kiss ‘father’ Ferenczi whenever she wished to do so, he wrote an upset letter, dated 13 December 1931:

... On the other hand, I see that the difference between us comes to a head in the smallest thing, a detail in technique, which certainly deserves to be discussed. You have made no secret of the fact that you kiss your patients and let them kiss you; I had also heard the same thing from my patients ... Now, picture to yourself what will be the consequence of making your technique public The younger of our colleagues will be hard put, in the relational connections that they have made, to stop at the point where they had originally intended, and

Godfather Ferenczi, looking at the busy scenery that he has created, will possibly say to himself: Perhaps I should have stopped in my technique of maternal tenderness before the kiss (Falzeder & Brabant, 2000, p. 422).

Ferenczi was hurt by Freud's comments, as is made clear in his response of 27 December 1931:

I believe I am capable of creating a mild, passionless atmosphere, which is suited to incubate also what has hitherto been concealed. But since I fear the dangers just as much as you do, I must and will, now as before, keep in mind the warnings that you reproach me with, and strive to criticize myself harshly. I would be remiss if I wanted to bury the productive layer that is beginning to uncover itself before me (Falzeder & Brabant, 2000, p. 424).

Later in his diary, Ferenczi made a note about Clara Thompson, saying that she, in the transference, acted out her relation to her father, who had abused her when she was a child, and whose play with her had been strongly sexually coloured. She now took her revenge by stigmatizing Ferenczi. Clara Thompson was in analysis with Ferenczi during her regular visits to Budapest 1928-1933, and it is interesting to read her portrayal of him in her 1989 paper. In this paper, she admits, that he was genuinely engaged in his calling as a psychoanalyst, meeting each patient with a deep conviction in his wish and ability to help; in his eyes nobody was incurable, only methods could be insufficient. She describes him as impulsively passionate, curious, and sentimental with a romantic colour, and as someone who strived with childish eagerness to identify with any situation. She did find him considerably attached to Freud, whose appreciation and approval was more important to him than his independence. This did not, however, prevent him from meeting his patients with confidence, self-reliance and genuine interest. Ferenczi was convinced that the positive feelings of the analyst contribute to healing, and that he should meet his patients with love and show them unlimited consideration. She herself stressed, that 'love' should consist of accepting and fundamentally respecting the patient – but nothing more. Ferenczi now and then had difficulties in knowing when to stop 'loving' with the consequence that his patients did exploit his affection to gain power over him. Too much fondness can even be damaging, for it can dissolve boundaries and respect. It is important for analysis to take place in an interpersonal relationship where the analyst remains open, frank and truthful, but he ought not to lose his maturity or his status as a symbol of normality (Thompson, 1943).

Before summing up my impressions of Ferenczi and his work, I wish to quote from Ferenczi's last lecture, *Confusion of tongues between adults and the child – the*

language of tenderness and of passion, which he gave at the 12th IPA Congress in Wiesbaden in 1932 (Ferenczi, 1932b). Before travelling to the congress, Ferenczi visited Freud on 30 August to seek his approval. Freud's opinion was that Ferenczi had regressed to the etiological assumptions that he himself had held 35 years previously, namely that neuroses are caused by real childhood traumas. Freud told Ferenczi that he should not present the paper, but Ferenczi carried on regardless, and, in spite of much opposition, it was published in *Zeitschrift* in 1933.

He started his lecture by stressing once more the significance of traumatic factors in the genesis of neuroses, factors that were wrongly neglected during the past years. Instead of exploring and studying these factors, many use premature explanations and make references to disposition and constitution. It is not only of foremost importance to acknowledge these traumatic memories, but to have the aptitude to contain them as actual and critical experiences. This paper does once more highlight the specific honesty of Ferenczi, re-emphasizing the importance of exploring the criticism the analysand can feel towards the analyst, as well as warning against the risk of falsifying memory.

The following quotation illustrates his honesty, the stress he places on traumatic factors and his warning against the consequences of the trauma in the form of the child's precocious maturity:

Gradually, then, I came to the conclusion that the patients have an exceedingly refined sensitivity for the wishes, tendencies, whims, sympathies and antipathies of their analyst, even if the analyst is completely unaware of this sensitivity. Instead of contradicting the analyst or accusing him of errors and blindness, the patients identify themselves with him; only in rare moments of an hysteroid excitement, i.e., in an almost unconscious state, can they pluck up enough courage to make a protest; normally they do not allow themselves to criticize us, such a criticism does not even become conscious in them unless we give them special permission or even encouragement to be so bold. That means that we must discern not only the painful events of their past from their associations, but also – and much more often than hitherto supposed – their repressed or suppressed criticism of us. Here, however, we meet with considerable resistances, this time resistances in ourselves as well as in our patients. Above all, we ourselves must have been really well analysed, right down to 'rock bottom'. We must have learnt to recognize all our unpleasant external and internal character traits in order that we may be really prepared to face all those forms of hidden hatred and contempt that can be so cunningly disguised in our patients' associations. (p. 158) ...

I obtained above all new corroborative evidence for my supposition that the trauma, especially the sexual trauma,

as the pathogenic factor cannot be valued highly enough. Even children of very respectable, sincerely puritanical families, fall victim to real violence or rape much more often than one had dared to suppose (p. 161) ...

When subjected to a sexual attack, under the pressure of such traumatic urgency, the child can develop instantaneously all the emotions of a mature adult and all the potential qualities dormant in him that normally belong to marriage, maternity and fatherhood. One is justified – in contradistinction to the familiar regression – to speak of a traumatic progression, of a precocious maturity It is natural to compare this with the precocious maturity of the fruit that was injured by a bird or insect. Not only emotionally, but also intellectually, can the trauma bring to maturity a part of the person. I wish to remind you of the typical ‘dream of the wise baby’ described by me several years ago (1923) in which a newly-born child or an infant begins to talk, in fact teaches wisdom to the entire family. The fear of the uninhibited, almost mad adult changes the child, so to speak, into a psychiatrist and, in order to become one and to defend himself against dangers coming from people without self-control, he must know how to identify himself completely with them. Children have the compulsion to put to rights all disorder in the family, to burden, so to speak, their own tender shoulders with the load of all the others; of course this is not only out of pure altruism, but is in order to be able to enjoy again the lost rest and the care and attention accompanying it. A mother complaining of her constant miseries can create a nurse for life out of her child, i.e., a real mother substitute, neglecting the true interests of the child (Ferenczi, 1932b, pp. 158, 161, 166).

THE FINAL BREAK BETWEEN FERENCZI AND FREUD

There is a kind of wise baby in Ferenczi, precocious, conveying his wisdom with childish vigour and always open to experimentation. This was probably the basis for the schism between him, Freud and the other ‘greats’ of psychoanalysis. In 1933, Freud wrote a caveat about how Ferenczi’s borderless experimentations could draw others into his system. Freud once again criticized Ferenczi’s theoretical regression in emphasizing the importance of traumatic childhood experiences. It seems most likely that both of them were influenced by unresolved mutual transferences and countertransferences. I wish to mention, that in February 1926, when Freud was in the third year of his struggle with his mouth cancer, Ferenczi proposed to come to Vienna and offered Freud his services as an analyst. Freud thanked Ferenczi warmly but declined, saying that he was too old for analysis. Ferenczi regarded this as

a defence mechanism and repeated the offer – but nothing came of it. Nevertheless, correspondence between the two continued, though with less frequency and intensity than before. Altogether there are about 1,000 letters in the collection that was published first in French in 1992 (Brabant et al., 1992) and later in English in 1993 (Brabant, et al., 1993), in 1996 (Falzeder et al., 1996) and in 2000 (Falzeder & Brabant, 2000).

Despite the controversies, Freud suggested that Ferenczi should be elected president of the IPA in 1932 – which the latter declined. There are two letters concerning this. In the first, written in Budapest and dated 1 May 1932, Ferenczi complained about his tendency to become involved in situations that he could master only with great difficulty and excessive strain, but at the same time he agreed to accept the presidency, if Freud insisted. In the second, from 21 August 1932, he wrote:

After long and tortured hesitation I have decided to decline the presidential candidacy. ... I have reached a definitely self-critical juncture in the cause of efforts to structure my analyses more effectively ..., which make it necessary not only to supplement but also correct our practical and in part our theoretical views. I have the feeling that such an intellectual standpoint in no way suits the dignity of the presidency, whose main task is to preserve and strengthen what has been established, and my inner sense tells me that it would not even be honest to occupy this position” (Molnar, 1992, p. 129).

Sándor Ferenczi died on 22 May 1933, at the age of 59. He was affected by pernicious anaemia, which had first been diagnosed in September 1932, a few weeks after the Wiesbaden Congress. In his obituary, Ernest Jones (1933) stated: “In his still later writings, Ferenczi showed unmistakable signs of mental regression in his attitude towards fundamental problems of psycho-analysis. Ferenczi blazed like a comet, but did not shine steadily till the end. In this course he illustrated one of his own most important teachings — the astoundingly close interdependence of mind and body” (p. 466).

Both Freud and Jones hold the idea that Ferenczi’s behavior was driven by a deterioration in his mental condition and dissidence. This was apparently false. According to Ferenczi’s stepdaughter, Elma Laurvik, the first symptoms of his illness were noticed in the spring of 1932, several months before the Wiesbaden conference. Nevertheless, “he worked with a few of his patients up to a month before his passing. He spent his last two weeks in bed and in the last days he had to be fed. The food was given to him by a maid whom he liked very much. Up to the last day he joked with her. She asked him if he would like more coffee. When she returned with it he was dead”

(Grossman, & Grossman, 1965, p.198). Another source is Emanuel Berman who in a book review from 1996 with the title *The Ferenczi renaissance* wrote: “Sandor Ferenczi was born on July 7, 1873, and died (of pernicious anemia) on May 22, 1933. One might add, metaphorically, that he was assassinated by Ernest Jones in 1957 and reborn in the 1980s and the 1990s. The authors and editors of the books reviewed here are among those who helped resurrect him (Berman, 1996, p. 391)”.

DISCUSSION

Ferenczi worked and wrote contrary to the established model of his contemporaries, who emphasized the rule of abstinence, insisted that the analyst should interpret the transference of the analysands, which could distort the analysand’s relationship with the analyst, and maintained that the latter should have full control of his/her own emotions and feelings. Countertransference was seen as an impediment to analysis, until Michael and Alice Balint (1939) and Paula Heiman at the 16th IPA Congress in Zürich (1948) emphasized the importance of countertransference for the understanding of our analysands (Heiman, 1950), thereby adding new weight to Ferenczi’s hypotheses. To quote André Haynal:

Ferenczi’s research made it possible to conceive of a field of interactions and finally of intersubjectivity (though, to my knowledge, he never used the term). But this interactionism never became facile; his passionate engagement with the Freudian heritage protected him from that, as well as from the trap of simplification. His various experiments with changing the analyst’s role (‘active therapy’ and ‘relaxation therapy’) were caricatured both in the work of Jones and in other writings on Ferenczi. But these experiments, along with his realization of the importance of the psychoanalyst’s attitude in the analytic treatment – which could be said to have broken a taboo, by taking into account the analyst’s feelings and inner reactions – ended up by centering his interest on countertransference and (its logical consequence) on the metapsychology of the analyst’s mental processes during analysis, his cathexes, his legitimate pleasures at work, that is, his way of functioning (Haynal, 1997, p. 449).

Today there are few who do not accept that intersubjectivity is central to psychoanalysis – as is made clear by the highly valued book on countertransference edited by Norman & Ylander (1999), in which the authors focus on unconscious communication. Interestingly, however, there is not one reference in this book to Sándor Ferenczi.

The main characteristics of Ferenczi’s technique can be summarized in the following way:

- the creation of an intense emotional atmosphere is important for reliving childhood traumas
- counter-transference analysis is central for the process
- mutual participation is essential for the authenticity of interaction
- empathy is fundamental for the maintenance of the subjective experience of analysands
- to experiment clinically is better than upholding doctrinaire knowledge
- the highest goal of psychoanalysis is to heal – by means of the warm and responsive approach of the analyst
- the analyst must himself have experienced deep, personal analysis
- the analyst should maintain a continuous self-analysis himself, and by peer supervision

In contrast to Ferenczi, I am of the same opinion as David Malan (1979), who emphasized that the aim of psychoanalysis (and psychotherapy) is not to give the patients the love they miss or never received, but to help them mourn and work through their emotions about the absence of being loved. The psychoanalytic process develops in the mutual interaction between analysand and analyst. Both their personalities, expectations, conception of the world, ideas about themselves and others, their characteristic way to organize and work with information, affects the course and outcome of the analytic process. Ideally, the relationship is characterized by the attitude of the analyst, and his or her interest, engagement, vigilance and dependability. A stable framework must include tolerance on the part of the analyst to be assigned different transference roles by the analysand, with the aim being first and foremost to understand and not to alter these. The analysand can thus recognize how her/his life is moved by uniquely subjective models of mind, as well as how psychic reality is constituted in interpersonal situations. Thus, the history of the patient can – within the framework of the psychoanalytic relationship – become mirrored, narrated and restructured. This provides the opportunity for a new understanding, which can allow the patient to take hold of and to own his individual history, and consequently to shape his life and future.

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