

THE ANALYTIC NURSERY: FERENCZI'S 'WISE BABY' MEETS JUNG'S 'DIVINE CHILD'.

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ABSTRACT:

In 1923, Sandor Ferenczi wrote a paper entitled 'The dream of the clever baby', in which he identified a phenomenon he discovered through his clinical work: the notion that young children who had been traumatized often had accelerated developmental characteristics that led them to acquire highly acute sensitivities and intuitions – in short, wisdom beyond their years. He characterized them as 'wise' babies. Similarly, C. G. Jung, with Karl Kerényi, (1949) elaborated a myth known as the 'divine child' – identifying an archetype which activates healing and intuitive understanding in children and adults. In their work, Jung (and Kerényi) explored the 'divine child' archetype from a mythological and a psychological perspective. The following paper elaborates aspects of Ferenczi's 'wise child' and Jung's 'divine child', comparing and contrasting them, and suggesting new perspectives on the connections between Ferenczi's and Jung's theoretical and clinical perspectives, and the two men themselves. As well, and specifically, the paper explores a comparative understanding of the development of two different modalities of early psychodynamic concepts with regard to children and their response to trauma, aspects that continue through theoretical and clinical practice today.

Key words: child archetype, confusion of tongues, development, divine child, Ferenczi, individuation, Jung, Orpha, Self, trauma, wise baby (child).

RESUMEN:

En 1923, Sandor Ferenczi escribió un artículo titulado "El sueño del bebé sabio", en el que identificaba un fenómeno que descubrió a través de su trabajo clínico: la noción de que los niños pequeños que habían sido traumatizados a menudo tenían características aceleradas de desarrollo que los llevaban a adquirir sensibilidades e intuiciones muy agudas, -en resumen, sabiduría más allá de sus años. Él los caracterizó como los bebés 'sabios'. De manera similar, a como C. G. Jung, con Karl Kerényi, (1949) elaboraron un mito conocido como el "niño divino", -identificando un arquetipo el cual activa la curación y la comprensión intuitiva en niños y adultos. En su trabajo, Jung (y Kerényi) exploraron el arquetipo del "niño divino" desde una perspectiva mitológica y psicológica. El presente artículo elabora aspectos del "niño sabio" de Ferenczi y el "niño divino" de Jung, comparándolos y contrastándolos, y sugiriendo nuevas perspectivas sobre las conexiones entre las perspectivas teóricas y clínicas de Ferenczi y Jung, así como de ambas personalidades. Asimismo, y más específicamente, este artículo explora un análisis comparativo del desarrollo de dos modalidades diferentes de conceptos psicodinámicos tempranos con respecto a los niños y su respuesta al trauma, aspectos que continúan a través de la práctica teórica y clínica actual.

Palabras clave: arquetipo infantil, confusión de lenguas, desarrollo, niño divino, Ferenczi, individuación, Jung, Orfa, Self, trauma, bebé sabio (niño).

RÉSUMÉ:

En 1923 Sandor Ferenczi écrit un article intitulé 'le rêve de l'enfant intelligent', dans lequel il identifie un phénomène découvert par lui dans son travail clinique: le fait que les jeunes enfants qui ont été traumatisés ont souvent un développement précoce accéléré qui les amène à acquérir une intuition et une sensibilité très fortes – bref, une sagesse qui dépasse leur âge. Il les nomma pour les caractériser de bébés 'de sagesse'. On

peut trouver une similitude avec l'idée de 'l'enfant divin' élaborée par Jung et Karl Kerényi (1949) dans leur travail sur le mythe de l'enfant divin, qu'ils voient comme la représentation d'un archétype dynamisant et chez l'enfant et dans l'adulte la capacité de guérison et la compréhension intuitive. Dans leur travail Jung (et Kerényi) explore l'archétype de l'enfant divin d'un point de vue mythologique et psychologique. Cet article étudie certains aspects de 'l'enfant de sagesse' de Ferenczi et de 'l'enfant divin' de Jung en les comparant et les opposant, ce qui ouvre de nouvelles perspectives pour penser aux connections qui existent entre les points de vue cliniques et théoriques de Jung et de Ferenczi, et entre les deux hommes. En même temps et de façon plus spécifique, l'article compare deux conceptualisations différentes de la psychodynamique de la petite enfance élaborée à partir des réactions des enfants au traumatisme, ces deux approches conceptuelles se retrouvant sous différents aspects dans les lignes d'interrogations cliniques et théoriques actuelles.

Mots-clés: archétype de l'enfant, confusion des langues, développement, enfant divin, Ferenczi, individuation, Jung, Orpha, Soi, traumatisme, sage bébé (enfant).

OVERZICHT:

Im Jahre 1923 verfaßte Sandor Ferenczi eine Arbeit mit dem Titel 'Der Traum vom 'gelehrten Säugling'' Baby,' in der er ein Phänomen beschrieb, das er in seiner klinischen Arbeit entdeckt hatte: die Vorstellung nämlich, daß junge Kinder, die traumatisiert worden waren, oft entwicklungsmäßig beschleunigte Eigenschaften besaßen, welche dazu führten, daß sie hoch akute Empfindlichkeiten und Intuitionen erwarben -kurz, nicht altersgemäße Weisheit. Er beschrieb sie als 'gelehrte' Säuglinge. In ganz ähnlichem Sinne beschrieb C. G. Jung zusammen mit Karl Kerényi, (1949) einen Mythos, der bekannt ist als 'das göttliche Kind' -wobei er einen Archetyp identifizierte, der Heilung und intuitives Verstehen in Kindern und Erwachsenen aktiviert. In ihrer Arbeit untersuchten Jung (and Kerényi) den Archetyp des 'Göttlichen Kinds' aus mythologischer und psychologischer Sicht. Die folgende Arbeit führt Aspekte von Ferenczi's 'Gelehrtem Säugling' und Jung's 'Göttlichem Kind' genauer aus durch Vergleich und Gegenüberstellung und den Vorschlag neuer Sichtweisen auf die Verbindungen zwischen Ferenczi's und Jung's theoretische und klinische Sichtweisen sowie den beiden Männern selbst.

Zudem und spezifisch untersucht die Arbeit ein vergleichendes Verständnis der Entwicklung zweier verschiedener Modalitäten -früher psychodynamischer Konzepte in Bezug auf Kinder und deren Reaktion auf Trauma, Aspekte, die heute in Theorie und klinischer Praxis fortgesetzt werden.

Steekwoorden: kindarchetype, spraakverwarring, ontwikkeling, goddelijk kind, Ferenczi, individuatie, Jung, Orpha, Zelf, trauma, wijze baby (kind).

SOMMARIO:

Nel 1923 Sandor Ferenczi scrisse un articolo intitolato 'Il Sogno del Bravo Bambino' in cui egli riconobbe un fenomeno che aveva scoperto nel corso del suo lavoro clinico: l'idea che bambini che hanno subito un trauma spesso hanno accelerato le loro caratteristiche evolutive e ciò li porta ad acquisire capacità intuitive e sensitive molto acute -in breve, una saggezza che va al di là della loro età. Egli li definì bambini 'saggi'. Similmente C. G. Jung insieme a Karl Kerényi, (1949) elaborò un mito noto come 'Il Bambino Divino' -identificando un archetipo che attiva guarigione e comprensione intuitiva nei bambini e negli adulti. Nel loro lavoro Jung e Kerényi esaminarono l'archetipo del 'Bambino Divino' da una prospettiva mitologica e psicologica. Il seguente lavoro elabora aspetti del 'Bambino Saggio' di Ferenczi e del 'Bambino Divino' di Jung confrontandoli e contrapponendoli e suggerendo nuove prospettive sulle connessioni fra i punti di vista teorici e clinici di Ferenczi e di Jung e fra gli stessi due uomini. Altrettanto e specificamente, il lavoro esamina un approccio comparativo alla comprensione dello sviluppo di due differenti modalità di concetti psicodinamici precoci riguardanti i bambini e la loro risposta al trauma, aspetti che continuano oggi attraverso la pratica clinica e la teoria.

Parole chiave: archetipo infantile, confusione di lingue, sviluppo, bambino divino, Ferenczi, Individuazione, Jung, Orpha, Sé, trauma, saggio bambino (bambino).

In 1923, Sándor Ferenczi, a Hungarian psychoanalyst and close friend of Freud, published a paper, entitled 'The dream of the clever baby', in which he identified a phenomenon he had discovered through his clinical work: the notion that traumatized young children often had accelerated developmental characteristics, including highly acute sensitivities and intuitions -in short, wisdom beyond their years. He characterized them as 'wise' babies¹. In Ferenczi's original formulation, the phenomenon expressed itself as a typical dream in which a 'very young infant in the cradle suddenly begins to talk and to give wise advice to its parents' (1931, p. 136).

Generally, from the mid-1920s through the early-1930s, the perspective of the child was a critical theme in Ferenczi's writings. During this period, he published important papers such as 'The adaptation of the family to the child' (1927), 'The unwelcome child and his death instinct' (1929), and 'Confusion of tongues between adults and the child' (1933). It was also in these years that Ferenczi wrote specifically from the perspective of the child in the adult, with papers such as 'Child-analysis in the analysis of adults' (1931).

Resonant with a line of psychotherapeutic thought today, Ferenczi believed childhood innocence was subverted, and children traumatized, by dominating and abusive adults -particularly parents. Ferenczi had long privileged the truth, honesty and innocence of children as contrasted with the hypocrisy of adults. In 1910, he had written to Freud: "There is certainly much that is infantile in my yearning for honesty- but . . . not everything that is infantile should be abhorred, for example, the child's urge for truth" (Freud-Ferenczi 1993, p. 224). Ferenczi believed that psychoanalysis should pay more attention to children. He wrote to Freud again in 1910: 'We stand in debt to children for the light they have thrown on psychology, and the best and most logical way of repaying that debt. . . is to strive to improve our understanding of them through psycho-analytical studies' (Freud-Ferenczi 1993).

The above comments are ironic since Ferenczi, like Freud and Jung, saw few, if any, children as patients. All three reconstructed the child's perspective through their own, and patients', recollections of childhood.² Nevertheless, Ferenczi, who first advocated child analysis in his 1913 paper 'A little chanticleer', influenced a number of the most important early child analysts, particularly Melanie Klein, to work directly with children. Klein herself attributed Ferenczi's influence to her taking up this work with children³.

To return to the 'wise baby', over the next ten years, until his death in 1933, Ferenczi elaborated and developed this idea of the wise baby. For example, he looked deeper into the meaning of these dreams and became convinced that they usually reflected an early trauma, often some form of child abuse. Ferenczi (1931) wrote: 'Those dreams in which a new-born or very young infant in the cradle suddenly begins to talk and to give wise advice to its parents or other grown-ups'.

'Now in one of my cases [Case of R. N] (Fortune 1993, 1994, 1996), the split-off intelligence of the unhappy child in the analytic fantasy behaved like a separate person whose duty it was to bring help with all speed to a child almost mortally wounded' (p. 136). We all know that children who have suffered much morally or physically take on the appearance and mien of age and sagacity. They are prone to 'mother' others also; obviously they thus extend to others the knowledge painfully acquired in coping with their own sufferings, and they become kind and helpful' (p. 136).

As Ferenczi explored the phenomenon over time, two scenarios emerged, one, an adult patient dreaming a 'wise baby' -the child in the adult- suggesting an early childhood trauma, and the other, an actual traumatized child, in reality displaying aspects of the 'wise child'.

By 1933, Ferenczi had honed in on the possible sexual component of this early trauma. He was now less focused on interpreting the dream or fantasy, but in using these images to unveil the reality of the trauma to the actual child (in the adult) and work through the psycho-emotional legacy of that trauma.

1.- In this paper, like Ferenczi, I will use the terms 'wise baby', 'wise child', (even 'clever baby') interchangeably.

2.- In Ferenczi's 30 November 1932 entry in 'Notes and Fragments' (1930-32) – a continuation of his Clinical Diary, Ferenczi (1932) made the notion personal: 'The idea of the wise baby could be discovered only by a wise baby' (p. 274). In Ferenczi's Christmas 1921 letter to Georg Groddeck he details his perception of his own early difficult childhood in an attempt to engage Groddeck in a mutual analysis (Ferenczi & Groddeck 2002).

3.- Not, as might be expected, Karl Abraham, her other influential analyst.

He writes in his 1933 paper, 'Confusion of tongues between adults and the child: the language of tenderness and of passion':

The sudden, surprising rise of new faculties after a trauma, like a miracle that occurs upon the wave of a magic wand, or like that of the fakirs who are said to raise from a tiny seed, before our very eyes, a plant, leaves and flowers. Great need, and, more especially, mortal anxiety seem to possess the power to waken up suddenly and to put into operation latent dispositions which, un-cathected, waited in deepest quietude for their development.

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 insect⁴. 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 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 them⁵. Indeed, it is unbelievable how much we can still learn from our wise children, the neurotics. (p. 164-5; my italics)

Ferenczi's description of the infant speaking from the cradle is uncanny, and evokes the religious phenomenon of 'speaking in tongues', which also resonates with Ferenczi's (1933) concept of a 'confusion of tongues', in which the child experiences sexual passion from an adult, while expecting, and hoping for, parental tenderness. The outcome can be a 'wise child'. There is a positive quality in this, as the wise child speaks wisdom -not blasphemy or vitriol. However, it is a confusion of child as adult, and adult as child. Overall, is it a positive, or negative, image -or simply mixed and contradictory? Ferenczi views it as pointing backward to something disturbing, yet also forward as a '*traumatic progression*', or a '*precocious maturity*'. Is this 'wise child' a perversion of higher consciousness? A twisted sense of wisdom? Or is it a symbol of higher consciousness being brought into life through trauma?

To address these questions, I would like to shift my focus to explore aspects of Jung's archetype of the child, specifically, the divine child (although I am not entirely sure if there is a difference), and connect it with Ferenczi's 'wise baby', to explore whether Jung's perspectives can amplify aspects, and understandings, of this phenomenon in ways not available to a classical, or even Ferenczian, psychoanalytic approach.

JUNG'S CHILD ARCHETYPE (DIVINE CHILD)

Jung defines the 'divine child', or child archetype: 'The child-motif⁶ represents the pre-conscious, childhood aspect of the collective psyche... [It is] a picture of certain forgotten things in our childhood' (1949, p. 124).

Like Ferenczi's wise baby, Jung's (1949) archetypal child has a complex history, manifesting itself in a number of ways: 'Sometimes the "child" looks like a child-god, sometimes more like a young hero. Common to both types is the miraculous birth and the adversities of early childhood -*abandonment and danger through persecution*' (p. 129). According to Jung, the child archetype erupts from the unconscious,

4.- Like pruning trees, which actually causes hormones to grow where spots have been cut.

5.- Ferenczi was the first to define the concept of 'Identification' -and specifically, the concept of 'Identification with the Aggressor' (sometimes called the Stockholm effect)

6.- Jung describes the term 'motif' as being 'mythological components which, because of their typical nature, we can call "motifs", "primordial images", types or -as I have named them- *archetypes*' (1949, p. 115).

which echoes the ‘wise baby’s’ genesis -uncanny, spontaneous- specifically, the child archetype activated at the point of trauma. Jung also describes the emergence of the ‘child’ in an adult in a ‘conflict-situation that offers no way out, the sort of situation that produces the ‘child’ as the *irrational third*, [which] is of course a formula appropriate only to a psychological, that is, modern, stage of development’ (Jung & Kerenyi 1949, p. 134).

Jung writes of an initial stage of personal infantilism –a picture of an ‘abandoned’ or ‘misunderstood’ and unjustly treated child with overweening pretensions’ (p. 146). Jung addresses the contradictions inherent in the situation of Ferenczi’s ‘wise baby’. He writes: ‘Higher consciousness, or knowledge going beyond our present-day consciousness, is equivalent to being all alone in the world. This loneliness expresses the conflict between the bearer or symbol of higher consciousness and his surroundings’ (p. 133). Jung’s view of the child archetype helps to re-frame the inherent conflicts of Ferenczi’s ‘wise baby’ -embodying the seeming contradiction of both the element that is under threat, and at the same time the element which rescues. At times of stress, the activated divine child is also a self-healing archetype.

Could the wise baby also be understood, from a Jungian point of view, as a unique and situational aspect of individuation? ‘As a matter of experience, we meet the child-archetype in spontaneous and in therapeutically induced individuation processes’, writes Jung (p. 146).

How do Jung’s views resonate with Ferenczi’s description of severely abused children who suffer psychic fragmentation, splitting, or possible annihilation (‘extinction’ of psychic integrity), and yet, at the same time demonstrate an accelerated wisdom, activated by the very nature of this potentially catastrophic situation in which the child finds itself?

Jung (& Kerenyi 1949) writes of the traumatic origins of the child archetype: ‘Abandonment, exposure, danger, etc. are all elaborations of the ‘child’s’ *insignificant beginnings* and of its *mysterious and miraculous birth*’ (p. 132). This could be a description of the ‘wise baby’. Jung continues:

This statement describes a certain psychic experience of a creative nature, whose object is the emergence of a new and as yet unknown content. In the psychology of the individual there is always, at such moments, an agonizing situation of conflict from which there seems to be no way out -at least for the conscious mind (p. 132)... The solution of the conflict through the union of opposites is of vital importance, and is moreover the very thing that the conscious mind is longing for, some inkling of the creative act, and of the significance of it, nevertheless gets through. From this comes the ‘numinous’ character of the ‘child’. (p. 133)

Under the heading ‘The invincibility of the child’, Jung (& Kerenyi 1949) writes:

It is a striking paradox in all child-myths that the ‘child’ is on the one hand delivered helpless into the power of terrible enemies and in continual danger of extinction, while on the other *he possesses powers far exceeding those of ordinary humanity...* Myth... emphasizes that the ‘child’ is endowed with superior powers and, despite all dangers, will unexpectedly pull through. (p. 135 [my italics])

Regarding the wise baby’s precocious pronouncements: Jung writes, implicitly incorporating an early trauma, that, ‘visionary experiences... whether they occur in dreams or in the waking state, are, as we know, *conditional to a dissociation having previously taken place between past and present*’ (1949, p. 125 [my italics]). Similarly, Ferenczi states: ‘To connect with the strange dream images about “wise babies”. Spiritualist mediums, insofar as they accomplish anything at all, owe their powers to a regression to this infantile state of omniscience and supreme wisdom’ (1932, p. 81).

Jung (1949) elaborates on the above theme, stating, ‘such dissociations come about because of various incompatibilities; for instance, a man’s present state may have come into conflict with his childhood state, or he may have violently separated himself from his original character in the interests of some arbitrary persona more in keeping with his ambitions... all this presents a favourable opportunity for an equally

vehement confrontation with the primary truth' (p. 125). Here, as opposed to Ferenczi, Jung shies away from, or at least ignores, imagining the catalyst experience of the child as traumatic.

The uncanny, 'miraculous', event of a young child speaking wisdom beyond his/her years, is similar to the following description by Jung (1949): 'the various "child"-fates may be regarded as illustrating the kind of psychic event that occurs in the entelechy or genesis of the "self". The "miraculous birth" tries to depict the way in which this genesis is experienced. Since it is a psychic genesis, everything must happen non-empirically, e.g., by means of a virgin birth, or by miraculous conception, or by birth from unnatural organs'.

The following by Jung (& Kerenyi 1949), may provide a further rationale as to the function of the wise baby in transcending, or at least alleviating, an intolerable situation. He writes: 'Because the symbol of the "child" fascinates and grips the conscious mind, its redemptive effect passes over into consciousness and brings about that separation from the conflict-situation which the conscious mind by itself was unable to achieve' (p. 133).

FERENCZI'S 'ORPHA'

On close reading of Jung's (1949) archetype of the child and the self, I kept thinking of Ferenczi's irreducible element, 'Orpha' -a primitive, natural, and undifferentiated state of the individual that Ferenczi identified with the aid of his patient 'R. N.', and described in his 1932 *Clinical Diary* (Ferenczi 1932). Ferenczi writes that 'Orpha' is 'an omnipotent intelligence (p. 121)... a singular being, for whom the preservation of life is paramount... [a] guardian angel [producing] wish-fulfilling hallucinations, consolation fantasies, anesthetizing consciousness and sensitivity against sensations as they become unbearable... maternal, organizing life instincts' (pp. 8-9). Ferenczi (1931) had written of 'Orpha' without naming it as such: 'Under the stress of imminent danger, part of the self splits off and becomes a psychic instance *self*-observing and desiring to help the *self*, and possibly this happens in early -even the very earliest- childhood' (p. 136) [my italics].⁷

From a Jungian perspective, I would suggest that Ferenczi's wise baby and Orpha are archetypal in nature. The wise baby is an aspect of the archetype of the child, and Orpha is an archetype similar, at least in being irreducible, to Jung's archetype of the 'Self'.

Reflecting 'Orpha', Jung (& Kerenyi 1949) writes that the 'child is born out of the womb of the unconscious, begotten out of the depths of human nature, or rather out of living Nature herself... a wholeness which embraces the very depths of Nature' (p. 135). Also, like the primal Orpha, Jung states that: 'The phenomenology of the 'child's' birth always points back to an original psychological state of non-recognition, i.e., of darkness or twilight, of non-differentiation between subject and object, of unconscious identity of man and the universe (p. 137)... The deeper "layers" of the psyche lose their individual uniqueness as they retreat further and further into darkness... they become increasingly collective until they are universalized and extinguished in the body's materiality, i.e., in chemical substances' (p. 138). This certainly rings of Ferenczi's 'Orpha'.

As I tried to forge an understanding of the links between Ferenczi's wise baby and Jung's child archetype, I found myself slipping between and around concepts -wise baby, orpha, divine child, self, archetype, myth, etc.- finding it difficult to pin down exactly which of Ferenczi's concepts might correspond to Jung's archetypal structures. I then stumbled upon the following description by Jung explaining my difficulty, and the nature of this slipperiness. Jung (& Kerenyi 1949) writes:

Clear-cut distinctions and strict formulations are quite impossible in this field, seeing that a kind of fluid interpenetration belongs to the very nature of all archetypes. They can only be roughly circumscribed at best. Their living meaning comes out more from the presentation as a

7.- Given that I am writing this paper for a Jungian journal, it is interesting to note Ferenczi's use of the term "self", which obviously has a more particular meaning in the Jungian context.

whole than from a single formulation. Every attempt to focus them more sharply is immediately punished by the intangible core of meaning losing its luminosity. No archetype can be reduced to a simple formula... [they] are the imperishable elements of the unconscious, but they change their shape continually. (p. 145)

Jung continues, 'it is a well-nigh hopeless undertaking to tear a single archetype out of the living tissue of the psyche; but despite their interwoven meanings the archetypes do form units that are accessible to intuition' (p. 145). They exist, but are not easily definable, or distinct.

An essential difference between Jung and Ferenczi's formulations of the child seems to be the question of whether it is a progressive or regressive phenomenon. Jung's elaboration of the appearance of the archetype seems to serve development, in Jungian terms a component of 'individuation' – evolving forward. Evoking a positive sense of the wise baby, Jung (1949) writes that 'symbols of wholeness frequently occur at the beginning of the individuation process; indeed they can often be observed in the first dreams of early infancy' (p. 128). "'Child" means something evolving towards independence', writes Jung (& Kerenyi 1949 p. 133). 'One of the essential features of the child-motif is its *futurity*. The child is potential future. Hence the occurrence of the child-motif in the psychology of the individual signifies as a rule anticipation of future developments, even though at first sight it might seem like a retrospective configuration... the "child" paves the way for a future change of personality' (Jung 1949, p. 127). Ferenczi's view, however, while not ruling out possible positive dimensions of the wise baby, albeit with hyper-evolved characteristics, essentially characterizes the phenomenon as traumatic and regressive.

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