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My own position in the psycho-analytical movement has made me a kind of cross between a pupil and teacher.

—Ferenczi, "The Principle of Relaxation and Neocatharsis"

In 1937, at eighty-one years of age and still possessing boundless intellectual curiosity, Freud wrote a monograph in which he attempted to define the principal obstacles to the successful completion of psychoanalytic treatment. Drawing on theory as well as more than forty years' experience as an analyst, Freud strove to elucidate the psychic forces that can give rise to deadlock or failure in these disastrous "interminable" analyses.

Among the examples Freud adduces to illustrate his hypotheses is the following analytic narrative:

A certain man, who had himself practised analysis with great success, came to the conclusion that his relations both to men and women—to the men who were his competitors and to the woman whom he loved—were nevertheless not free from

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neurotic impediments; and he therefore made himself the subject of an analysis by someone else whom he regarded as superior to himself. This critical illumination of his own self had a completely successful result. He married the woman he loved and turned into a friend and teacher of his supposed rivals. Many years passed in this way, during which his relations with his former analyst also remained unclouded. But then, for no assignable external reason, trouble arose. The man who had been analyzed became antagonistic to the analyst and reproached him for having failed to give him a complete analysis. The analyst, he said, ought to have known and taken into account the fact that a transference-relation can never be purely positive; he should have given his attention to the possibilities of a negative transference. The analyst defended himself by saying that, at the time of the analysis, there was no sign of a negative transference. (1937, 221)

As we know, Freud here refers to Ferenczi, and he is himself the analyst who is “regarded as superior.” This is Freud’s way of posthumously continuing the dialogue with his friend who had died four years earlier, in May 1933. Freud appears to be asking how it could be that Ferenczi, whose therapeutic skill was held in great respect by his contemporaries, should have come to reproach him with not having analyzed his negative transference. Indeed, Freud wonders further, how could this former patient and close friend have come to suspect that he himself had had a negative countertransference response? Are these complaints to be read as the deferred effects of a negative therapeutic reaction? How is one to categorize this residual hatred provoked by the analysis and the analyst, which remained undetected at the time? Ought he to have adopted a hostile “active” technique, so that Ferenczi’s negative affect could have been made available for analysis? At the very least, Freud’s compulsion publicly to narrate his analytic history with Ferenczi in “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” indicates that this misadventure had left a considerable impact on him and that he was still trying to think through its implications.

In spite of the inconclusive and even tragic end to the relationship between the founder of psychoanalysis and the man he once looked upon as his “Paladin and secret Grand Vizier,” there can be no doubt about Ferenczi’s exceptional importance to the history of the psychoanalytic movement. From the first years of his psychoanalytic vocation, Ferenczi’s outstanding clinical gifts and his grasp of theoretical matters made him one of the few truly original thinkers of the time. Furthermore, the place he occupied beside Freud for the twenty-five years between 1908 and 1933—
by turns pupil, disciple, patient, and close and trusted friend—meant that his authority was recognized throughout the psychoanalytic community. However, his standing with Freud changed almost imperceptibly during the last five years of his life until it became “exceptional”—in the sense that “the exception proves the rule.” The technical modifications Ferenczi began to introduce in 1928 and the theoretical formulations to which they gave rise were deemed unacceptable by Freud, who saw them as subversive. From then on, disagreement and disharmony reigned, and the estrangement that ensued in the year before Ferenczi died was distressing to both men.

In 1920, a year that marks a turning point for psychoanalysis, first Freud and then Ferenczi began to appreciate the diabolical character of the repetition compulsion, which caused so many analyses—such as that of the Wolf Man—to become bogged down or end in failure. Faced with the clinical consequences of this compulsion, psychoanalysts wondered how it could be overcome or at least mitigated.

Ferenczi tried to find an answer through his own experience with “difficult” cases and the theoretical challenges they posed. In doing so, he put into practice some new variations in technique. From 1918 to 1933, he became increasingly involved in attempts to reevaluate and then modify the clinical setting, partly through what would nowadays be called “putting it on trial” (Cahn 1983). He began by proposing what he called the active technique. This failed, so he abandoned it in favor of the relaxation technique or neocatharsis. Freud remained suspicious of this trend because he regarded it as a step backwards that revived ways of thinking by which he had himself been tempted before discarding his seduction theory in 1897.

In this second phase of technical innovation, Ferenczi was confronted with complex transference situations, which cast doubt on the received metapsychology of the time. He interpreted them as a pure repetition of childhood trauma, and this led him to question the concept of trauma. He widened Freud’s theoretical hypothesis about seduction and made a remarkable breakthrough. The etiology of trauma in Ferenczi’s view is the emotional rape of the child by an adult, a confusion of tongues between them, due to the adult’s denial of the child’s despair. Ferenczi saw the essential question in his patients to be one not of the natural destiny of the libido
but of extreme states of mental (and sometimes physical) pain—*the agony of mental life*.

As Ferenczi’s thinking evolved between 1928 and 1933, a conflict with Freud became inevitable. A theoretical gulf opened up between them around the concept of infantile trauma. In Freud’s view, to claim that the compulsion to repeat stemmed from a traumatic situation mistakenly rendered the object responsible and underestimated the resources of the mind to transform trauma and the mental pain associated with it. He voiced his objections to Ferenczi’s theoretical regression in a letter of October 2, 1932: “I no longer believe you will correct yourself as I corrected myself a generation ago. . . . For a couple of years you have systematically turned away from me. . . . Objectively I think I could point out to you the technical errors in your conclusions, but why do so? I am convinced that you would not be accessible to any doubts” (Dupont 1985, xvii).

As Michael Bálint has pointed out, “the historic disagreement between Freud and Ferenczi acted as a trauma on the psychoanalytic world” (1967, 152). When Ferenczi died, a discreet veil was thrown over the matter, which was not lifted for over thirty years. This veil brought with it silence with respect to Ferenczi the man, reticence with respect to his work, and even a partial loss of memory about his importance to Freud. Above all, this attitude is symptomatic of the difficulty felt by both his contemporaries and successors in comprehending his prescient clinical and theoretical intuitions. Ferenczi was one of the founders of modern clinical practice, but it was necessary to await the passing of several generations of analysts before there could be a “return to Ferenczi” and a renewal of interest in the questions he raised long ago.

*“From Unexhausted Springs of Emotion”*

In the days following Ferenczi’s death in May 1933, Freud wrote an obituary. He recalled the major role that his friend had played in the psychoanalytic movement and the tribute he had paid to him ten years before on his fiftieth birthday. But after reiterating his admiration for Ferenczi’s “versatility and originality and the richness of his gifts” (1933, 227), and singling out *Thalassa* (1924) as Ferenczi’s masterpiece, he added:
After this summit of achievement, it came about that our friend slowly drifted away from us. On his return from a period of work in America he seemed to withdraw more and more into solitary work, though he had previously taken the liveliest share in all that happened in analytic circles. We learnt that one single problem had monopolised his interest. The need to cure and to help had become paramount in him. He had probably set himself aims which, with our therapeutic means, are altogether out of reach today. From unexhausted springs of emotion the conviction was borne in upon him that one could effect far more with one's patients if one gave them enough of the love which they had longed for as children. He wanted to discover how this could be carried out within the framework of the psychoanalytic situation; and so long as he had not succeeded in this, he kept apart, no longer certain, perhaps, of agreement with his friends. Wherever it may have been that the road he had started along would have led him, he could not pursue it to the end.

(229)

This note, quite different in tone from the previous one, clearly indicates that there had been prolonged difficulties in the relationship between the two men. These were due both to their theoretical differences and to Ferenczi's complaint to Freud about his unanalyzed negative transference. In his letter of January 17, 1930, Ferenczi claimed that this omission was at the root of the difficulties he had encountered in his own analytic practice:

What happens in the relationship between you and me (at least in me) is an entanglement of various conflicts of emotions and positions. At first you were my revered mentor and unattainable model, for whom I nourished the feelings of a pupil—always somewhat mixed, as we know. Then you became my analyst, but as a result of unfortunate circumstances my analysis could not be completed. I particularly regretted that, in the course of the analysis, you did not perceive in me and bring to abreaction negative feelings and fantasies that were only partly transferred. It is well known that no analysand—not even I, with all the years of experience I had acquired with others—could accomplish this without assistance. Painstaking self-analysis was therefore required, which I subsequently undertook and carried out quite methodically. Naturally this was also linked to the fact that I was able to abandon my somewhat puerile attitude and realize that I must not depend quite so completely on your favor—that is, that I must not overestimate my importance to you. (Dupont 1985, xiii)

Freud replied on January 20, 1930, that he was "amused to read certain passages," particularly those in which Ferenczi reproached him for not having analyzed the negative transference. It was, he observed, as though Ferenczi had forgotten that at the time nobody—not even the two of
them—knew that negative transference reactions were always to be expected. In addition, Freud went on, given the excellent relationship between them, it would have taken quite some time before that became clear.¹

At this key point in his relationship with Freud, Ferenczi clearly adopted a different point of view from the one he confided to Georg Groddeck eight years earlier, after a visit to Vienna, in a letter of February 27, 1922:

Pr. Fr. occupied himself 1–2 hours with my conditions; he adhered to his earlier opinion that the main thing in my case is the hatred toward him, who (just like the father at one time) had interfered with my marriage to a younger bride (now daughter-in-law). Hence therefore my murderous intentions toward him, which express themselves in nocturnal death-scenes (growing cold, moaning). These symptoms are overdetermined by reminiscences of witnessing parental intercourse.—I must admit that it did me good to be able to talk for once about these feelings of hate with the beloved father. (Ferenczi and Groddeck 1982, 41)

In view of this letter, how are we to read Ferenczi’s 1930 complaint that his negative transference was not analyzed? Is it a simple memory lapse on his part? Or is it a more extreme form of repression based on a hard core of negation and denial? A form of splitting? If such were the case, what would be the effect of the destiny of the transference neurosis that at that moment gave rise to such apparently unjustified complaints?

There is in fact neither contradiction nor paradox in these statements. If we follow Ferenczi’s thinking and his technical and theoretical formulations from 1920 to 1930, it becomes apparent that what Freud and Ferenczi meant by the negative transference is of a qualitatively different order. Negative transference in Freud’s view develops through the vicissitudes of an essentially paternal dynamic, while for Ferenczi it is maternal (Bokanowski 1979, 1988). Their use of the same term inevitably gave rise to conceptual vagueness and confusion. What is more, the negative maternal transference based on primitive narcissistic conflicts and consequent difficulties with symbol-formation had not yet been conceptualized. Ferenczi deserves credit for having been the first to outline its metapsychological characteristics and to attempt to describe what was at issue in the transference-countermem-
Technical and Theoretical Issues in Ferenczi's Analytic Work

We can understand the importance of Ferenczi's developments only if we recall his analytic background and the context in which he began to practice. His career falls into two main periods. The first, from 1908 to 1918, represents his years of apprenticeship and training. With them came a particular type of relationship to Freud, which was all the more complicated because almost from the beginning Ferenczi was not only a disciple and heir to a body of doctrine, but he was also Freud's trusted friend and confidant. Yet after the masterstroke of "Introjection and Transference" (1909), Ferenczi put himself in the position of an apparently immature hopeful waiting for Freud to take him into analysis.

Despite the increasing urgency of his appeals, compounded by his romantic entanglements of 1911–12, Ferenczi had to wait two and a half years until, in 1914 and 1916, he received three periods of analysis, each of which lasted a few weeks. But the circumstances were awkward, and neither Freud nor Ferenczi felt that the latter gained very much from this experience, though both agreed that it was not to be dismissed out of hand.

The second period of Ferenczi's career spans the fifteen years of technical experiment, from 1918 to 1933. With hindsight we can see that he attempted to disengage from the transference to Freud and sublimate what he felt had been left unanalyzed in him. His innovations are also, as I have indicated, a response to the challenges that the repetition compulsion posed for analysts in the aftermath of World War I. Freud attempted to formulate ways of dealing with this issue in such key texts as Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), The Ego and the Id (1923), "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924), Civilization and Its Discontents (1930), and "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" (1938). Like Freud's, Ferenczi's solutions to the riddle of repetition took shape only gradually, but they differed radically in that they were primarily concerned with technique.

Ferenczi was a brilliant and indefatigable clinician. From his first years as a practitioner, he set himself the task of comprehending the limitations he came up against in treating the most intractable patients. His contemporaries regarded him as a "savior" and did not hesitate to send him patients with whom they had failed. A man of independent temperament, Ferenczi
was bold, creative, undogmatic, and determined to maintain his freedom of thought and action. After a decade of analytic practice, he came to the conclusion that clinical observation and experience (Erlebnis) were inseparable. Insofar as technique was the indispensable offshoot of theory, Ferenczi thought that it should be shaped according to the demands of the treatment situation. The difficulties he encountered in his analyses—negative transference, resistance to and by means of the transference, narcissistic and masochistic attitudes, acting-in and acting-out—were regularly connected to the psychological configurations of his patients—severe character disorders, “as-if” and narcissistic personalities, borderline cases, etc.—and they led him over time to envisage a series of conceptions fundamentally different from the technique recommended by Freud and that had been practiced hitherto. Ferenczi's technical innovations can be read not only as modifications of the setting but also as countertransference reactions. Reaching deadlock in some cases, he was on the lookout for a different theoretical and practical perspective in his work.

Three distinct subphases in the development of his technique can be outlined: (1) the phase of active technique (1918–26); (2) the phase of technical flexibility (1926–29); and (3) the phase of neocatharsis and mutual analysis (1929–33), both of which were directly related to his concurrent thinking on trauma.

In the active technique, Ferenczi's technical innovations sprang from his realization that the difficulties met with in analysis derived from the way that patients sometimes cut themselves off mentally from their symptoms even though these were quite visible. Such patients could be regarded as partly “absent” from themselves; they had no self-representation of their symptoms. Ferenczi thought it essential to draw back into the transference character traits and even mental processes that, in spite of progress in the treatment, remained split off and encrypted; his aim was to weaken resistance and reignite analyses that had become bogged down.

Contrary to the received impression, Ferenczi intended that the patient and not the analyst should be the active party. By means of injunctions (Gebote) and prohibitions (Verbote), the analyst encouraged the patient to adopt an active stance, that is, to do or stop doing something. Thus, in contrast to the cathartic method, in which the lifting of repression caused a
memory to emerge and stimulated an affect, the active technique facilitated
the return of the repressed by inducing both action and the advent of the
corresponding affect.

However, the unpredictability of the results and limitations inherent in
the method rapidly convinced Ferenczi that the technique had little to
recommend it. It considerably amplified the patient’s resistance without
bringing in its wake an increase in frustration or in deprivation, and indeed
some patients seemed to welcome this heightened tension in order to
satisfy their masochism within the analysis itself. The result was stalemate.

“Contra-indication to the ‘Active’ Psycho-Analytical Technique” (1926)
marks the end of this period of research. In this paper, Ferenczi criticizes
both the method and its results. He observed that the increase in tension
induced by the active technique represented for the patient a repetition of
earlier traumatic situations that lay at the root of the neurosis. The change
in perspective in this paper was the prelude to a completely different
approach.

Having tried to shorten analysis through the application of the active
technique, Ferenczi in his period of flexibility and experiment now pro-
posed to lengthen it. His idea was to allow insecure patients time to develop
a stronger narcissistic base that would not clash with the limits prescribed
by the analytic process. The main technical feature, articulated in “The
Elasticity of Psycho-Analytic Technique” (1928), was “benevolence,” which
implied a “countercathexis” of hatred. For Ferenczi this was a new ap-
proach to the countertransference; the analyst made himself available to the
demands of the patient and flexibly changed his technique to meet the
patient’s needs.

Abandoning the gentler forms of active intervention, Ferenczi concen-
trated on what the patient appeared to be expecting from him as an analyst.
His aim was to have empathy (Einfühlung) for his patient, thanks to the
psychological flair that should enable the analyst to appreciate when and
how to communicate something to the patient. Empathy joined with
“kindness” was meant to convince the patient of the analyst’s sympathetic
attentiveness. “The analyst, like an elastic band, must yield to the patient’s
pull, but without ceasing to pull in his own direction” (1928, 95).

The problem remained of determining the limits of this “elastic” tech-
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nique. How far should the analyst go with his patient? How could an appropriate atmosphere be promoted without repeating in the treatment situation the conditions that might have presided over the initial childhood trauma? In Ferenczi's view, an overly dogmatic adherence to "classical" technique might well do just that. By contrast, the analyst's unshakable benevolence toward his patient, regardless of the extremes of language or actions to which the latter might go, fostered the growth of trust because the analyst was felt to be reliable and not tarnished by "professional hypocrisy" (1933, 159). This in turn made possible an authentic and personal relationship between patient and analyst.

Such considerations led Ferenczi to envisage a permissive method of relaxation or neocatharsis, and he even went so far as to condone mutual expressions of physical tenderness similar to those between a mother and child. A new conception of trauma took shape in the years that followed. The four works that together form the main corpus of this innovative theory bear witness to Ferenczi's thinking during his final period. Two papers—"Child Analysis in the Analyses of Adults" (1931) and "Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child: The Language of Tenderness and of Passion" (1933)—were published during his lifetime; the other two texts—the Clinical Diary (1985) that he conducted from January through October of 1932 and "Thoughts on Trauma" (1934)—were posthumous.

Extrapolating from what he observed during psychoanalytic therapy, Ferenczi (1933) concluded that trauma was caused by the passionate impulses in adults, which arose in response to the child's search for tenderness and truth, and of adults' refusal to acknowledge the child's mental suffering. This is experienced by the child as a form of terrorism that hampers the development of independent thought. Trauma is augmented by the child's introjecting of the adult's (unconscious) feelings of guilt, which alter the loved object and turn it into a hated one. All these traumas can be reactivated and amplified by the analyst's rigidity during treatment.

The child who experiences aggression is overwhelmed by his defenses and resigns himself to his inevitable fate; he withdraws from himself and observes the traumatic event. In this state he may perhaps look on the aggressor as mentally ill, a madman whom he must attempt to cure. In this way, the child becomes a "wise baby" and his parent's psychiatrist. Excited
and destitute, the child is overwhelmed by an excess of both external and, above all, internal stimuli. He has neither the means of discharge nor the capacity to think the situation through, and therefore finds himself plunged into deep distress. The child, Ferenczi hypothesizes, identifies with the aggressor and introjects the adult's guilt feelings, which augments his confusion. Superimposed on the passionate love and punishments inflicted by the adult is the child's terrorism of suffering. In this dynamic likewise lie the seeds of passionate transference.

With mutual analysis, his final technique, Ferenczi intended to improve the comprehension and resolution of all these problems created by “passionate” clinical situations. The technique is closely related to Ferenczi’s conception of trauma (Janin 1988). Trauma results from a splitting of the ego. The split-off part, which is difficult to reach in analysis, exists in both analyst and patient and comes to function as a traumatic zone common to both. The goal of mutual analysis is to obtain release from this blind spot.

Yet once more Ferenczi had to yield to hard facts. This final technique ironically resulted in reinforcing the situation it had been designed to alleviate—the patient’s being “seduced” by the analyst and the analysis. It was also unclear what meaning could be ascribed to such unfamiliar and obscurely organized material. To whom, patient or analyst, could it be referred? Ferenczi concluded that the countertransference predicaments he found himself facing in mutual analysis with difficult patients proved the insufficiency of his personal analysis. Hence his painful and bitter comment in his Clinical Diary: “Mutual analysis: only a last resort! Proper analysis by a stranger, without any obligation, would be better” (1985, 115).

**Ferenczi’s Transference Depression**

The exemplary humility and analytic honesty in his Clinical Diary are tributes to Ferenczi’s desperate attempts to explore as thoroughly as possible the experiences of countertransference and psychoanalysis. This document, originally intended only for his private consultation, contains a digest of notes Ferenczi made each day. But it can also be read as Ferenczi’s accusation against Freud, the acme of his negative transference to and idealizing of the
latter, with Ferenczi, a disciple of genius, demanding a *maternal form of reparation* through his technical innovations.²

From this perspective, “mutual analysis” appears to originate in Ferenczi’s desire to situate Freud in fantasy in a preambivalent maternal role and receive from him something akin to *primary love*. The implication is that Ferenczi was in the throes of a *primary depression* that could neither find a proper outlet nor even be designated as such; therein lay the real source of his *transference depression* reactivated and buttressed by his relationship with Freud.³ It could not be properly unmasked or allowed to develop—much less analyzed—simply because at the time the necessary conceptual tools were not available. But it was at the root of Ferenczi’s need to try to work through what he regarded as an “unanalyzed” residue; and it is also what induced him in the 1920s to begin to put forward innovative conceptual developments that made Freud fear that he was being sidetracked into something far removed from orthodox practice.

What Ferenczi described as *negative transference* did not refer merely to the paternal imago. In using such a designation—he had no other available—he probably attempted to account for a *primary depression that Freud did not recognize*, which was transformed into a *transference depression* once his powerful affects were galvanized by the encounter with Freud, psychoanalysis, and the psychoanalytic process.⁴

*Transference depression* reveals, usually after several years of analysis, a particular kind of depression that repeats an *infantile depression*. The latter results from an abrupt abandonment by the caretaking object that the subject experiences as a calamity. The essential feature of infantile depression is that it occurs in the presence of an object that is itself engulfed by a mourning process. Up to that point, the infant possesses authentic mental vitality, but then is faced with a sudden cessation of the object’s affective cathexis; a dramatic alteration—a mutation—of the maternal imago ensues. The happy relationship with the mother is brought to a halt and remains paralyzed. When the mother enters into mourning and decathects her child, mental life is transformed in a way that is experienced by the infant as *catastrophic*.

As the letters make clear, from the very beginning of their relationship
Ferenczi was involved in an intense idealized transference to Freud. Nobody ever remained indifferent where Freud was concerned! This transference was accompanied by an immediate transference to psychoanalysis and its doctrine, which at that time were indistinguishable from Freud himself. In return, Ferenczi's remarkable capacity to turn to account the Freudian ferment was certain to attract Freud. From then on, an exceptional bond linked both men.

This dual encounter was truly a case of "love at first sight," reinforced by the many interests shared by the two partners. Freud realized that Ferenczi had an immense talent that would make him both a first-class practitioner and an eminent theoretician of psychoanalysis, and he could see also that Ferenczi was ready to devote everything to the battle for the cause. Ferenczi found in Freud a father who apparently would not hesitate to seek the support of a son and seemed able to endorse the latter's ongoing struggle for self-assertion and independence. However, Ferenczi—enthusiastic, sensitive, generous, hungry for recognition and affection, with his prodigious outbursts of spontaneity—sometimes came up against a lack of reciprocity on Freud's part. Although communicative and warm-hearted, Freud often withdrew behind a mask of aloofness, all the more because he hoped to find in Ferenczi a son who had already resolved a fair number of problems.

Their different ways of coming to terms with their sensitivity are echoed in their modes of thought. The relationship was such that at certain crucial moments a high degree of ambivalence was aroused in both protagonists. It was often in moments of tension that Ferenczi would seek Freud's help. He attempted analysis by correspondence and informed Freud regularly of the progress of his self-analysis in order to try to untie the transferential knots that he supposed to be the source of his difficulties with Freud.

Until October 1914, when Freud agreed to analyze him, Ferenczi's epistolary self-analysis was a substitute for an analysis that did not declare itself as such. Ferenczi's letters were really an urgent and repeated request for analysis by Freud. His use of correspondence for self-analysis reached its climax between 1914 and 1917, when it took over from the analysis he had had with Freud in 1914 and 1916. Yet for the first six years of their relationship, faced with the transference responses of this pupil who had
become a friend, Freud did all he could to postpone the analysis, sometimes using their friendship as a justification. A combination of factors seems to have motivated his determination.

Dazzled by his disciple’s clinical ability and exceptional capacity for introjecting theory, Freud seemed convinced that a mere transference to theory would be an adequate substitute for the transference to him as a person. In addition, the transference interpretations he offered—having to do with the father complex, sibling rivalry, and psychic homosexuality—were in Freud’s opinion sufficient to account for the affects aroused in Ferenczi and so to give him support.

The countertransference situation was further complicated by Freud’s own personality and plans for Ferenczi, which, after the disappointment caused by Jung, included his desire to establish him as a spiritual son and heir to the psychoanalytic corpus. Faced with his disciple’s pressing demands for an intimacy that went beyond friendship, however, Freud seems to have tried to free himself from a tie that he felt was marked by passion and liable to become overwhelming.

As time passed, the cumulative effect of these factors weighed heavily on the relationship. One of the consequences was the reinforcement in Ferenczi of an eroticization of his request for analysis, as Freud’s support became more and more equivocal and his pleas remained unanswered. Another was the insidious emergence of a transference depression, which could be neither recognized nor analyzed.

Three decisive features of the relationship between Freud and Ferenczi can be discerned from the outset. The first is what Ferenczi in a letter of April 5, 1910, called his “unsatisfied need for support” (Brabant et al. 1992, 157). This phrase evokes the deprived child inside the analyst, who feels depressed, dejected, and exhausted. Ferenczi likewise told Freud during their September 1910 tour of Sicily that he was counting on him for everything, just as a depressed child has every reason to count on his parents, especially his mother. This is why Ferenczi demanded absolute veracity and reciprocity from Freud, who must have felt somewhat perplexed.

The second feature is the sentimental “affair” between Ferenczi and Elma Pálos, his analysand and the daughter of his intimate friend, Gizella.
He found himself drawn into a period of turmoil and confusion, which occupied his letters to Freud from the end of 1911 through 1912. This “acted-out” transference love had a deep impact on the relationship between Freud and Ferenczi; it occasioned a revival of Ferenczi’s epistolary self-analysis and his urgent appeal for help and support.

The third feature, which I shall mention only in passing, is Ferenczi’s hypochondria in his relationship with Freud. One would be justified, I think, in calling this a transference hypochondria, given that Ferenczi’s symptoms, fluctuating along with the mood of the letters, were an obvious mediating object in the transference between the two men.

“*My Unsatisfied Need for Support*”

During the American tour with Jung in September 1909, the teacher-pupil relationship between Freud and Ferenczi ripened into friendship. In the months following their return, Ferenczi felt depressed and lonely, both because of his celibacy and because of his psychoanalytic work. Confessing his “unsatisfied need for support,” he sought to alert Freud to his personal problems and to induce him to accept a kind of analysis by correspondence. Freud, apparently sympathetic, nevertheless strove to table the issue and urged that Ferenczi resign himself to his lot. There followed an exchange of letters in which Ferenczi’s disappointment is obvious, as is his unspoken hostility at feeling so little understood.

This situation, comprised of latent resentment that neither man could interpret, formed the backdrop to their trip to Sicily at the end of August 1910. During this journey, what came to be known as the “Palermo incident” took place. For the next twenty years it remained a landmark; Freud and Ferenczi would recall it whenever matters between them turned difficult.

Ferenczi reported the incident in a letter to Groddeck dated Christmas 1921:

For years we travelled together every summer. I could not open myself to him completely freely; he had too much of that “aloofness”; he was too great for me, too much the father. The result was that in Palermo, where he wanted to do the famous study of paranoia (Schreber) together with me, on the very first evening of
work, when he wanted to dictate something to me, in a sudden access of rebellion
I sprang up and declared that it was not working together if he simply dictated to
me. "Is that how you are?" he said in astonishment. "Obviously you want to take
the whole thing?" he declared; and from then on worked alone every evening,
leaving me only the editing. Bitterness seized me by the throat. (Of course, I now
know what "working alone in the evening" and "a tight throat" mean. I just
wanted to be loved by Freud.) (Ferenczi and Groddeck 1982, 36–37)

This event set the tone for their trip, which lasted more than three
weeks. For both, it was a disappointment, as Freud's letter of September 24,
1910, to Jung bears witness:

My travelling companion is a dear fellow, but dreamy in a disturbing kind of way,
and his attitude towards me is infantile. He never stops admiring me, which I don't
like, and is probably sharply critical of me in his unconscious when I am taking it
easy. He has been too passive and receptive, letting everything be done for him like
a woman, and I really haven't got enough homosexuality in me to accept him as
one. These trips arouse a great longing for a real woman. (McGuire 1974, 353)

On their return, Ferenczi, fearful that Freud might feel resentment
toward him, made the first move. Replying on October 2, Freud suggested
that Ferenczi's disappointments were a result of his unrealistically high
expectations:

You will believe me when I say that I think back about your company on the trip
only with warm and pleasant feelings, although I often felt sorry for you because of
your disappointment, and I would like to have had you different in some respects.
Disappointment because you certainly expected to wallow in constant intellectual
stimulation, whereas nothing is more repugnant to me than posing, and I then
often let myself go in the opposite direction. So I was probably mostly quite an
ordinary old gentleman, and you, in astonishment, realized the distance from your
fantasy ideal. On the other hand, I would have wished for you to tear yourself away
from the infantile role and take your place next to me as a companion with equal
rights, which you did not succeed in doing; and further, in practical perspective, I
would have wished that you had carried out more reliably your part of the task, the
orientation in space and temporality. But you were inhibited and dreamy. (Brabant
et al. 1992, 215)

Ferenczi was unwilling to leave matters there and tried on October 3 to
plead his case by appealing to "χρόνος. candor." He wrote of his desire to
establish with Freud a relationship of unreserved trust, as should exist
"between two men who tell each other the truth unrelentingly, sacrific-
ing all consideration. . . . That was the ideal I was looking for; I wanted
to enjoy the man, not the scholar, in close friendship” (218). Ferenczi then reported a dream in which he saw Freud naked, interpreting it in terms of the combined effects of his homosexuality and his desire for “absolute mutual openness.” He tried to convince Freud that his “ideal of truth” conformed to Freudian teaching and recalled a remark the latter had made that analysis was a “science of facts” (219). Ferenczi agreed entirely and urged Freud to draw its full implications:

The final consequence of such insight—when it is present in two people—is that they are not ashamed in front of each other, keep nothing secret, tell each other the truth without risk of insult or in the certain hope that within the truth there can be no lasting insult. If you had scolded me thoroughly instead of being eloquently silent! . . . I would have owed you a very large debt of gratitude for it. (220)

Freud replied in his letter of October 6:

Why didn’t I scold you and in so doing open the way to an understanding? . . . I couldn’t do it, just as I can’t do it with my three sons, because I like them and I feel sorry for them in the process.

Not only have you noticed that I no longer have any need for that full opening of my personality, but you have understood it and correctly returned to its traumatic cause. Why did you thus make a point of it? This need has been extinguished in me since Fliess’s case, with the overcoming of which you just saw me occupied. A piece of homosexual investment has been withdrawn and used for the enlargement of my own ego. I have succeeded where the paranoiac fails. (221)

But on October 12 Ferenczi insisted:

I do not want to give up hope that you will let a part of your withdrawn homosexual libido be refloated and bring more sympathy to bear toward my “ideal of honesty.” . . . It certainly has also a healthy core.—Not everything that is infantile should be abhorred; for example, the child’s urge for truth. . . . I still hold firm to the conviction that it is not honesty but superfluous secrecy that is abnormal, although I do admit that the former can be overly emphasized by infantile influences. I am grateful to you for every word that you say or write about my behavior, no matter unpleasant it may be. (224)

Freud registered Ferenczi’s plea, but his reply on October 17 was just as uncompromising: “You are still asserting your point of view, and, I concede, ardently and with good arguments. But there is nothing obligatory in that. . . . It occurs to me that a paralyzing influence emanated from you to the extent that you were always prepared to admire me” (227). On October 29,
three weeks after it all began, the controversy ended with Ferenczi's remark: "Why didn't you mention the 'shy admiration and mute contradiction' in Italy? Everything could have turned out differently" (231).

This episode reveals the sources from which, twenty years later, Ferenczi developed his influential technical innovations and ideas on trauma. The child's desire for truth—the language of tenderness—comes up against what the adult falsifies or leaves unsaid—the language of passion. This dynamic is at the root of trauma. By the same token, the reciprocal trust between analyst and patient is intended to free them from the traumatic effect induced by the hypocrisy of the "classic" setting. This conviction lies behind Ferenczi's creation in 1930–33 of the technique of mutual analysis (Bokanowski 1992).

"Turmoil and Confusion": Ferenczi and Elma Pálos

In 1904, Ferenczi began an affair with a married woman, Gizella Pálos, who had two daughters, Elma and Magda (the latter later married Ferenczi's younger brother, Lajos). The affair was more or less clandestine, because the husband, Géza Pálos, refused to grant a divorce. Gizella was eight years older than Ferenczi and could no longer have children. Elma was a much-courted young woman, somewhat flighty and incapable of a long-term relationship with any man who might take an interest in her. When Gizella worried about her daughter's emotional instability, Ferenczi, in a reparatory frame of mind, offered to analyze Elma. When he informed Freud of this, Freud wrote back on July 20, 1911: "I... wish you much practical success in the new enterprise with Fräulein Elma, but, of course, I fear that it will go well up to a certain point and then not at all. While you're at it, don't sacrifice too many of your secrets out of an excess of kindness" (Brabant et al. 1992, 296).

Despite this warning, Freud could not have guessed how quickly events would overtake his fears. Scarcely half a year had elapsed before Ferenczi wrote, on December 3, of the collapse of his analytic neutrality with his young patient:

I still have no right to declare myself mature... I was not able to maintain the cool detachment of the analyst with regard to Elma, and I laid myself bare, which
then led to a kind of closeness which I can no longer put forth as the benevolence of the physician or of the fatherly friend. . . . Perhaps in the end my sight was clouded by passion. . . . Elma became especially dangerous to me at the moment when—after that young man's [a former suitor's] suicide—she badly needed someone to support her and to help her in her need. I did that only too well. (338)

Freud's uncompromising rejoinder came on December 5: "First break off treatment, come to Vienna for a few days . . . don't decide anything yet, and give my regards many times to Frau G" (318–19). Thoroughly confused and distressed—"Of course, I myself cannot continue the treatment" (324), he wrote on January 1, 1912—Ferenczi sought a way out of his self-imposed deadlock and asked Freud to analyze Elma. Freud was reluctant, but agreed the following day: "If you do not ask about my inclinations and expectations but rather demand of me that I undertake it, then I naturally have to assent" (325).

During the three months that Elma was in analysis with Freud—from January to the end of March 1912—he and Ferenczi were in constant communication about her treatment. Elma was obviously an issue between them, just as her mother would later become. Freud had from the outset championed Gizella, not disguising his preference for the mother over the daughter. In 1912 the friendship between the two men was seriously put to the test by Ferenczi's interminable hesitations between Gizella and Elma. They, too, vied with each other in love and devotion for Ferenczi, and their declarations of affection for each other and lack of self-interest exacerbated the imbroglio. In a letter to Freud on March 8, Ferenczi admitted that his amorous difficulties were directly related to his unconscious hostile impulses toward Freud: "You were right when, on my first trip to Vienna where I revealed to you my intention to marry, you called attention to the fact that you noticed the same defiant expression I had on in my face when I refused to work with you in Palermo" (353).

However, overwhelmed by contradictory feelings toward both Gizella and Elma, Ferenczi constantly asked Freud's advice. The latter remained cautious, trying to play for time, and could find no other solution than to maintain an appearance of neutrality at all costs. When Ferenczi realized that he would obtain nothing more than he had already been given, he told
Freud on April 23 of his decision to take Elma back into analysis. In proposing such a course, Ferenczi’s conscious aim was to enable Elma to express her real feelings toward him and thus to make up her own mind in the name of freedom of thought and speech. Freud remained ostensibly unruffled, replying on April 28: “I am in great suspense as I devour your news about the course of your family affairs. . . . Of all your misgivings, one has made an impression on me: whether your daily schedule and lifestyle have room for a young woman who is in love with life and not deeply interested in your work” (371).

Ferenczi took Elma back into analysis from the end of April until August. What he was trying to prove to everyone concerned was his ability “to resist the urgings of the passions and to regain the coolness of the intellect” (374). In this way he hoped to succeed in correcting “the mistakes that [he] made in the first analysis” (397), but in the end he admitted that Elma “is subjecting herself to analysis against her will, solely because of her hoped-for and impatiently anticipated marriage.” Under such circumstances, as Ferenczi reported to Freud, he himself told Elma that “analysis was pointless” (402).

As he reached the climax of this struggle against his own passionate nature, Ferenczi claimed during the summer of 1912 to have recovered his coolheadedness:

I must confirm that my cruelty and severity toward Frau G. could be infantile revenge against my mother. . . . Along with this infantile desire for revenge, however, my behavior may also in part influenced by the fact that in the last four years, since I have been testing myself analytically, I have actually been carrying on a continuing struggle for liberation against my maternal fixation. (383)

It was at this point, when he accepted Freud’s interpretation concerning his “mother complex,” that Ferenczi put an end to his relationship, both analytic and sentimental, with Elma, who soon afterwards married an American called Laurvik. But this did not resolve his procrastination with Gizella, whose age remained a problem for him and whom he did not marry until 1919. Their married life never got over this crisis; Gizella, disappointed, remained torn between her erotic and maternal roles. Ferenczi’s acting out of transference love reveals his primary depression and need for primary love, projected on to Elma.
Transference Love

When certain patients regress during analysis, they relive the early environmental deprivations that are responsible for the distortions of their ego or self. When maternal and autoerotic deprivations have had too severe an impact on the child's development, pathological and excessively passionate transference can arise. The eroticization of the transference then becomes a defense against fears of collapse and the sudden return of primary depression. The plea for "love" is an appeal for "linking" in the sense of reorganizing something that causes disruption. Such patients make the analyst experience their despair and distress; they want the analyst to feel the misery and helplessness they were unable to symbolize during childhood.

The excitement aroused in the analyst by the patient's transference projections, and in particular by the eroticization of the transference, tests the analyst's superego organization. More fundamentally, it tests his capacities for linking and symbolization, as well as the resolution of his own depressive position and desires for reparation. Analysis of the personal and "cultural" countertransference, which restricts the analyst's ability to understand, is essential. Otherwise the situation no longer embodies the patient's suffering, but that of the analyst. An analyst suffers; he is in despair; he can no longer identify what he is up against; he is overly excited and feels helpless. The analyst suffers because inside himself there is a depressed infant, disheartened and in despair. In such a case, in contrast to dreams, there is no possibility of representation of the trauma. What traumas are at work? What kind of absence of symbolization are we up against?

Unlinking overwhelms the mind. Despair enters the analysis in the form of primary depression with its concomitant deceit, confusion, loss of idealization and of any reverential aura. The issue becomes one of seeking completeness with a sufficiently loving and good-enough mother who agrees to invest her "primary maternal preoccupation"; there is a quest for "reparation." The primary conditions of depression, involving deficits in symbolization, are repeated. The erotic demand in the transference is an attempt at relinking for both protagonists, who are faced with the abyss of failure in symbol formation.

It was precisely at the time of his transference love that Ferenczi went
through a *transference depression*. Freud lacked the conceptual tools that would have enabled him to deal both theoretically and practically with Ferenczi’s bouts of inadequate symbolization related to maternal depression. By the double mechanism of projective and introjective identification, Ferenczi displaced on to Elma his hopes that Freud would take care of him.

In the tumultuous episode involving Elma and Gizella, in which love for the mother opposed that for the daughter, Ferenczi probably experienced the repetition of an infantile trauma that aggravated his inherent primary depression. In the same way that Elma asked him for reparation after the loss of her friend by suicide, Ferenczi constantly demanded reparation from Freud. In the years to come he structured his psychoanalytic writings around the idea of *damage* to and *reparation* of *narcissism*. By projective identification, he took on the role of the “good mother,” in the psychoanalytic movement to compensate for his inability to introject a loving, tender, soothing mother who could contain and repair him. One of the Ferenczi’s childhood traumas doubtless had to do with the mourning of his mother Rosa, who lost her one-year-old daughter Vilma when Sándor was only four years of age.

It appears wholly justified to hypothesize in Ferenczi a traumatic primary depression, reactivated and crystallized by Elma, a young woman in mourning, who reawakened the memory of a mother who also had been mourning a loss.

*Primary Depression and Advances in Theory*

In treating “difficult” cases, Ferenczi encountered stalemate situations that he ascribed to flaws in the countertransference; hence his attempts to relate them to his own emotional problems. His need to extricate himself from his transference to Freud and to resolve his difficulties through sublimation led him to sketch out experimentally many new concepts that are today looked on as fundamental. Thanks to Ferenczi, the sources of trauma can be related to the economy of “excess” and “deprivation” in mental life; identification with the aggressor is seen to stem from a traumatic fantasy of seduction; and “passionate” transference can be ascribed to a narcissistic (psychotic) splitting, which is a consequence of primary trauma. The
splitting of the ego induced by trauma takes myriad forms: "dead" zones, division between the soma and psyche, paralysis of thought and spontaneity, loss of affect, "as-if" personality, and objectless depression. Ferenczi likewise drew attention to the importance of primitive love and hatred and understood that hatred was a more powerful means of fixation than tenderness. He stressed the importance of the environment—that is, the mother and her mental functioning, her aptitude as container, etc.—and the emotional imprints left by early caretaking. He grasped the role of play in analysis and the need to take the countertransference into account as more than an obstacle that "counters" the transference. He looked upon it as a phenomenon created in one mind through its encounter with another mind and that reflects some aspects of the latter's unconscious functioning. In other words, he elevated the countertransference—and its accompanying affects—into a valuable instrument for the analyst and the treatment. It is for all these reasons that Ferenczi has had a fundamental impact on psychoanalytic thinking and doctrine.

The passion inherent in Ferenczi's transference to Freud and the psychoanalytic corpus reactivated his latent primary depression. Given the inadequacy of the theoretical tools of the time to respond to failures in symbol-formation, his primary depression turned into a transference depression. When Freud did not analyze this, it drove Ferenczi into distress, bewilderment, and hatred. In order to extricate himself from the transference, he was spurred on to invent new concepts. To distress corresponds the "wise baby," to bewilderment the "confusion of tongues," and to hatred the "introjection of the adult's guilt" that produces the "terrorism of suffering," splitting, and fragmentation in the child.

NOTES

1. In this letter Freud uses the same arguments concerning Ferenczi's lack of a negative transference that he would later put forward in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable."

2. On March 17, 1932, Ferenczi wrote: "My own analysis could not be pursued deeply enough because my analyst (by his own admission, of a narcissistic nature), with his strong determination to be healthy and his antipathy toward any weakness or abnormalities, could not follow me down into those depths, and introduced the 'educational' stage too soon" (1985, 62).
3. There is no doubt that Ferenczi’s encounter with psychoanalysis, through and with Freud, aroused deep emotional impulses in him. These perhaps reactivated an acute “maternal conflict” because of his hypochondriac (“oral-narcissistic dependent”) personality, which led him to adopt technical innovations related to maternal identification. See Grünberger (1974).


REFERENCES


