

# ARTÍCULOS SOBRE FERENCZI. CLÍNICOS GENERALES.

## NOT “FILED AWAY AS FINALLY DEALT WITH”.

Judith E. Vida.

This essay considers some historical, clinical, and personal dimensions of Sandor Ferenczi’s contributions to psychoanalysis. It uses a clinical framework to develop a new perspective of the Freud–Ferenczi relation (and of its impact on the development of psychoanalysis), which despite smoldering conflict, persisted for twenty-five years and was Freud’s longest-lasting intimate friendship. A case is made for the open, undefensive, experience-drenched basis of Ferenczi’s work to assure its continuing usefulness to the psychoanalyst of today, which, as is demonstrated, can lead in surprising directions.

**KEY WORDS:** Ferenczi; Freud–Ferenczi relationship; Clinical Diary.

Prior positions become obsolete. . . . Yet prior positions are part of the invention, because to attain the new position the inventor must reassemble its components by an intuitive insight transcending the preceding positions in the sequence.

. . . The new position . . . demands . . . familiarity with prior positions in order [to] discover the working range of the invention. The technique of invention thus has two distinct phases: the discovery of new positions followed by their amalgamation with the existing body of knowledge. (Kubler, 1962, p. 64)

My primary interest as a psychoanalyst is clinical. I had a notion at the beginning of my psychoanalytic training that if a theory were to be useful to me, it must be resonant with what I observe and experience in and out of the consulting room, as analyst, analysand, self- analysand, colleague, friend, spouse, and parent. Over time that notion grew into a conviction. Yet for a very long time, such resonance was missing for me with any body of theory that I could not consider myself a member of any “school,” although each school offered a piece of something that seemed valuable. Eventually, I wondered even if it was justifiable to consider myself “a psychoanalyst” since as time went on I had less and less True Belief. When I began to read Ferenczi in the late 1980s, just as *The Clinical Diary* was being published in English, what emerged with startling passion was his view of psychoanalysis as a two-person encounter in which both persons were present, accountable, stirred-up, and enriched. This was a “missing piece” that at last made psychoanalysis for me a legitimate human enterprise. More than anything Ferenczi contributed to theory (and he contributed plenty, though much of it was not recognized while he was alive), it is as a living presence that I have come to encounter Ferenczi over more than a decade of studying and writing about him. In these few pages I will describe that living presence and mention some ways in which I have made use of it.

Sandor Ferenczi died in 1933 at the age of fifty-nine. His body succumbed to the progressive neurological debilitation that was the consequence of a treatment-resistant pernicious anemia. At the time of his death he was dispirited emotionally; the twenty-five year long intense, ambivalent, enmeshed friendship with Freud, consciously fraught with controversy, had become attenuated with disappointment and disillusionment. Yet clinically, and in his most private intrapsychic space, he was bursting with new awareness and new connections about old experiences, with new ideas as exhilarating as they were humbling and extraordinarily painful. And he wrote it down as he was living it, on bits of paper that Michael Balint scooped up after Ferenczi’s death and later translated and published as *Notes and Fragments* (1949/1955b), and in *The Clinical Diary* (1988), which Balint also saved.

This matter of Ferenczi writing his experience as he lived it is of particular significance because it

compounds the effect of his lifelong approach to psychoanalysis. Michael Balint, Ferenczi's longstanding pupil, analysand, colleague, and friend, described it thus:

For Ferenczi, words and technical terms were only—more or less—useful means of expressing mental experience; the experience was the important thing that had to be described as strikingly as possible. . . . Even the most common, the most everyday, the most routine experience was never rounded off and finished for him; he never filed anything away as finally dealt with or definitely solved. (1948/1957, pp. 245–6)

Capturing experience in words contributes an unusual quality of aliveness to everything Ferenczi wrote over his professional lifetime from his pre-analytic days as a neuropsychiatrist throughout his quarter-century as Freud's most intimate friend and fellow psychoanalytic pioneer. The aliveness in the writing, improbably, survives even the most labored translation ("His scientific language," noted Balint, "is indeed horrifying to any purist or to a would-be translator" (1948/1957, p. 245). Aliveness is a rare commodity in the psychoanalytic literature, with or without the interposition of translation. Only Winnicott comes close to Ferenczi in conveying such a personal presence; beyond Winnicott, perhaps John Klauber, Robert Stoller, Harold Searles have sometimes approximated this gritty clinical poetry.

But there is more than aliveness in Ferenczi's writing: there is engagement. The experience of reading Ferenczi can be likened to an intimate chat with a colleague whose compelling clinical observations suddenly make one's own cases come to life with colorful new interest. There is candor, there is humility, there is respect (for the patient, for the exigencies of circumstance, for the unconscious). There is an intuitive brilliance that is neither belittling nor shaming of the reader; to the contrary, the reader experiences an invitation to admit his own unacceptable thoughts into awareness. Ferenczi, although dead in 1933, comes across in his writing as a companion. Continued exposure to his work has the extraordinary effect of installing him as a friend in one's intrapsychic space. Small wonder that Freud loved him and found it difficult to bear when Ferenczi pulled away to interests other than Freud's own.

I have previously written about the impact of reading Ferenczi's Clinical Diary while simultaneously engaged with a difficult clinical situation (Vida, 1993), and I want to return to that here. "Raw and exposed" is how I described my internal state, as I elaborated the resonance I could feel between Ferenczi's frame of mind and my own throughout the Diary. Through that resonance I experienced an "implicit message . . . that this was hard work in frightening, unpredictable intrapsychic and interpersonal terrain in which terrible things had already happened" (p. 628). Before long, some inhibitions about my previously unconscious countertransference were lifted. This new awareness, which was not directly disclosed to the patient, made the clinical situation workable for quite a few more months. Eventually the need for ever-deeper countertransference excavations and for evergreater tolerance for disruptions outstripped both the patient's capacity and my own for forbearance, and the patient broke off the treatment. I had to accept my limitations in this extremely painful event, which emphasized to me as nothing else how remarkable indeed was Ferenczi's achievement to stay with his difficult clinical cases.

Two aspects of this clinical situation are deserving of further comment in the context of Ferenczi's living presence. First, reading the Clinical Diary in a state of clinical distress brings one immediately into contact with a similarly suffering colleague. As Balint noted, Ferenczi's language is vivid, even more vivid here than in the papers polished for publication. (If Ferenczi had intended to publish the Diary, that would have come later and there would have been some editing; however his most pressing need in the Diary was to render his clinical experience as close to the bone as possible to get at what was incontrovertibly real.) In that contact, one immediately feels first Ferenczi's anxiety at exposure, both internally and before the analysand, then the dissolving of shame as the content is pursued. With the absence of shame comes a noticeable relaxation, the relief of having room to explore what is happening on both sides of the couch. There is room for curiosity, for self-reflection, for the analyst to be humanely neutral toward him/herself, without requiring disavowal to salvage self-regard. It changes the emotional climate of the consulting room.

The second aspect is the observation that surprising new creative thought becomes available when one is “cracked open” without the interference of a belittling authoritarian presence. The Clinical Diary is widely regarded as a letter to Freud, but I believe it is every bit as much a letter to himself. In The Diary, Ferenczi stands aside from an authoritarian part of himself with which Freud’s person had become fused (even before their three brief episodes of formal analysis). He identifies characteristics of Freud’s personality and thought that for decades he had supported at the expense of pursuing openly his own quite different positions. The cumulative impact of Ferenczi’s clinical experience, devoted as he was to treatment rather than to theory for theory’s sake, could no longer be ignored. What Ferenczi had to do was to give up hope that Freud would acknowledge his own limitations and recognize Ferenczi’s experience as worthy and valid. When hope was let go, the internalized version of Freud’s authority lost its power to terrorize; Ferenczi’s clinical competence, zest for living, and profound intuitive ability were more free to come together without interference. The attachment to Freud was still there, but stripped of its power, Freud’s point of view carried no extra weight in the ensuing state of internal collaborative wholeness. The result was The Clinical Diary, a masterpiece of creative exposition that emerged from Ferenczi’s mingling of experience (clinical and otherwise), history, and emotions—none of it having been “filed away as finally dealt with.” This was the realization of Ferenczi’s antiauthoritarian “political” stance, his utopian vision for a society in which one was free to tell the truth, “even [to] the king” (Brabant, Falzeder, and Giampieri-Deutsch, 1993, p. 130). Although it was not to be in real life, Ferenczi did achieve it intrapsychically; Freud did not. In a letter to Hollos (Sabourin, 1985; translated and cited by Haynal, 1988), Freud acknowledged his abhorrence of psychotic patients: “[C]ould my attitude result from an increasingly firm stance in favor of the intellect, the expression of my hostility toward the ‘Id’?” But Freud saw this only as a limit of his capacity as a physician, not as a person.

Does it make sense to read the clinical work of a psychoanalyst who died in 1933? There is among many the belief that Ferenczi and the pioneer generations of analysts should be left to the historians and that all but the most contemporary psychoanalytic work should be ignored. Those who hold such a view may want to see psychoanalysis as one of the natural sciences, for which its history must be assimilated and superseded by the products of new research. Andre Haynal (1993) accepts the impossibility that psychoanalysis will develop a unitary theory and technique that could operate independently of the infinitely variable personality of the analyst. He argues persuasively that psychoanalysis is more usefully considered as a hybrid social science, similar to economics or anthropology which operate from different epistemological premises than the natural sciences yet remain intellectually credible.

Thinking about psychoanalysis as a social science makes it less dissonant to recognize that in psychoanalysis, actually, history is everything. Our patients enter our consulting rooms seeking help for their histories, hoping to recover them, to vanquish them, or to come to terms with them. We, the analysts, are carried along by our histories, of which our training analyses have made us more or less conscious. And, of course, psychoanalytic theory is encrusted with history, the history of its reactive development from something experienced to be wrong or missing in preexisting formulations and relationships.

To say more about the relevance of history, I will take up the epigraph that opens this communication. Art historian George Kubler (1912–1996), in *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962), proposed that the category of art be enlarged to include “the whole range of manmade things.” This meant ideas as well as objects, so that even psychoanalysis could belong to that category (Vida, 1994). From his studies of the art from prehistoric times to the modern, Kubler found that every major development was at once an historical event and a solution to a problem (p. 36). This was quite a different perspective from that of “biographical narration... [which] tends to display the entire historical situation in terms of an individual’s development,” which is, of course, the usual method of psychoanalysis. Kubler’s long-range view challenged the “myth of the solitary genius” when it became obvious to him that invention was a fundamentally collaborative activity: “Despite the inventor’s solitary appearance he needs company; he requires the stimulus of other minds engaged upon the same questions” (p. 115).

Thus we can say that psychoanalysis was invented as a solution to a problem. Freud’s discovery of his disinclination to be a therapist led eventually to a bifurcation of psychoanalysis into two disparate versions.

One was as a research tool for the development of theory, which was Freud's interest, and the other was as a therapy, which Freud consigned to Ferenczi at the Budapest Congress in 1918. With this bifurcation there was a dramatic shift in the "problem" to which the earliest version of psychoanalysis was a "solution." At the beginning psychoanalytic ideas and a rudimentary technique were applied equally and informally to those identified as "patients" and those identified as "analysts." Gedo (1976) has attributed the immense creativity of the pioneers to their need to make new discoveries about individual psychology in order to address their personal problems. In this sense, the analyst was discovering himself step by step along with assisting the patient to discover himself. Following the bifurcation of psychoanalysis, the institutionalizing of psychoanalytic training compartmentalized the selfdiscovery of the analyst into a "training analysis."

This had the unfortunate effect of disapproving of the ongoing intrapsychic participation of the analyst and in fact pathologizing it. The ensuing codification of asymmetry in the analytic relationship made the analyst into a much more powerful, authoritarian presence. The asymmetry served the additional function not only of protecting Freud's narcissistic vulnerabilities but of installing them as the core around which "classical" technique would be built. Ferenczi had to be disavowed to allow this split-off solution to proceed. A perspective derived from Kubler's ideas suggests that psychoanalysis became muddled and limited by clinging to Freud's "biographical narration" as the sole basis for its history and ongoing development. In other words, psychoanalysis became the solution to Freud's problem instead of fulfilling its early potential to be a solution to a cultural problem. As psychoanalysis returns to those nodal points of disavowal to resume the development of an integrated theory and practice, much valuable experience can be put to use. Rudnytsky's (1991) comment that "Freud is at once insuperable and out-of-date" (p. 14) defines the developmental impasse that results when experience is not permitted to enlarge the definition of psychoanalysis.

Ferenczi's enduring role will not be as an authority but as a model of working with experience. In 1929 Ferenczi wrote: "I really do not know whether I envy our younger colleagues the ease with which they enter into possession of that which earlier generations won by bitter struggles. Sometimes I feel that to receive a tradition, however valuable, ready-made, is not so good as achieving something for oneself" (1929/1955a, p. 111). Indeed a resilient, authentic psychoanalytic identity can only be developed through often painful experience and is very different from that which one receives "ready made" through the identifications of traditional psychoanalytic training.

I conclude by illustrating with a personal example the point that history must be known (i.e., conscious) to allow for an experience of wholeness. As my passion for psychoanalytic history became apparent, I have often wondered "why Ferenczi?" For years the only available answer lay in my admiration for Ferenczi as an original who had struggled to develop his own point of view against the conformity of a conventional system. The fact that Ferenczi was Hungarian, the same ethnic identification as both my sets of immigrant grandparents, just seemed humorous. After all, I was Hungarian in name only. I spoke no Hungarian. There had been a recognizable sense of culture strain even as I propelled myself to learn some Hungarian recipes from my paternal grandmother during the one visit she made to visit us in California. The more exotic cuisine of my maternal grandmother had been too much for my assimilated taste buds; of that I had only memories, not recipes. Although as an adult I occasionally prepared some Hungarian dishes, I always felt fraudulent, as though I was trying to manufacture an ethnic connection that was more make-believe than real.

Once I started to write and present papers about Ferenczi, I became aware of a subtle physiological reaction, a faint kind of visceral gearing down, whenever I heard someone speaking in a noticeably Hungarian accent. It was mainly at psychoanalytic meetings that I observed this, probably because it was generally quiet with few external distractions. I noted it as curious and wondered jokingly if it had something to do with Ferenczi. When I received confirmation that I would speak at the 4th International Sandor Ferenczi Conference in commemoration of Ferenczi's 120th birthday, to be held in Budapest in the summer of 1993, I knew that this would feel odd. My parents had always spoken of wanting to visit Hungary, but they never had; now my father had passed away, and my mother was too frail even to think of attempting it. I would attend as the assimilated product of two generations in the American melting pot, estranged from my name, which I had already discovered was instantly recognizable to Hungarians.

Ferihegy International Airport is about 45 minutes outside the center of Budapest. When the plane touched down at the smaller and older of the two terminals, and we passengers used portable exit stairs, I was reminded of the old Burbank airport in the 1960s. But once inside something was familiar in a different way. It seemed quiet; not a lot of people talking, no public address announcements that I can recall—but perhaps it had already begun to feel like a dream. During the ride into the city, I looked outside at the passing countryside, signs and billboards in Hungarian, little square stone cottages with peaked, tiled roofs and small yards, each containing fruit trees, a spectacular vegetable garden, and a grape arbor. Before long, I realized that the familiar feeling from the airport had grown into the sense that everything looked familiar. As I looked at the billboards and tried to sound out the Hungarian words (which I couldn't understand, though they too looked familiar) I noticed a buzzing in my mind: I was hearing Hungarian being spoken. I was hearing faint voices that sounded like my grandparents, my maternal grandparents, who had spoken English but who had spoken mainly Hungarian between themselves, especially as they grew older. I could hear other voices too that I could not identify; I could hear this language being spoken that I knew was Hungarian and that I did not understand, but it was there.

These two phenomena -that of hearing Hungarian being spoken in my mind and that of visual familiarity-persisted throughout my stay. My souvenir of Budapest was a new experience of deep internal calm being created by the restoration of a missing piece of myself that I had been unable to identify even as having been gone. In the years since, this recovered piece has been expanded by further "translations" from Hungarian-born psychoanalytic colleagues, Giselle Galdi, Ph.D., and Ildiko Mohacsy, M.D. What I subsequently reconstructed was that, despite my mother's insistence to the contrary, I had to have used the Hungarian language in early childhood. I was born during World War II. While my father was in the South Pacific, my mother had returned to live with her parents in Detroit until I was two and a half. When the war was over, my parents moved to California. Except for a six-month period a year later, I never again inhabited a Hungarian-speaking environment. My "visceral gearing-down" on hearing Hungarian spoken is actually a regression to my early years; the Hungarian language I have begun to recover is a baby's Hungarian.

I now know that my grandparents had recreated meticulously a Hungarian ambience; I recognized those cottage gardens because they had been identical to my grandparents' garden. Now I know why as a first grader learning the mythology of early American history, I felt that that history didnot apply to me; ever after, as an adult, the archaic sense of never fitting in had only seemed neurotic. My mother still insists that her parents lived their lives "100% American" and could not have been so Hungarian as my experience suggests; she does not comprehend that my grandparents may have been "100% American" and "100% Hungarian" at the same time. Nevertheless, I see now the subtlety with which the Hungarian style found its way anyway into my mother's cooking and from there into my own. It is easily recognizable but only when you know how to look and what to look for.

Ferenczi understood in his bones that multiple realities could exist simultaneously. He also understood implicitly that not leaving history behind is what allows for invention, for the creation of new solutions to the clinical problems that alter as a result of being amalgamated with the existing body of knowledge. When all is said, it is Ferenczi himself who needs to be neither "rounded off" nor "finished," neither "filed away as finally dealt with" nor "definitely solved." We, and psychoanalysis, will all be more whole.

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