

SÁNDOR, GIZELLA, ELMA: A BIOGRAPHICAL JOURNEY¹.

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SUMMARY

In recent years, particularly with the publication of the Freud–Ferenczi correspondence, it has become clear that the rich theoretical dialogue between Freud and Ferenczi, a dialogue that may be constitutive for psychoanalytic discourse in recent decades, was intensely intertwined with their complex personal relationship. Two women -Gizella Pálos, who eventually became Ferenczi's wife, and her daughter Elma, who was both Ferenczi's and Freud's analysand, and with whom Ferenczi fell in love- played a crucial role in shaping the Freud–Ferenczi relationship. Their own voices, however, have so far been barely heard. This paper is a preliminary report of a biographical research project which aims to complete the puzzle, by getting to know better Gizella, Elma and their family, with the help of numerous original sources, many of them unpublished till now. The emerging picture tends to confirm Ferenczi's initial view of Elma as a person of depth and integrity, rather than Freud's view of her as fundamentally disturbed; countertransference-love, it is suggested, may have facilitated fuller perception rather than clouding it. The question of the impact of Elma's ‘confusion of tongues’ with Ferenczi and with Freud on her subsequent life is also discussed.

Keywords: boundaries, childlessness, countertransference, ethics, generative-dyad, guilt, incest, misogyny, power, secrets

RESUMEN

En los últimos años se ha hecho evidente la riqueza del diálogo teórico entre Freud y Ferenczi, en particular tras la publicación de su correspondencia. Este diálogo, que puede ser considerado como constitutivo del discurso psicoanalítico en las últimas décadas, estuvo intensamente entrelazado con sus complejas relaciones personales. Dos mujeres -Gizella Palos, quien finalmente se casó con Ferenczi, y Elma, su hija, paciente tanto de Ferenczi como de Freud y de la cual se enamoró Ferenczi- desempeñaron un papel crucial en la configuración de la relación Freud-Ferenczi. Sin embargo hasta ahora sus voces apenas han sido escuchadas. Este artículo es el informe preliminar de un proyecto de investigación biográfica que pretende completar el enigmático cuadro, para llegar a conocer mejor a Gizella, a Elma y a su familia, con la ayuda de numerosas fuentes originales, muchas de ellas inéditas hasta ahora. La imagen que surge tiende a confirmar la visión inicial de Ferenczi sobre Elma como una persona profunda e íntegra, más que la visión que Freud tenía de ella como fundamentalmente perturbada. El autor sugiere que el amor contratransferencial puede haber facilitado una percepción más completa antes que haberla distorsionado. También se examina la cuestión del impacto de la “confusión de lenguas” de Elma con Ferenczi y con Freud en su vida posterior.

Palabras claves: fronterizos, infertilidad, contratransferencia, ética, diada generativa, culpa, incesto, misoginia, poder, secretos.

In den vergangenen Jahren wurde vor allem durch die Publikation des Freud-Ferenczi-Briefwechsels deutlich, dass der intensive theoretische Dialog zwischen Freud und Ferenczi — den man als konstitutiv für den psychoanalytischen Diskurs der vergangenen Jahrzehnte betrachten kann — aufs engste mit der

1.- Based on a presentation at the international conference ‘Clinical Sándor Ferenczi’, Torino, Italy, July 2002.

komplexen persönlichen Beziehung zwischen den beiden Briefschreibern zusammenhing. Zwei Frauen, nämlich Gizella Palos, die schließlich Ferenczis Ehefrau wurde, und ihre Tochter Elma, die sowohl bei Ferenczi als auch bei Freud in Analyse war und in die Ferenczi sich verliebte, haben die Freud-Ferenczi-Beziehung entscheidend mit geprägt. Bislang aber sind sie selbst praktisch nicht zu Wort gekommen. Der Beitrag ist ein vorläufiger Bericht über ein biografisches Forschungsprojekt, das das Puzzle zu vervollständigen versucht. Zahlreiche, bisher großteils nicht veröffentlichte Originalquellen ermöglichen es, Gizella, Elma und ihre Familie besser kennen zu lernen. Das so auftauchende Bild bestätigt tendenziell Ferenczis ersten Eindruck, dass es sich bei Elma um eine integre Frau mit einem reichen Seelenleben handelte, die aber von Freud als schwer gestört betrachtet wurde; die Gegenübertragungsliebe, so eine These des Autors, könnte die umfassende Wahrnehmung erleichtert und nicht etwa verstellt haben. Gleichfalls diskutiert wird die Frage, wie die „Sprachverwirrung“ zwischen Elma einerseits und Ferenczi und Freud andererseits das weitere Leben der Frau beeinflusst haben könnte.

Ces dernières années, avec notamment la publication de la correspondance Freud - Ferenczi, il est devenu clair que le riche dialogue théorique entre Freud et Ferenczi, dialogue qui peut être considéré comme constitutif du discours psychanalytique des dernières décennies, était intimement lié à la complexité de leurs relations personnelles. Deux femmes -Gisella Palos, qui est devenue en fin de compte l'épouse de Ferenczi, et sa fille Elma (qui a été l'analysante à la fois de Freud et de Ferenczi), et dont Ferenczi est tombé amoureux- ont façonné de façon déterminante les relations entre Freud et Ferenczi. Leurs propres voix ont cependant été à peine entendues. Le présent article est le rapport préliminaire d'un projet de recherche biographique destiné à compléter le puzzle, en essayant de mieux connaître Gizella, Elma et leur famille, à l'aide de nombreuses sources originales, pour la plupart non publiées à ce jour. Le tableau qui émerge tend à confirmer le point de vue initial de Ferenczi, à savoir que Elma était une personne profonde et intégrée, contrairement à l'opinion de Freud qui la considérait sévèrement perturbée. L'amour contre-transférentiel a, semble-t-il, permis une perception plus complète, au lieu de la voiler. L'auteur discute également la question de l'impact de la « confusion de langues » d'Elma avec Ferenczi et avec Freud sur la vie ultérieure de celle-ci.

In questi ultimi anni, soprattutto con la pubblicazione della corrispondenza Freud-Ferenczi, appare chiaro che il loro ricco dialogo teorico, che può essere considerato costitutivo per il discorso psicoanalitico degli ultimi decenni, era strettamente intrecciato con il loro complesso rapporto personale. Due donne -Gizella Palos, che alla fine sposò Ferenczi, e sua figlia Elma, analizzanda sia di Freud sia di Ferenczi, e della quale Ferenczi s'innamorò- ebbero un ruolo fondamentale nel dare forma al rapporto Freud-Ferenczi. Finora, però, si è raramente udita la loro voce. Quest'articolo è un resoconto preliminare di un progetto di ricerca biografica che intende completare il puzzle per cercare di conoscere meglio Gizella, Elma e le loro famiglie con l'ausilio di numerose fonti originali, molte delle quali finora inedite. Il quadro che emerge tende a confermare l'opinione originaria che Ferenczi aveva di Elma come di una persona di grande profondità e integrità, piuttosto che l'opinione che ne aveva Freud di persona fondamentalmente disturbata. L'autore suggerisce che l'amore controtrasferale potrebbe aver facilitato una percezione più completa anziché averla offuscata. Si esamina inoltre quali ripercussioni abbia avuto, sulla vita successiva della donna, la "confusione delle lingue" di Elma nei rapporti con Ferenczi e con Freud.

‘Elma Laurvik? No, I don’t remember’, said the superintendent at 30 East 81st St., a large apartment building not far from the Metropolitan Museum, in New York City. ‘I work here for 26 years, so, if you say she died around 1972, I should have known her. What apartment did you say? 10D? When I started here there were two Hungarian ladies, the sisters Ferenczi.’

‘Yes, yes’, I interrupt, ‘Magda and Elma?’

‘I think so. They were quite old and lonely. They stuck to each other; they had no friends here. No, I don’t believe anyone in the building would remember them. I saw more of them than anybody else. I would come

up to fix things for them. You know, I am Hungarian too. They barely went out. I don't think they knew people here, not even other Hungarians. And they died within a year: first one had a stroke, then the other one died too. I wish I could tell you more. But, you know, it was so long ago.'



Picture 1 — Old Elma and Magda

These were my notes, taken in October 1995, of one of my first stops in a long journey, a journey far from conclusion. This journey also brought me to Judith Dupont's magnificent archive in Paris; to exchanges with André Haynal in Geneva, who searched the Balint archive for me; to Blaise Pasztor's family albums in New York City, out of which the photographs included here originate; to a correspondence with Mary Mowbray, another descendant of the Ferenczi family, in New Zealand. I would like to dedicate this paper to all of these individuals, for whose generous help I am so grateful.

A fateful quadrangle.

But the journey actually started in Tel Aviv, in 1994, during my reading of the first volume of the Freud–Ferenczi correspondence, which I undertook to review. My interest in Ferenczi's ideas goes back years, but it was the correspondence that captivated me, and made me intensely interested in Sándor Ferenczi as a person, and in the individuals close to him. More specifically, I became fascinated by the two women who played a central role in Sándor's life: Gizella Pálos, his lover and eventually his wife, and her daughter Elma. Freud was actively involved in both relationships. The drama of that fateful quadrangle, which for years was considered utterly secret, became for me -through some kind of transference- a drama of my own family.

But is this story really important, or is it just gossip? It took me some time to realise that my interest in this drama goes far beyond plain voyeurism. I believe that much of the progress of psychoanalysis is achieved through the intersubjective dynamics of what I call 'generative dyads': Breuer and Bertha Pappenheim, Freud and Anna von Lieben, Ferenczi and Elizabeth Severn, and so on (Berman, 1997). Freud and Ferenczi (and similarly, Klein and Winnicott) are among the most creative generative dyads in our history, and the dialectics of their encounter follow us wherever we turn in contemporary psychoanalytic discourse (Berman, 1999, 2004). We all, nowadays, seem to be negotiating our way between the inner world of fantasy (Freud) and the impact of childhood experiences (Ferenczi) as shaping personality; between drives (Freud) and self-object relations (Ferenczi) as organising conceptions; between interpretation (Freud) and affective experience (Ferenczi) as primary analytic tools; between viewing ourselves as neutral observers

(Freud) or as involved in an intersubjective process (Ferenczi).

The publication of the Freud–Ferenczi correspondence (Brabant and Falzeder, 1993–2000) allows us an unprecedented opportunity to study the Freud–Ferenczi debate with the aid of primary sources, and hopefully to surpass the biases of its past interpretations. Reading the correspondence, it becomes clear that the theoretical differences between the two did not develop during Ferenczi’s later years (Blum, 1994), but have their roots in the earliest stages of their relationship (Berman, 1995). Moreover, it becomes clear that the personal and professional levels in their dialogue were intertwined all along the way. Two major aspects of this admixture were the quadrangle between Freud, Ferenczi, Gizella and Elma; and Ferenczi’s analysis with Freud, which in many ways was an outgrowth of that quadrangle (Dupont, 1994).

Ferenczi’s original insights into the underlying mutuality of the analytic relationship, insights that culminated with the bold experiment of mutual analysis (Berman, 1999, 2004), first developed in the context of his yearning for a greater mutuality in his personal relationships –with Freud, with Gizella and then with Elma; while Freud consistently expressed his scepticism in all these situations (Aron, 1998). Later on, Ferenczi’s painful dilemma, in choosing between mother and daughter, made him dependent on Freud’s advice and help, and gradually more prone to accept Freud’s hierarchical worldview. Freud prodded him to settle on Gizella, encouraging Ferenczi to accept Gizella and himself as transferential parents. Ferenczi’s stormy ambivalent feelings regarding this choice made him defiantly cling to Elma at one point; but later brought him closer to Freud, including the wish to be analysed by him and the willingness to accept Freud’s view and marry Gizella. Eventually, however, the unresolved conflict rearoused his antagonism to Freud, which again inflamed the dormant theoretical disagreement as well (Berman, 1996, 1997).

To study this fateful quadrangle more fully, I thought, we must rely on the correspondence, but supplement it with other documentary sources, which would enable us to portray more accurately the two ‘silent’ partners in the drama, Gizella and Elma, who are left in the margins in most existing accounts. Only by allowing the women in the story to regain their missing voices can we hope to complete the puzzle. While acting as the less powerful, their position may have given Gizella and Elma considerable impact over both Ferenczi and Freud. Only an exploration taking into account the experiences of all participants could allow us to outline the fullest and most accurate picture possible of the way in which the relationship between Freud and Ferenczi –so deeply interwoven with their lifelong theoretical and clinical arguments– was influenced by both these men’s entanglement with Gizella and with Elma.

Key moments in the Freud–Ferenczi correspondence

My fascination with the drama started while reading André Haynal’s rich introduction to the first volume of the correspondence. There I found the history of the Freud–Ferenczi correspondence itself. Ferenczi’s diary and Freud’s letters to him were entrusted to Michael Balint by Gizella, Ferenczi’s widow, when he left Budapest for England in January 1939. Later on, Gizella, having arrived in Bern after the war, asked Anna Freud to send her Ferenczi’s letters to Freud, and Anna Freud consented, asking to have them copied first ‘with an eye to their eventual partial use’ (Brabant and Falzeder, 1993–2000, I, p. xxix). Gizella was apprehensive: ‘These letters contain a great many personal details concerning me, and I wouldn’t want them to fall into the hands of just anyone’ (p. xxix). After her death in 1949, Elma –Ferenczi’s stepdaughter, as well as former analysand and former lover– continued the dialogue with Balint regarding possible publication.

Balint wanted to publish the correspondence and the diary at the same time, out of his concern about the way the diary may be received; even on 16.7.68, close to the end of his life, he was ‘still not certain whether the time has come for publishing it’ (I, p. xxxiii)². Balint attempted to devise various schemes for the selective publication of the correspondence, taking into account Anna Freud’s objections (Anna was

2.- I quote the original letters, which appeared slightly modified in the introduction to the correspondence, where they were retranslated from Haynal’s French translation. In this paper, I, II and III designate the three volumes of the correspondence in English (Brabant and Falzeder, 1993–2000).

always conservative in considering open publications; she was also reluctant to publish ‘the controversial discussions’). However, he was also guided by his own wish to avoid full exposure of the drama involving Elma. Elma herself, after many years of reluctance, in 1966 gave him her consent to publish the letters and to clarify their background, realising that her role in Sándor’s life cannot be passed over in silence. She expressed confidence in Balint’s tact, and he attempted to meet the challenge by suggesting to her, on 10.12.68, ‘We should give you a pseudonym … [and] state that you were a near relation to Gizella, but not divulge that you were her daughter’.

Balint died in 1970, Elma in 1971, Anna Freud in 1982. The passage of time, as well as changing norms as to what can be openly disclosed, eventually allowed for the publication of the correspondence without any omissions or disguises.

On the background of my fascination, I read the correspondence with special attention to Gizella and to Elma, and I will outline the story as I read it.

Sándor first alludes to Gizella Pálos in 1909, a year after the beginning of the enthusiastic friendship and the correspondence between Freud and Ferenczi. (From a later letter we learn that Sándor’s and Gizella’s first union took place in 1900; 17.10.16, II, p. 141). In 1909, Sándor is single, 36 years old; Gizella is married, aged 44, the mother of two daughters: Elma (almost 22) and Magda (20), the latter becoming the wife of Sándor’s younger brother Lajos in 1909.



Picture 2 — Magda, Gizella, Elma

Sándor writes to Freud about Gizella, ‘The difficult and painful operation of producing complete candor in me and in my relationship with her is proceeding rapidly’ (26.10.09, I, p. 87);

the confession that I made to her, the superiority with which, after some reluctance, she correctly grasped the situation, and the truth which is possible between us makes it seem perhaps less possible for me to tie myself to another woman in the long run, even though I admitted to her and to myself having sexual desires towards other women and even reproached her for her age. Evidently I have too much in her: lover, friend, mother, and, in scientific matters, a pupil, i.e., the child (p. 88).

He is ‘eagerly at work analyzing’ his lover (30.10.09, I, p. 90), which I understand as referring to soul-

searching discussions, not in a structured analytic setting.

Freud has his doubts:

It belongs to the ABC of our worldview that the sexual life of a man can be something different from that of a woman, and it is only a sign of respect when one does not conceal this from a woman. Whether the requirement of absolute truthfulness does not sin against the postulate of expediency and against the intentions of love I would not like to respond to in the negative without qualification, and I urge caution. Truth is only the absolute goal of science, but love is a goal of life (10.1.10, I, p. 122).

Later on in the same letter, while analysing a dream Ferenczi reported, and making a comparison between Ferenczi and Fliess, Freud states another lasting and fateful difference between them: ‘This need to help is lacking in me, and I now see why, because I did not lose anyone whom I loved in my early years’ (I, p. 122).

A few months later Ferenczi mentions Gizella’s ‘concern for her unmarried daughter [Elma] and for the two-sided (partly communal) relationship’ (5.4.10, I, p. 157), the latter at this point still involving only Magda and Lajos. Planning a trip to Vienna with Gizella and Elma he asks Freud for permission ‘to ask your advice in a rather difficult matter (marriage and love affair of that same daughter)’ (3.1.11, I, p. 248). Freud surprises him after the visit by diagnosing Elma as a mild case of ‘dementia praecox’, and this has ‘a rather depressing effect’ on Ferenczi (7.2.11, I, p. 253). Freud elaborates:

Frau G.’s visit was very nice; her conversation is particularly charming. Her daughter [Elma] is made of a coarser material, participated little, and for the most part had a blank expression on her face. Otherwise, of course, there was not the slightest abnormality noticeable in her (8.2.11, I, p. 254).

Half a year later Ferenczi reports taking Elma into psychoanalytic treatment: ‘the effect is favorable. Of course, she has to talk much more about me than other patients do, but that is not turning out to be an absolute hindrance’ (14.7.11, I, p. 296). Freud wishes him success, but warns: ‘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’ (20.7.11, I, p. 296).



Picture 3 — Elma

Elma’s analysis suffers a setback when a man she was involved with romantically shoots himself on her account. (In her letter to Balint on 7.5.66, to which I will return later, Elma erroneously attributes

the beginning of her analysis to that event.) Then Ferenczi realises: ‘I wanted to commit a terrible act of violence. Dissatisfied with both parents, I wanted to make myself independent!’ (14.11.11). He appears to equate love with total loyalty (to both Freud and Gizella), and independence from them with dangerous violence. Ferenczi then relates this rebellion to his fantasies of marrying Elma, indicating these have started earlier on, prior to the analysis; a talk with Gizella, however, leads him to the conclusion that the attraction to ‘young, pretty creatures’ is only an attempt to mask his fixation on Gizella (I, p. 312). In the same letter he deals with his relationship with Freud – the latter’s attempt not to give too much opportunity for his transference, his attempt to make himself independent in reaction, ‘a phase of my struggle for freedom’ (p. 312). Freud responds by addressing him ‘Dear son’ (I, p. 314), while disregarding the developments with Elma, which –so it appears- are deeply related to their relationship.

Ferenczi now reports,

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 (3.12.11, I, p. 318).

He told Gizella, who is ‘unstintingly kind and loving’ (from the outside, one wonders if there is a masochistic element in her surrender?), and he thinks of his wish for a family, complicated by Gizella’s age (p. 318). Freud responds immediately: ‘First break off treatment, come to Vienna for a few days … don’t decide anything yet’ (5.12.11, I, pp. 318-9).

Two weeks later Freud sends Ferenczi a letter for Gizella, where he interprets Ferenczi: ‘his homosexuality imperiously demands a child and… he carries within him revenge against his mother’ (17.12.11). (The issue of homosexuality in the Freud-Ferenczi relationship is thoroughly explored by Forrester, 1997.) He raises many doubts regarding Elma’s character (‘I did not find that she could place herself alongside her mother’), the pace of the process, and the risk in building an alliance for life ‘on concealing the fact that the man has been her mother’s lover in the fullest sense of the word’ (I, p. 320). A day later Ferenczi writes: ‘Marriage with Elma seems to be decided. What is still missing is the fatherly blessing’. Freud succumbs: ‘perhaps I have said more than was justified … I will congratulate you wholeheartedly when you let me know that the time has come’ (I, p. 322).

Two more weeks, and a reversal: following her father’s objections, ‘doubts crept into *Elma*’s mind’, and her repetitive inability to wish without reservation came up:

the scales fell from my eyes… I had to recognize that the issue here should be one not of marriage but of the treatment of an illness… she consented to go to Vienna and enter treatment with you (1.1.12, I, p. 324).

Ferenczi accepts Freud’s view of Elma, and turns her over to him. Freud agrees, though bringing up all the complicating factors; he says he first thought the letter will announce the engagement, and wanted to show ‘no sensitivity now that you neglect the sullen old man in favour of the charming young woman’ (2.1.12, I, p. 324). The bitterness is evident, even if it is disclaimed. Surprisingly, Freud also claims, regarding Ferenczi’s change of mind, ‘I have done nothing to bring that about’ (I, p. 325).

The following stage in the correspondence involves Freud’s detailed (and, by today’s standards, highly unethical) reports to his friend about Elma’s analysis. Freud develops an interpretive scheme, emphasising Elma’s ‘compulsive attitude toward being disappointed by her father, her identification with him since, her desire for revenge, her striving to do to others what she has suffered through him’ (3.3.12, I, p. 351). Bonomi (1997) points out that Elma comes to represent in Freud’s eyes ‘the third sister-casket’, signifying death (Freud, 1913b).

Emotionally, Freud fluctuates. At times he is attempting to ‘prepare’ Elma for Sándor: ‘So wait, not without good expectations’ (13.1.12, I, p. 327); or ‘If we succeed further and she gives up her infantilism (that is, after all, the only legitimate diagnosis [no longer dementia praecox?]), then a new situation will

arise ...' (1.2.12, I, p. 340). At other moments he is more pessimistic, warning Ferenczi 'that masochistic impulses very frequently take their course in an unfavourable marital choice', while again utilizing negation: 'I am in no way taking sides against Elma' (13.2.12, I, p. 345). Later, he warns Sándor: 'she doesn't want to get into the experience with you ... I am cooling off noticeably again' (24.3.12, I, p. 362).



Picture 4 — Elma as a child

Not surprisingly, Ferenczi is becoming more and more sceptical. Retreating from the defiant rebellion against both 'father' and 'mother', he now says: 'I would find sufficient compensation for the loss of family happiness in the understanding and loving company of Frau G. and in scientific intercourse with you' (18.1.12, I, p. 328). He reports to Freud quotations from Elma's own letters, such as 'my character is so unbalanced, such a terrible chaos is reigning in me that it would be a risk for anyone to take me as a wife' (I, p. 329); or 'I am still living much too much in fantasies and exaggerations' (I, p. 348). He visits Freud in Vienna, agreeing with Freud to keep his visit secret from Elma, and then writes: 'Rarely has a visit with you given me such undisturbed intellectual and emotional satisfaction... The fault on some other occasions (Palermo!) lay not in you, of course, but in me' (29.2.12, I, p. 350).

The fact is that the experiences that came about through Elma's analysis significantly diminished her value in my eyes ... 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 on my face when I refused to work with you [namely, refused to take dictations of the Schreber case; Fortune, 2002, pp. 8-9] in Palermo (8.3.12, I, pp. 352-3).

With Elma back in Budapest, another stage starts. Ferenczi is less attracted to Elma, while she 'no longer has the ambition to be more than she can by nature'. (A sad outcome for an analysis, I would argue, and another indication of the price of the early analysts' sexist biases.) Gizella encourages Sándor to marry her daughter after all, promising to remain his friend. 'I made it clear to her that the possibility... depended on two conditions: Elma's suitability -and the fact that she becomes agreeable to *me*. (And on Elma's inclination as well, naturally.)' (17.4.12, I, p. 365). The last sentence, added in parentheses, appears to be an afterthought.



Picture 5 — Elma as an adolescent

‘The pendulum swings’, Ferenczi writes, ‘in my inclination between Frau G. and Elma, between mother and sister, spirit and matter, are continuing’. Elma’s suitability will be examined through a renewed analysis with Ferenczi, who also demands of her to

break off all relations... for the duration of the treatment... She has to decide to speak with me freely and uninhibitedly, to admit all her resistances. If she doesn’t do that, then I am firmly resolved to give her up (23.4.12, I, p. 369).

Freud follows the process with encouraging interest. The two friends appear to have now a joint Pygmalion fantasy, but also enact their common misogyny (Bonomi, 1997, p. 156). They view woman -a view typical in their cultural milieu- as a dangerous seductress, motivated by ‘the animal side of her self’ (Freud, 1915, p. 163), who must be tamed. ‘I am very glad that you have remained consistently firm against Elma and have thwarted her tricks’, Freud writes (20.7.12, I, p. 395).

I must admit that in reading this part of the correspondence my identification shifted completely from Ferenczi (or Freud) to Elma. Freud’s attitude reminded me of his unempathic work with ‘Dora’, discussed extensively in recent literature (Berman, 2002); when Dora asked Freud to accept her back into analysis, he also took pride in remaining consistently firm and rejecting her, which many contemporary authors lament. Ferenczi appears to have given up for a while all his egalitarian and feminist ideals. He is more attentive to Gizella’s suffering, but not at all to Elma’s.

With hindsight, there is something amazing in the degree to which the intense countertransference of both Ferenczi and Freud must have blinded them to the cruelty of the experiment, and to the hopeless double bind created by making analytic openness the precondition for marriage with the analyst: ‘no talk of engagement as long as she doesn’t commit herself to open (analytic) discourse’ (27.5.12, I, p. 374).³

Freud, who writes at that time of the required ‘emotional coldness in the analyst’ (1912, p. 115), congratulates Ferenczi: ‘you have found the only correct technique, and I am very happy about that’ (30.5.12,

3.- A modern parallel came to my mind: the condition of a candidate in a ‘reporting’ psychoanalytic institute, whose professional future depends on the judgements of his or her analyst (Berman, 2000).

I, p. 375). However, the suffering of both Gizella and Elma grows. ‘In today’s hour Elma was quite ill; she didn’t say a word [indeed, Bonomi’s mute sister]; I think she is struggling inwardly but doesn’t have the courage to make a decision’ (10.6.12, I, p. 381). ‘Frau G. … has difficulty bearing her daughter’s suffering in analysis’ (14.6.12, I, p. 381).

Ferenczi extensively quotes a letter from Elma, now allowing her a voice. It proves to be a very poignant voice:

... I know quite certainly that you will not come to get me. And yet I have such a terrible anxiety about it. This being alone that now awaits me will be stronger than I; I feel almost as if everything will freeze inside me; I will remain reasonable, but it will be so cold in me, I will freeze so much that I will have to hate this last resort, reason.

... You know me, of course, and you know there is no relying on me.

... I told you how terribly impatient I am, how I burn with desire. It is a very, very good thing for me to be with you; I don’t think there could be anything better.

... I also feel really a little like your child, so much do I wish to be led by you. Only if we had our child could I feel as if I were your wife.

... Why subject myself to the danger that this test will exceed my strength? Do you wish that, perhaps? Or are you also afraid of it?

Talk about yourself, for once; up to now you have been talking only about me!

... Write to me once, one single time, honestly, the way one speaks to an adult, and tell me what you really feel (date unknown, I, pp. 383-5).

Elma is finally losing patience, but Ferenczi scolds her ‘that she had never worked properly’; he notices that now she only expresses herself ‘when I have to hurt her and bring her to tears’ (18.7.12, I, p. 392). Naturally, the whole experiment fails. Both analysis and relationship collapse: ‘I have given up Elma’s analysis and in so doing severed the last thread of the connection between us’ (8.8.12, I, p. 402). Towards the end, Ferenczi writes: ‘giving up my (almost realized) fantasy with Elma and the analytic executioner’s work with which I had to put this fantasy to death by myself still gives me considerable pain’ (26.7.12, I, p. 396). Subsequently, Elma gets married and leaves for the US, as I will describe later; Sándor returns to Gizella, in spite of sexual difficulties, and eventually marries her under Freud’s unrelenting pressure.

Ferenczi is afraid of Elma’s revenge, dreaming ‘that she was tearing up my papers like a mad dog’ (26.12.12, I, p. 451). To the end of his life, Ferenczi resents Freud for his role in preventing him from marrying Elma and having children (Dupont, 1994); but we never hear directly from him regret or guilt about his tantalising attitude towards Elma, so strongly influenced by his surrender to Freud’s view. Freud, while oblivious to his active role, does tell Ferenczi, echoing Gizella: ‘you, because of your infidelity to Elma, have inflicted a deep wound on her and have confused the possible future with demonic dexterity’ (6.7.17, II, p. 226).

As for Ferenczi, we could infer some guilt feelings towards Elma from his later discussion of a young woman patient of his, whom he kisses when she first comes to him (‘the repetition of the case of Elma’, he adds in brackets), but later rejects. When she shoots herself on the background of her love for him,

this depresses him ‘extraordinarily’ (19-20.12.17, II, p. 253). He describes ‘repetition of earlier (deserved) feelings of regret’ (p. 254), but apparently does not notice that he recreated for himself a major trauma once suffered by Elma. Talking to Gizella makes him feel no longer guilty, only sorry about the girl (p. 255); although from his own account -where he describes postponing treatment in spite of direct suicide threats- his guilt sounds realistic rather than neurotic (Berman, 2003).

A few months after separating from Elma, Ferenczi writes: ‘Mutual analysis is nonsense, almost an impossibility’ (26.12.12, I, p. 449). This is the occasion he asks Freud to take him into analysis, abandoning the fantasy he expressed two years earlier, when still striving for greater equality with Freud, that he could help Freud as ‘an unimpeachable therapist’ to be more open with him (I, p. 224). As we know, his eventual disappointment with the analysis with Freud (Dupont, 1994) coincided with his renewed belief in mutuality, in the value of speaking ‘honestly, the way one speaks to an adult’. In the work described in the *Clinical Diary* -especially in his attempted mutual analysis with ‘R.N.’, Elizabeth Severn (Berman, 1996)- Ferenczi finally meets Elma’s frustrated challenge, after a long detour.



Picture 6 — Gizella, Sándor, Elizabeth Severn

The Altschuls

What do we know of the life of Elma, Gizella and their family? Gizella Altschul was born on 29 August 1866 in Budapest. The Ferenczis (formerly Fraenkels) got to know her when she moved to Miskolc, probably after her marriage. Gizella’s father Simon was a Jewish grain merchant, who came originally from the Prague area. As an outgrowth of his commercial ties with Sweden, he later became the Swedish honorary consul in Budapest, a title subsequently bestowed upon his son Artur. He and his wife had three sons, the oldest Artur and Lajos, and the youngest Guszti⁴, and four daughters in-between these sons: Ilona, Gizella, Saroltà and Elise. Their mother, Sophie (Zsófia, nee Kohn), died at an early age, when Gizella was about 6. The children were then brought up by Aunt Titi (Ernestine), a well-educated but domineering French governess, who was reputed to have also been the father’s mistress.

4.- After the deaths of Simon, Artur and Lajos, Guszti became the head of the family. He was a conservative person and disapproved of his sisters’ divorces, but was also realistic and respected their emotional needs. He respected Sándor and was on good terms with him. When Guszti died in 1963, aged 91, Elma wrote to Balint: ‘we all received a lot from him during his long life; he leaves behind a large empty space’ (21.11.63). Guszti’s grandson, Blaise Pasztory, has contributed much to this paper



Picture 7 — Young Gizella (right), probably with daughters; Aunt Titi (seated at back), father and two of the sisters

All four daughters married under pressure, not out of love, and all were unhappy in their marriages⁵. Gizella, always a powerful and sophisticated woman, married Dr Géza Pálos, a weak and passive man, who gradually became deaf. She apparently never loved him, and had other relationships from an early stage. They had two daughters: Elma was born on 28 December 1887, and Magda on 28 April 1889. The temperaments of these sisters were different from childhood: even in early photos Elma often appears to be serious, introverted, complicated, and Magda usually tends to be more smiling and easygoing.



Picture 8 — Gizella

⁵ Ilona's husband, an architect (Dénes), contracted syphilis and later committed suicide. Gizella, Saroltà and Elise eventually divorced. Saroltà (Charlotte), for example, had a very unhappy marriage with a physician (Friedmann), whom she divorced after their only daughter died in adolescence. Gizella and Saroltà were both notably intellectual; they spent the Nazi occupation years together. Sándor had confessed to Gizella a sexual encounter with Saroltà (18.11.16, II, pp. 155, 158), which Forrester (1997, pp. 70–1) interprets as an outgrowth of Sándor's ambivalence about marrying Gizella



Picture 9 — Magda, caretaker, Elma

Magda, whom Sándor characterised as having a ‘mundane’ nature (8.4.18, II, p. 277), married Lajos, Sándor Ferenczi’s younger brother (who was a bank executive), in 1909, at age 20. They lived together till he died -apparently of a heart attack- towards the end of the Second World War.



Picture 10 — Lajos with Magda

Elma’s relationships with men, as we know, were much more tormented. Blaise Pasztor, the son of Elma’s and Magda’s cousin Katalin Zsófia (Lily), knew both of them well and his experiences of them -while naturally subjective- are of interest. He describes Elma as troubled, anxious, usually dressed in various shades of purple and writing her letters in purple ink; but also kind, dedicated to others, in a way a martyr. Magda he recalls as hedonistic, self-centred, but full of *joie de vivre*, leaving behind long journals of her numerous trips.

Gizella eventually left Géza Pálos in late 1917 (see Ferenczi’s letter to Freud of 18.4.18, II, p. 276). Géza had been very hurt by her affair with Sándor; in one of his letters to Gizella, he expressed his shock and pain after he accidentally met Sándor and Gizella in the park, and they smiled at him in recognition and just continued walking. Sándor, after intense prodding by Freud during his brief intermittent analysis (Dupont, 1994; Hoffer, 1996), overcame his hesitation and married Gizella on 1 March 1919. While Elma supported this marriage, both Lajos and Magda were bitterly opposed (Ferenczi to Freud, 8.4.18, II, pp. 276-7).

The day Gizella and Sándor got married, Géza died. While we cannot be certain if it was a coincidental heart attack as Ferenczi said (II, pp. 333, 336), or a suicide (Roazen, 1998), this event must have added an additional burden to the newly-weds relationship, which we know was already far from simple: ‘The marriage, sealed under such unusually tragic circumstances...’ (Ferenczi to Freud, 23.5.19, II, p. 356).



Picture 11 — Gizella and Sándor

Although their marriage appears to have been successful in many ways, Sándor's deeper conflict was never really resolved. On 23.5.19 he wrote to Freud: 'since the moment in which you advised me against Elma, I have had a resistance toward your own person' (II, p. 356). Later, on 27.2.1922 he wrote to Groddeck: 'Prof. Freud... persists in his original view that the crux of the matter is my hatred for him, because he stopped me... from marrying the younger woman (now my stepdaughter). Hence my murderous intentions toward him...' (Fortune, 2002, p. 19; see Haynal, 1988, p. 44). These quotes highlight the defensive nature of Freud's account, in 'Analysis terminable and interminable', according to which Ferenczi's analysis 'had a completely successful result. He married the woman he loved...' (1937, p. 221) -a major simplification aimed at presenting Ferenczi's later antagonism as coming 'out of the blue'. Gizella's own experience of being the ambivalently loved wife of Sándor, and her emotional response to his continued attraction to Elma, were not directly expressed in any way I could discover so far.⁶

Turning now to Elma's life, her marriage -on one level- fulfilled Ferenczi's hopes: 'the best thing would be to get her married; but she is being difficult' (15.11.12, I, p. 432). When she decided to get married (about a year after her break with him) he felt 'happy to see the matter with Elma settled without me', and yet '*was extraordinarily* saddened when I learned ... that the marriage with that American is *really* going to take place'. Just before she made up her mind, his old scruples returned, and Gizella once more suggested he should marry Elma (7.7.13, I, p. 497); this was an idea she later returned to when Elma's marriage started falling apart (11.4.17, II, p. 195), and brought up again as late as 1927 (Forrester, 1997, p. 77), so it appears to have been Gizella's long-term view of the right solution, contrary to Freud's direction.

About the fate of Elma's actual marriage, I will quote her own description in an affidavit she signed in 1957. While possibly influenced by its legal purpose, which will become clearer soon, it sounds to me as an honest retrospective account.

In the summer of 1913 an International Women Suffrage Congress was held in Budapest and I served there as a guide-interpreter. Mr. John N. Laurvik also attended this congress. If I remember well he was sent by the Christian Science Monitor, by the Boston Transcript and by a New York Magazine to cover the congress. A short time after our first meeting he proposed marriage to me. We became engaged and after a few weeks he returned to the United States promising that he will return to Budapest a year later for our wedding. Meanwhile my parents made inquiries as to Mr. Laurvik and the report was that he lived with his mother and sister... in Elizabeth, New Jersey... His father had died several years before... His occupation was given as art critic and I think he had been a contributor about New York art exhibitions in the Christian Science Monitor and in the Manchester Guardian...⁷

6.- Judith Dupont heard from her mother the thought that Gizella unconsciously took revenge upon Sándor by neglecting his unpublished manuscripts after his death (Dupont, personal communication).

7.- Let me add here additional information from two other sources: John is identified in their marriage certificate as Janos Agost Nilsen Laurvik, born 1877, divorced. Who's who in America (1918–9, v. X) specifies he was born in Fredericksavaern, Norway (27.11.1877), came to the US in 1888, became a dramatist and art critic, and translated Ibsen's letters in 1905..



Picture 12 — Laurvik

I married Mr. Laurvik on September 18 [actually 16], 1914, in Budapest, and we left, via Norway, for Elizabeth, New Jersey. A few weeks after our arrival... a friend of Mr. Laurvik who was Director of the Palace of Fine Arts at the Panama Pacific International Exposition, asked him if he would not be willing to go immediately to Europe and collect paintings [for the exposition]... Mr. Laurvik accepted this offer under the condition that I accompany him as I knew four languages...

Elma goes on to describe their success in collecting paintings by Marinetti and other Italian Futurists in Milano, by a famous Finnish painter, by Norwegian and Austrian painters, and by many Hungarians, including Bereny. After the First World War was over most paintings were safely returned, but, 'Evidently two paintings by Robert Bereny, the portrait of Béla Bartók and a Crucifixion were retained by Mr. Laurvik.'⁸



Picture 13 — Elma and Laurvik

By that time I joined the American Relief Administration, organized by Mr. Herbert Hoover, and worked

8.- These stolen paintings are clearly the topic of the affidavit, as part of some legal proceedings.

for this organization, as a voluntary worker, for 1½ years in Budapest, Hungary.⁹

... I have seen Mr. Bereny who was anxious to know why these two paintings were not returned with the others and I did my best to find out from Mr. Laurvik what has happened to them. I believe that he did not want to let them out of his hands as he loved them very much, but I never could get a direct answer out of him. Mr. Laurvik, true to his native land, Norway, was a regular Peer Gynt, full of plans and phantasies [the spelling used by Elma] but unable to carry out his good intentions. I believe he truly meant to scrape up enough money to make an offer to Bereny to purchase the paintings. Yet, he did never make an offer to Bereny. He dilly dallied, beat around the bush, but kept the paintings.

I returned to San Francisco some time during 1920.¹⁰ However, because of Mr. Laurvik's unstable character and because of differences in our point of view, I decided to return again to Budapest, Hungary, some time during 1924. We never divorced legally because he always assured me that he wanted me to come back to him and promised that he would change and we could start a new life together again. He never kept his promises and so I never returned to him...

As he never sent me any support I had to start to work for my living and I joined the American Foreign Service in 1925. I was appointed to the American Legation in Budapest... I worked there from 1925 until World War II. Then the American Legation had to close its offices and I was sent to Bern, Switzerland... [Actually, there was an interim position in Lisbon.] I never divorced Mr. Laurvik. He passed away in 1953.¹¹

Mr. Pasztor remembers many family discussions about Laurvik, a handsome tall man, who used to be a sailor before he entered the art world; a charming but violent person, who possibly abused Elma physically. He recalls an episode described to him in the early 1950s: Elma came to visit her cousin Lily (Mr. Pasztor's mother). Laurvik wanted to have lunch with her. Elma was apprehensive, and asked Lily to join them. It was very hot, John bought an ice cream, but when it started dripping he threw it angrily in the middle of the street. Elma told Lily, 'You see what kind of a person he is'.

Gizella always cared deeply for Elma. When Sándor wanted to marry Gizella, she expressed concern, because of her hope 'to secure the family home for Elma, who (perhaps) wants to get away from her husband and come back to Europe' (Ferenczi to Freud, 17.10.16, II, p. 142). Sándor, feeling rejected, accused Gizella of 'neurotic pampering -almost worshiping- of Elma' (23.10.16, II, p. 148); but at more empathic moments could say, 'She, too, loves her problem child most' (19.1.19, II, p. 327). He viewed Laurvik as 'a man fixated on his mother and sister' (22.10.18, II, p. 303). Freud wrote, on 14.8.25: 'I was sorry to note that your dear wife is so hard hit by Elma's fate' (III, p. 223).

Sándor's premature death on 22 May 1933 was a shock for Gizella. She wrote a will (on 18.6.33), stating:

Shortly after Sándor's death and under its impact, in case I will too leave this world unexpectedly, and so that our joint wishes materialize, I am writing this will. My property consists of two parts. The smaller one I inherited from my father, and the larger one is what Sándor, during our life together, gained from his restless physical and mental labor. I was his partner in his struggles, from their beginning to their end; he gave me, and he trusted me. I leave all my property, as Sándor too wanted, to my two girls, Elma and Magda, who all their lives gave me -and gave Sándor, since he got to know

9.- As we notice, Elma glosses over her first separation from Laurvik.

10.- Laurvik became the director of the S.F. Art Association, and edited several exhibition catalogues, which I located at the NYU library. Freud writes on 21.1.20: 'Your Elma was here ... beautiful and blossoming ... I was very pleased to hear that she has reconciled with her husband' (III, p. 4).

11.- Laurvik died in New York City on 2 May 1953; towards the end of his life he lived with an American woman, Harriet Langwig..

them- only happiness. I direct them to continue what Sándor and I did, and help and support those sisters of mine and of Sándor's whose regular modest income is insufficient...

This support is then specified.

Gizella's will resonates with the will of her sister Saroltà, written in Budapest in 1949:

I nominate as the heir to all my property my niece Mrs. Janos Laurvik, née Elma Pálos, now residing in Bern, who generously took care of all my needs, and allowed me a careless life in my old age ... [my brothers' children] know as well as me that Elma will treat the family property entrusted to her goodheartedly, as she did so far, and will help the family to the degree she will see the need for ...

As I have mentioned, Elma lived during the Second World War in Lisbon, then in Bern. Gizella, Saroltà, Magda and Lajos stayed in Budapest during the war years and the Nazi occupation of 1944-5. Gizella converted to Christianity in 1944, but this was not a sufficient safeguard. They were all protected by Raul Wallenberg, in a Swedish house. In 1946, Elma invited Gizella and Magda (now also a widow) to join her in Bern.



Picture 14 — Gizella, Magda and Elma in Bern

Gizella died in Bern on 21 March 1949, at age 82. Elma and Magda stayed there, before moving to New York City in 1955. Elma died on 4 December 1971 after suffering from Alzheimer's disease; Magda died on 11 May 1972 of a heart attack.

Elma and Balint correspond

A major source of insight into Elma's later years, into her personality and into her view of her involvement with Sándor is her correspondence during the 1950s and 1960s with Michael (Mihaly) Balint, Ferenczi's most prominent disciple and literary executor. These letters supply us an important part of the puzzle, a puzzle that is still incomplete, but its contours -I believe- become clearer.

During these years, Balint resides in London, being a central member of the British Psychoanalytic Society, a spokesman for the Independent Group and for an object-relations emphasis. Elma starts the correspondence -an outgrowth of Balint's earlier correspondence with her mother Gizella, till the latter's death- from Bern, where she is still on the staff of the USA legation; and she pursues it through her retirement in 1955, her move to New York City with Magda, and their old age spent together. Most of the letters are typewritten in English, a few are in Hungarian. Magda is often mentioned, but does not appear to write letters herself.

Elma is concerned about the delay in publishing the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence, which she mostly blames on Anna Freud (12.11.51). She is very upset about the persecution of family members in Hungary, who were deported out of Budapest. A son of her cousin tried to flee to Austria, was arrested, and developed

such symptoms that he was sent for observation to a psychiatric ward. She asks: ‘Will psychoanalysis ever transform human evil?’ The young man (Pisti Dénes) was sentenced to four years in prison, and on 13.2.55 she reports with relief his release in good spirits and health.



Picture 15 — Elma in her office in Bern

Both Elma and Michael are much invested in republishing Ferenczi’s writings and getting them translated, and speak often of the need to preserve Ferenczi’s heritage, as well as of the financial aspects of the project. Balint lent Elma and Magda some money, which is to be returned through the royalties for Ferenczi’s writings, part of which Elma and Magda receive. It takes a while till the sum is repaid, and Elma is often worried about it. Balint has Ferenczi’s correspondence with Freud typed, but suggests that, because ‘Unfortunately there are so many personal references and allusions’, its publication has to be postponed. He feels the same about ‘Sándor’s scientific diary, which Gizella entrusted to me in Budapest’ (23.1.55). Elma answers,

I am sure that you are right to wait... Sándor certainly would not like to hurt or to upset people [she refers to him as if he were still alive]. All his precious thoughts are in your faithful and loyal hands, they will not get lost to the world (13.2.55).

Elma plans to resign her position ‘after 30 years of toil’, and to visit Italy, ‘the land of my dreams’. She and Magda indeed enjoy Italy tremendously, praising in particular Urbino, Lucca and San Gimignano (3.10.55). After Italy, she and Magda will ‘take our courage into our hands and move back to the United States ... even though our heart will remain in Europe’. She hopes Balint will visit them there, ‘it is not such a bad country after all’ (13.2.55). Ironically, her apologetic tone about the move to the US reminds us of Freud’s concern 35 years earlier that Ferenczi might immigrate to the US under Elma’s influence! (15.3.20, 17.4.21, III, pp. 12, 55).

Elma apologises that ‘it would be too long to explain why we think this is the best solution for us’, but the answer may be related to their eventual address in New York City: 825 West 187th St., namely the late John Laurvik’s former apartment (since 1930, his death certificate states), which Elma apparently inherited. In a letter sent from the Chelsea Hotel, their first stop, on 13.3.56, Elma says, ‘Things are not moving ahead with us and we are still fighting to overcome the difficulties’, possibly referring to some legal complications in settling the inheritance. An authorized English translation of her and John’s marriage certificate was prepared for this purpose.

Before leaving Europe, Elma asks Balint’s advice about the ring which Ferenczi received from Freud (as a member of the secret Committee of Freud’s disciples; Roazen, 1998, p. 272), and she received from her mother. The ring, she says, symbolizes the link among analysts. Should she give it to Anna for a future Freud museum? ‘Or perhaps you would wish to wear it, and then leave it in deserving hands? ... If you

will wear it willingly, it is yours ...' (3.10.55). Balint is delighted by the idea, but asks again if she is sure, because it means a lot for her too (22.10.55). The ring is delivered to him, and Elma writes, 'I am glad that you enjoy wearing THE ring and I am glad it is with YOU' (26.3.56).

One reason Elma had to go to the US was her struggle to gain guardianship of their ailing aunt Elizabeth Morando (Gizella's sister Elise, who moved with her second husband -Czech opera singer- to Hollywood), whom she finally manages to bring from Los Angeles, and places in a nursing home. Alas, the aunt gets 'entirely confused and I am sorry to say, also very vicious and unpleasant', and has to be rushed into a state hospital, where 'she often mentions Sándor in her phantasies [sic]' (11.8.56). Elizabeth died a month later.

Jones's allegation, in the third volume of his Freud biography, that Ferenczi went insane at the end of his life, hurt Elma (and Magda) deeply.

It shocked us to read what Jones states about Sándor, namely that he died insane! As you know he was not insane! Even if Jones, and probably some other persons, cannot follow his last writings and do not agree with him, that certainly does not prove that Sándor was insane! It is horrible to make such a statement of a dead man, who cannot defend himself. Will somebody rectify it? Will something be written and done? Publicly, I mean. We are very, very sad that this could happen 25 years after Sándor's death (8.11.57).

Balint updates Elma about his negotiations with Jones ('a cold and calculating man, rather egocentric') and with Hoffer regarding the publication of his rebuttal, which -he says apologetically- 'as a result of a compromise had to be diplomatic'. He goes on, 'That is a pity but what would the alternative have been? To start a public controversy with charges and counter charges, stirring up intimate details of Sándor's and the Professor's life, and so on' (28.1.58). This last concern must be understood on the background of what Roazen describes as an 'implied threat on Jones's part' in Jones's letter to Balint of 16.12.57:

Perhaps you might tell Elma and Magda that I was extremely careful to avoid dealing with Ferenczi's personal life, e.g., the way he treated Gisela [sic], his intimacy with her daughter, etc., but kept strictly to his relations with Freud (Roazen, 1998, p. 273).

Elma is very invested in reading Balint's response to Jones, going out of her way to receive the relevant issue of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* for herself and for Sándor's sister, Zsófika (25.6.58). She also sends Balint Fromm's angry reaction, in *The Saturday Review*. On 19.10.60, Balint gladly informs her that his reservations will be included in the introduction to the German edition of the Jones biography, in agreement with Jones's widow. On 14.2.61 Balint asks Elma for details about Sándor's earlier life, for a biographical chapter he is preparing; 'I did not meet him until 1918', he explains. Elma must have responded apprehensively (that letter is missing), and Balint hastens to write, 'I am very sorry indeed if I have stirred up any unpleasant memories in you Elma. No one, and certainly not I, wants to trespass in private areas which are no concern for the public'. His interest, he explains, is in the years following Sándor's medical studies in Vienna, 'when he was a fairly frequent visitor to your mother's house, so you and Magda must have met him on several occasions' (7.3.61). As we'll see, this is but a prelude to a more intense exchange later.

Much of this time, Elma works at the Bartók Archives. On 22.4.64 she writes,

I was reduced to only two working days by my chief... and my pay was cut by half. As nothing interests me as much as to make money, I am very depressed about this... This money I could use for my favorite 'hobby': to help my poor friends in Bp. [Budapest].

A year later, at age 78, she loses her job completely, to her bitter disappointment: ‘I hoped I can work to the end of my days’ (4.4.65). Around the same time, Magda and Elma move to 81st St., ‘nearer to our relatives, friends, our doctor...’ ‘Rent sky high’, she mentions parenthetically, adding,

I must admit I am not 100% enthusiastic as I fear never more in my life will it be as peaceful and as quiet as it was here, around us. (Magda claims she loves city noise and motion, but we have different tastes) (28.3.65).

Balint cheers her up: ‘it is grand to live in the next block to Fifth Avenue’ (2.4.65). He also reports the good sales of the new Bausteine edition, and Elma greets the news: ‘It means a lot to me... that Sándor’s thoughts and ideas are still alive, and the present generation also wants to learn and profit by them’ (9.6.65).



Picture 16 — Older Elma

On 28.4.66 Balint reports his agreement with Anna Freud to publish a selection from the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence, accompanied by a historical account of their relationship, written by him, in a second volume.

This now raises a very tricky problem, which is your relationship with Sándor. To write a biography... without mentioning that you played a part in it would be a falsification... So may I ask you to reflect on this very intimate and touchy problem, and in due course let me know what your feelings are about it.

Elma’s answer, on 7.5.66, is written in Hungarian, indicating the emotional intensity of the situation for her; I will quote from Haynal’s translation. While her memory appears to have betrayed her on some of the details (placing her analysis with Freud after the end of her relationship with Ferenczi, while it actually took place in its middle phase), it is impressive how lively is her recollection of the drama, more than 50 years later. While on 12.11.51 she wrote to Balint, ‘If only I could live to see the publication of this correspondence’, now her feeling is different:

I was always afraid that I might be mentioned in it and hoped that it was not going to be published in my life. First of all, I would like you to leave out my unfortunate role... however... aiming at historical truthfulness, it is out of the question. Secondly, I would like it if Sándor’s image weren’t further impaired... Thirdly, relying on your tactfulness... I will have to put aside my feelings and agree that you write this biography. I hope that by the time it comes out I will have passed away.

‘Since you have read Sándor’s letters about it’, she guesses wisely, ‘you must know more about the whole story than me... it seems that unconsciously I wanted to forget it altogether because I only remember certain scenes’. She erroneously attributes the beginning of her analysis with Sándor to the suicide of the young Frenchman who was in love with her. She speaks of herself bitterly:

in spirit I was immature, self-conscious and desirous of love... I was a young girl with a fiery spirit... I was an evil seducer, I was only thinking about myself and did not care about my victims. But perhaps I was not evil at all, only the slave of nature!

Then she describes,

All in all after a few sessions Sándor got up from his chair behind me, sat on the sofa next to me and, considerably moved, kissed me all over and passionately told me how much he loved me and asked if I could love him too. Whether or not it was true I cannot tell, but I answered ‘yes’ and -I hope- I believed so.

We were cruel when telling it to Mum, who was astonished, but with her presence of mind she said that if the two people whom she loved most in the world were going to get married she could only be happy about it. She was glad that Sándor would have children after all... Later on she must have opened her heart to Zsuka¹² because Zsuka told me once that I shouldn’t have gotten involved in this affair of Mum and Sándor. She was right.

How we told this to my poor father I cannot recall, but he, who was aware of and suffered from the liaison of Mum and Sándor, must have been astounded. Probably he clapped his hands in amazement and gave a shy laugh -the way he would always do, surrendered to his fate and retreated. That’s what he did all his life. He was a hapless, deaf and weak man.

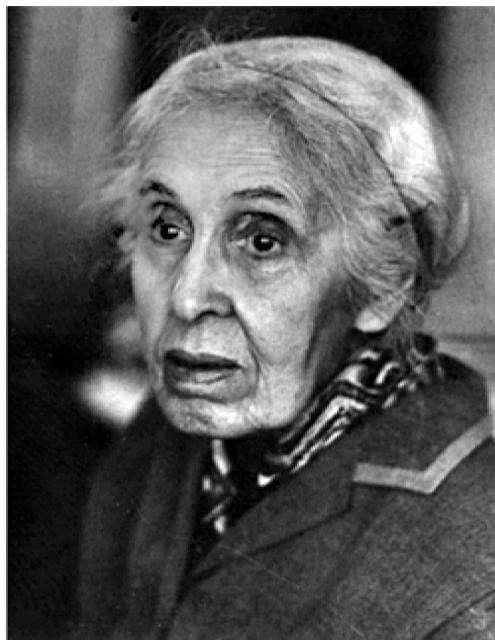
Elma goes on to describe her growing realisation that she does not love Sándor that much, and how the break-up of their relationship made the situation of the whole family unbearable.

The transitory nature of feelings was the greatest disappointment of my life. The one I could love was my husband, but he was a Peer Gynt and our life dissolved... When I got back to Budapest Sándor and Mum were already man and wife. When I first saw him again we were both somewhat embarrassed but later on the situation became natural. Sometimes when we were two he would whisper some kind words to me, once in a while he even approached me, but fortunately I remained impassive. My evil nature had disappeared by that time.

Elma closes her letter saying: ‘It was not easy to put all these memories into words’.

Balint is very empathic: ‘I was deeply touched by your prompt and sympathetic reply. I can well imagine how many memories, both fond and painful ones, my request stirred up in you ...’ He promises to treat the matter carefully, offering to submit what he writes for her approval (11.5.66). He also describes his difficulty in telling Sándor, his second analyst, what he had already heard in Berlin about the episode -the experience called by Haynal (2002) conversation between different couches. Balint later assures her again that his writing about Sándor will put ‘his real personality in the proper light so that his great qualities should not be obscured’ (20.5.66).

12.- Elma’s cousin, Ilona’s daughter, who eventually became a writer: Zsófia Dénes



Picture 17 — Old Elma

Elma, troubled by ‘many symptoms of old age’, is becoming concerned about inheritance issues (the intended heiress is their cousin Katalin [Lily] Pasztry), and also becomes worried whether Balint or Ernst Freud will do the selection from the correspondence -another indication of her continued anxiety in this matter (23.5.67). Balint reassures her it will be him (6.6.67). Later on she raises the question of responsibility for Ferenczi’s writings ‘after the death of both of us -and after your death, dear Michael’, proposing to pass on the role to Balint’s niece Jutka (namely, Judith Dupont) (9.10.67), a wise proposition that Balint soon embraces.

Some subsequent letters are directed to Elma and Magda together, probably because ‘Elma is feeling tired and slow’ (17.1.68). Balint addresses Elma alone, however, when he proposes to describe her as ‘a near relation to Gizella, but not divulge that you were her daughter’ (10.12.68). On 14.1.69 he laments Olga’s (Judith Dupont’s mother) report of ‘how weak and ailing Elma is’, and thanks Elma for her agreement to be represented by the pseudonym of ‘Sylvia’. On 7.2.69 he writes Elma and Magda: ‘You need not worry about the treatment of Sylvia in Sandor’s biography and correspondence’.

These are the last moments of the brother-sister friendship between childless Sándor’s two almost-children: his beloved stepdaughter and his beloved disciple. Half a year earlier, in a somewhat disorganised letter, Elma sympathises with Michael’s difficulty deciding which papers to leave out in a selection from Sándor’s works: ‘I can see before me Sándor shrug his shoulders, smiling a little bitterly, would he have been confronted with this problem’ (10.7.68). She expresses her pride in Balint’s election as president of the British Psychoanalytic Society, and concludes her brief letter: ‘May I give you a warm hug at this occasion (you are safe from the distance). Many thanks, as always. Your old friend.’

DISCUSSION

Balint, as I have mentioned, was concerned that in the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence ‘Unfortunately there are so many personal references’. From our point of view today, I believe, the personal–professional admixture is a reality that must be well understood, if the theoretical debate is to be clarified.

This expanded understanding could also enable us to better explore how insights gained from the emerging picture can illuminate major issues in contemporary psychoanalysis regarding the nature of the psychoanalytic encounter, sources of transference and countertransference, the place of reality and fantasy, the role of boundaries, our view of the relationship between men and women, and related ethical issues.

Therefore, a fuller historical-biographical picture, some aspects of which are outlined here, can enrich an up-to-date understanding of the relevance of the Ferenczi-Freud dialogue to central issues in psychoanalytic theory and practice today, and help us in reviving the broken Freud–Ferenczi dialectic (Berman, 1999, 2004).

The picture emerging here points to the utopian nature of the belief expressed by Freud, and at times by Ferenczi as well (Berman, 2003), in an objective, impartial, impersonal psychoanalytic technique, modelled ‘on the surgeon, who puts aside all his feelings’ (Freud, 1912, p. 115). As with many of Freud’s other cases, the place of subjectivity and of countertransference appears central in any contemporary reading.

While Freud seriously attempted to draw his conclusions from the Elma affair (as well as from Jung’s involvement with Sabina Spielrein) in his powerful paper on transference-love, that paper touches only superficially upon countertransference issues, advocating ‘keeping the counter-transference in check’ (Freud, 1915, p. 164). It perpetuates the image -typical of the period- of man’s struggle against woman’s dangerous seduction. But is countertransference-love, for better or worse, any less ubiquitous to the psychoanalytic process than transference-love?

On this background, ethical issues, and most specifically the implications of personal and professional incest, taken too lightly by Freud (Forrester, 1997, p. 83), become crucial. The loose mixture of personal and professional relationships, characteristic of the period (and finding later expressions also in Freud’s analysis of Anna and in Klein’s analysis of her little children), appears to us now as much more dangerous¹³. The need for boundaries and for confidentiality as defining a sharply delineated asymmetrical analytic field is seen most clearly, also in relational and intersubjective analytic models which are often inspired by Ferenczi’s belief in the unavoidable mutuality of the analytic process (Berman, 1997). To translate mutuality into symmetry implies denial of the power-relations inherent in any therapeutic relationship, and such denial may enhance the abuse of power, that indeed characterised the analyses of Elma with both Ferenczi and Freud.

One of the questions that was on my mind after reading the first volume of the correspondence was this: whose view of Elma should we trust? Freud’s view of her as a limited person, expressing ‘a few astute thoughts that I would not have thought her capable of’ (13.3.12, I, p. 356); as a woman who is quite disturbed, possibly even ‘a mild case of dementia praecox’? Or Ferenczi’s deep initial respect and love for her?

Ferenczi’s view was, of course, later shaken up by Freud’s reports, to the point of speaking -for example- of ‘the extent of her narcissism, her lack of objective interest in people and things’ (23.4.12, I, p. 368). The wish to reach a fuller picture of Elma’s personality was one of my motives to look for more information about her to hear her voice more extensively.

Elma’s own fuller account of the drama, which we heard in one letter to Balint, was deliberately suppressed by her for decades. I came to the conclusion that Elma was a very discreet person, deeply loyal to both Freud and Ferenczi, and she struggled all her life to protect Ferenczi’s reputation. This is how I understand her reticence when interviewed by Roazen in 1967 (Roazen, 1998), as well as many expressions in her letters to Balint. One may wonder, whether she treated Freud and Ferenczi with greater loyalty than they deserved, with more caring than they invested in her during that crucial period, maybe as a form of identifying with the aggressor? (Frankel, 2002).

Reading Elma’s letters and the additional documents I quote, noting Roazen’s characterisation of her as ‘an unusually sensitive and humanly distinguished person’ (1998, p. 275), and talking about her with Blaise Pasztor (whose mother was Elma’s cousin), I reached a clear conclusion that Elma was an outstanding person: wise, loyal, serious and -contrary to her self-image when writing to Sándor during their fated affair- a very reliable woman.

Ferenczi’s initial ‘countertransference-love’, rather than clouding his perception, must have connected him with Elma’s real, partially hidden deeper potential. Freud, on the other hand, may have erroneously

13.- Freud warned, ‘Special difficulties arise when the analyst and his new patient or their families are on terms of friendship or have social ties with one another’ (1913a, p. 125). Lynn and Vaillant (1998) prove, however, that he never took this warning seriously.

interpreted her defensive inhibition as signifying ‘a coarser material’, and may have mistaken her youthful turmoil for more profound psychopathology, which did not characterise her in adult life.

Whether Elma’s living alone (or with her sister) most of her life is to be attributed to an inherent difficulty with heterosexual intimacy, or to the post-traumatic effect of her ‘confusion of tongues’ with Ferenczi, and in another version with Freud as well, is a question that is difficult to answer.

In one respect Freud was surely right: she did suffer a deep wound.

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