

**THE PROBLEM OF HEREDITY: FERENCZI'S ORGANOLOGY AND
THE POLITICS OF BIOANALYSIS.**

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the First World War, Sándor Ferenczi drafted a first version of his theory of genitality, which was to be published in 1924 under the title *Versuch einer Genitaltheorie* (in English: *Thalassa*). Here, he theorizes not only genitality, but the genitals themselves. With the morphology of reproductive organs as a point of departure, *Thalassa* takes us through time and space, speculating that the physiological side of genitality must be understood as the belated abreaction of a series of phylogenetic catastrophes. This contribution offers a new frame for reading *Thalassa*, challenging the common perception that the phylogenetic speculation in Ferenczi and Freud sought to provide psychoanalysis with a natural scientific foundation. Instead, Ferenczi deconstructs precisely such foundational claims: he reads his sources from nineteenth-century popular biology against the grain and draws upon diverging psychoanalytic notions of hysteria to destabilize popular evolutionary narratives. Read against the backdrop of its time, Ferenczian 'bioanalysis' holds the potential for a political intervention against biologism and eugenic thought. His methodology breaks with the dream of a transparent language in what is today called the hard sciences.

Keywords: Ferenczi, Freud, phylogeny, Lamarck, Haeckel, Bölsche, trauma, hysteria, antisemitism, evolution, heredity

RESUMEN:

Al inicio de la Primera Guerra Mundial, Sándor Ferenczi redactó una primera versión de su teoría de la genitalidad, que sería publicada en 1924 bajo el título *Versuch einer Genitaltheorie* (en inglés: *Thalassa*). En este trabajo, teoriza no solo sobre la genitalidad, sino también sobre los propios genitales. Tomando como punto de partida la morfología de los órganos reproductivos, *Thalassa* nos lleva a través del tiempo y el espacio, especulando que el lado fisiológico de la genitalidad debe entenderse como la abreacción tardía de una serie de catástrofes filogenéticas. Esta contribución ofrece un nuevo marco para la interpretación de *Thalassa*, desafiando la percepción común de que la especulación filogenética en Ferenczi y Freud buscaba proporcionar al psicoanálisis una base científica natural. En cambio, Ferenczi deconstruye precisamente tales afirmaciones fundamentales: lee sus fuentes de la biología popular del siglo XIX de manera contrapuesta y se basa en divergentes nociones psicoanalíticas de la histeria para desestabilizar las narrativas evolutivas populares. Leído en el contexto de su tiempo, el 'bioanálisis' ferencziano tiene el potencial de intervenir políticamente contra el biologicismo y el pensamiento eugenésico. Su metodología rompe con el sueño de un lenguaje transparente en lo que hoy se llama las ciencias duras.

Palabras clave: Ferenczi, Freud, filogenia, Lamarck, Haeckel, Bölsche, trauma, histeria, antisemitismo, evolución, herencia.

There is no such thing as neutral speech about heredity. A mesh of differing scientific and political views about the history of evolutionary descent formed the background against which the bioanalytical project emerged, in all its eccentricity¹. In *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* (1924),² Sándor Ferenczi (1873–1933) applied the clinical profiles of traumatic neurosis and psychosis as his 'models' in rewriting the evolutionary history of human genitalia (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 393). In doing so, he invoked Jean Baptiste-Lamarck (1744–

1829) and two German writers popular at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, Ernst Haeckel and Wilhelm Bölsche, not simply as important influences, but so as to intervene in the discourses shaped by these authors. His intervention has hidden political implications.

This contribution examines the bioanalytical reading strategy that Ferenczi deployed in his theory of genitivity and his resulting perspectives on both –on organic life itself, and on what the biological sciences seek to teach us about it. Ferenczi’s work looks back, not only on the aquatic origins of terrestrial life, but also on the evolutionist enthusiasm of an epoch that by Ferenczi’s time had reached its end point; an epoch in which Darwinism and Lamarckism were not yet perceived as contradictory, but were alike points of reference for the monistic worldview of the zoologist and popular science writer Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), whose biogenetic law was central to the phylogenetic speculations of both Ferenczi and Freud. This legacy of popular biology in psychoanalytic theory is by now shrouded in an aura of embarrassment; Ernest Jones, Freud’s approved biographer, had a hard time with Freud’s Lamarckism. In the following, I set forth the hypothesis that Ferenczi’s bioanalysis itself, despite using it as a reference point, also responds to a certain uneasiness with the ‘biogenetic law’ of Haeckel. This same ambivalence applies to his use of the ‘erotic Monism’ (Kelly, 2011, p. 36) of the reformer and publicist Wilhelm Bölsche (1861–1939), who followed and built upon Haeckel’s work. While Ferenczi writes affirmatively of the ‘old master Haeckel’ (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 358), and of Bölsche as ‘Haeckel’s apostle’ (pp. 358–9), at the same time he severs his connection to a discourse on heredity that was all too consistent with Haeckel’s and Bölsche’s memberships in the German Society for Racial Hygiene.

It is indeed well known that Ferenczi’s genital theory conflicts with biodeterministic doctrines, such as August Weismann’s theory of the germplasm, which displaced Lamarckism in the established biology of the 1890s. The ‘Lamarckism’ of Ferenczi and Freud – they occasionally referred to their unfinished bioanalytic project as ‘the Lamarck Project’ – has been linked to the politically progressive potential inherent in the Lamarckian concept that acquired characteristics can be inherited by subsequent generations (Slavet 2009). Unlike deterministic theories of heredity, which take only the genetic nuclear material into account, Lamarckian approaches allow that the environment can change mutable individuals. Against this background it makes sense that Ferenczi repurposes Weismann’s concept of amphimixis against its creator’s intent: while Weismann used the term to refer exclusively to the fusion of genetic material in the cell nucleus, Ferenczi understood it as a form of transfer relationship between organs. In other words, through Ferenczi’s appropriation of Weismann’s notion, the *soma* gains in importance.

As we shall see, Ferenczi, however, reads not only Weismann but also Lamarck fundamentally against the grain. *Thalassa* needs to be read against the historical background of a time in which eugenicist ideas were becoming ever more socially acceptable, on both the left and right of the political spectrum, and among neo-Lamarckians as much as neo-Darwinians³. Whether the scenes developed through Ferenczi’s bioanalysis describe reality is beside the point; the discussion here is not about if organic life is actually pushed or pulled by something, whether the direction is forwards, backwards, upward, down into the ocean, or towards the inorganic. Ferenczi’s accomplishment, rather, lies in the radical defamiliarization of ideas of perfection and degeneration, of normality and pathology.⁴

HEAVY LEGACY

Ferenczi wrote the first draft of *Thalassa* in the winter of 1914–15, while stationed as the chief physician of a regiment of Hussars (light cavalry) in the Hungarian garrison town of Pápa, where he spent his leisure hours working on a translation into Hungarian of Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 317).⁵ Among various books on zoology, the soldiers’ library available to him at the fort offered the writings of Lamarck, Oken and Darwin, as well as works by the best-selling science authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Haeckel and Bölsche (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 317). It should come as no surprise that these books could be found in a provincial military library. Evolutionary monism in the mode of Haeckel enjoyed immense popularity well into the twentieth century, and contributed substantially to a biologization of the social sphere (Hagner & Sarasin, 2008, p. 52). Bölsche’s three-volume best-seller, *Love-*

life in Nature [Das Liebesleben in der Natur] (Bölsche, 1898–1903), among the most important sources for Ferenczi's *Thalassa*, reached a circulation of 80,000 copies in Germany by the year 1927 (Berentsen, 1986, p. 175). No literary salon or workers' library could be considered complete without a full set.

Among the academic biologists of the time, however, Haeckel's approach had long been thought obsolete. Ferenczi accordingly presents his theory of genitivity with the caveat that it is not based on the latest findings of the biological sciences (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 137). In 1923, writing the foreword to the finally completed text due for publication in 1924, he attributes the selection of his sources to the sparse offerings of the soldiers' library available to him in 1914. The caveat can be reformulated in positive terms: the constellation to be found in Pápa – Freud's sexual theory meets popular Darwinism in a soldiers' library – was still worthy of attention ten years later. The tensions of an epoch approaching its end are evident in the sequence of texts we may safely assume passed over Ferenczi's desk.

In the 1860s, Haeckel's interpretation of Darwin's works had achieved a breakthrough for evolutionary theory in the German-speaking world. Decisive to this success was Haeckel's combination of the Darwinian theory of descent with natural philosophy, and of the principle of natural selection with the romantic-idealistic theory of recapitulation (the idea that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny') (Kleeberg, 2005, p. 140). In Haeckel's telling, the supposed causal relationship between phylogenesis (the evolutionary development of a species) and ontogenesis (the development of an individual organism) became the pattern for understanding life itself – life, in Haeckel's words, as governed by a 'law of progress and perfection' (Haeckel, 1870, pp. 274f.). In his *Anthropogenie* (1868, 'Genesis of Man'), Haeckel declares that this biogenetic law is the starting point for understanding the evolution of human beings. His lifelong passion for primitive aquatic organisms was already illustrated in *Die Radiolarien* (1862, 'The Radiolaria'). In the aesthetically pleasing skeletal structures of his favoured protozoans, he believed he had discovered an inherent tendency towards completion. This was fully in a Lamarckian mode. In this way the Darwinian concept of the struggle for survival unfolded into its German-language reception, articulated by Haeckel with an anti-clerical pathos that merged with the *Kulturkampf* rhetoric of the early Bismarckian period.

Ever since Frank Sulloway's publication of *Freud: Biologist of the Mind*, it has become a commonplace that the biogenetic law formulated by Haeckel was decisive for the repetitive structure of the psychosexual stages in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* – the text that Ferenczi was translating into Hungarian while drafting *Thalassa*. The idea that an obsolete understanding of biology exercised a 'hypothetico-deductive influence' (Sulloway, 1979, p. 200) on the formation of psychoanalytic theory is, however, only one part of the story. It remains important to characterize this relation more specifically: despite the reference to phylogenesis, a term coined by Haeckel, the theory of bioanalysis, in Ferenczi as well as in Freud, is strikingly consistent in the way it parts company from the specific worldview with which Haeckel's theory of recapitulation was entangled⁶.

Back in the soldiers' library, while Ferenczi was drafting *Thalassa*, early 1915 brought the publication of Bölsche's book *Stirb und Werde!* ('Die and Become!') with its culminating meditation on the 'true progressive mutation visible to us,' 'the holiest assurance of our continued march toward the light' (Bölsche, 1915, p. 87). At the same time, a publication by Haeckel was incorporating the latest war dispatches into his evolutionary history, which started from unicellular organisms and ended with the necessity of Germany's victory in the war on the basis of eugenics (Haeckel, 1915). Ferenczi can hardly fail to have noticed that the life-long social reformer Bölsche, following in Haeckel's footsteps, had already in 1900, presented an explicit case for measures of 'racial hygiene': Bölsche had called on science to intervene in guiding natural selection with the 'prudent wisdom of the scholar', 'for the sake of raising ever healthier, stronger, happier generations' (Bölsche, 1898–1903, vol. 3, pp. 332–3). In the final analysis, the 'race' had to be brought 'forward' (p. 40). Bölsche's understanding of the social, like Haeckel's, is an unbroken extension of the biological, already 'prefigured in those mayflies' with the 'urge to mate' that we can observe. 'The social ideal, how it steams, bleeds, surges into the almost-awful light of our daily reality' (Bölsche, 1898–1903, vol. 1, p. 34).

When Bölsche's narrator takes the reader of *Love-Life of Nature* into the moist depths where procreation began and life arose, Ferenczi's work follows him. But the stylistic and structural differences are crucial.

Bölsche climbs the stepladder of development, observing the upward and ever-more ambitious movement of primitive life. He describes his retrospective vision of developmental history as a ‘reflective recollection’, a ‘gathering of one’s forces toward an unprecedented, even higher developmental push’ (Bölsche, 1898–1903, vol. 1, p. 333). Thirty years later (15 years after Ferenczi’s manuscript writing at Pápa), Bölsche would write that he saw the redemption for all that he had advocated in his work in National Socialist ideology (Bölsche, 1934, p. 4, quoted in Hagner & Sarasin, 2008, p. 61).

There is, however, no straight line that leads from Bölsche’s three-volume *Love-Life of Nature* to National Socialism. At the turn of the century, Bölsche was still a kind of socialist; his circle in Friedrichshagen by Berlin was mocked as a ‘Bolshevik paradise’ in the pages of the Munich-based satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* (Sarasin, 2011, p. 447). His sex-positive attitude had its liberatory aspects, at least in comparison with the dominant sexual morality of the Wilhelmine era (see Azzouni, 2009, pp. 21–2). Yet the eugenicist attitudes of his best-seller cannot be ignored, especially when read from the perspectives of Ferenczi and Freud. It displays a series of characteristics specific to the epoch, against which psychoanalysis from its very beginnings sought to distinguish itself.

ON METHODOLOGY: DO ORGANS NEED A THEORY?

As originally presented by Haeckel, the monistic worldview expresses a desire for totality that can be understood as a defensive reaction to the modern diversification of the sciences (Thomé, 2002). Adorno points explicitly to the monism of the late nineteenth century when he characterizes *Weltanschauung* (worldview, ideology, philosophy of life) as a realization of the infantile wish to gain hold of the whole world and its knowledge through a subjective act (Adorno, 1973, p. 92). This describes the morphology that Haeckel (invoking both Goethe and Darwin) advocated: it holds the promise of a revelation observed under the microscope; it depends on the idea that the structures of everything that lives are readable by visual observation (*Anschauung*).

When, by contrast, Ferenczi conceives of bioanalysis as a science that ‘translates psychoanalytic knowledge and methodology to the natural sciences’ (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 389), he assumes above all that these structures require interpretation. Bioanalysis cannot rely on observation alone. A central role in Ferenczi’s framework is played by the psychoanalytic concept of overdetermination, which becomes his bulky gift to the natural sciences: according to Ferenczi, one must assume that all physiological processes are overdetermined (Ferenczi, 2004c, pp. 352f., 390, 347). The epistemological implications of this intervention in physiology are far reaching.⁷ They are at odds with positivism, but also with the speculative-intuitive transgression fantasies that characterize the works of Bölsche. Ferenczi distances himself thoroughly from the monistic notion of the soul as the uninterrupted extension of the biological substrate, but in a manner that has little to do with Cartesian duality. This becomes obvious in a lecture Ferenczi later delivered, ‘Freud’s Influence on Medicine’ (‘Freuds Einfluss auf die Medizin’, Ferenczi, 2004a, vol. 2, pp. 290–302). Therein Ferenczi stressed that the psychoanalytic method seeks to avoid both the naive extreme of body–soul dualism and the error of materialist monism with its placement of ‘the psychic and the physical’ into a ‘premature unity’. This, he concludes, is ‘not possible to accomplish completely, either now or in the near future, and perhaps never’ (p. 294). The strategic dualism of psychoanalysis accepts the methodological consequences of this conclusion: there is no such thing as a neutral and transparent language about organic matter.

Alongside the concept of overdetermination, which demands that priority be given to language and to the interpretative approach, the decisive innovation of the bioanalytic approach lies in its programmatic reversal of perspective. Ferenczi’s writing reveals this as a process of working through the language, down to the smallest formulations. ‘The higher we rise on the evolutionary ladder,’ he begins, only to reverse perspective in the same sentence, ‘by which we mean according to our own conception: the more complicated the fates on which the history of a species may look back upon’ (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 363). If this describes the method, then Ferenczi’s thesis of a thalassal regression operates on the level of necessary speculations about things that elude empirical observation.

Beyond their various differences there exists a bioanalytic narrative that unites Ferenczi and Freud. In relation to the dominant narrative of completion it serves as a counter-narrative, revolving around the hypothesis of a backward-pointing impulse that was triggered by a traumatic break. In keeping with the logic of the counter-cathexis, the backward-pointing impulse expresses itself in the form of a progression. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud observes: ‘The processes undertaken in the formation of a neurotic phobia, which is nothing more than the attempt to flee from the satisfaction of a drive, give us the model for the origin of his supposed “drive to perfection”’ (Freud, 1989b, pp. 251–2). Ferenczi’s *Thalassa* states similarly that the ‘the same force which impels to regression operates, when it is prevented therefrom by a censorship, in a progressive sense –in the sense, that is, of adaptation and constructiveness’ (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 395). His hypothetically assumed thalassal regression points backward, and this direction defines Ferenczi’s own point of view, sentence for sentence. It dispenses with the image, going back to Aristotle, of an evolutionary stepladder, and with it also the related notion of an inherent tendency in life to perfect itself, with all its political virulence.

According to Ferenczi, forms of life have only ever been forced to change because of an ‘external stimulation, an emergency or a catastrophe’ (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 394). It is easy to overlook the difference to the Lamarckian environmental paradigm: Lamarck also assumes that negative conditions are the driving force of change. Whereas Lamarck’s organisms emerge strengthened from each crisis, bioanalysis, quite in contrast, operates so as to destabilize radically the notion that this increased strength is separable from pathological change. The stimuli that Ferenczi is concerned with are linked to his later, often polemically expressed thesis, that it is ‘always traumatic, shocking, real upheavals and conflicts with the environment’ that give impetus to neurotic disorders (Ferenczi, 2004b, vol. 2, p. 268).

Ferenczi’s thesis of the overdetermination of tissue and tissue elements is not only an epistemological position. It also establishes the symptomatic status of the object of examination within the bioanalytic narrative. When Ferenczi announces that he will interpret the ‘individual processes of the sexual act’ as if they were ‘neurotic symptoms’ (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 342), their characterization as symptoms arises from substantive, political circumstances. In the following, therefore, I consider his ‘organology’ in relation to psychoanalytic notions of hysteria, and pose the question of what exactly makes such a reading relevant.

HEROIC ORGANS, HYSTERICAL ORGANS

Ferenczi remarked that ‘when Lamarck, to take one example, makes the use or disuse of an organ responsible for its progression or regression, he fails to see that he has avoided the actual problem’ (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 396). Lamarck posits that organs develop because of a fluid that flows into a body part when it is stimulated or activated. Ferenczi is not satisfied with this explanation. He argues with the analogy that the use of a machine does not make for a stronger machine (p. 396) and posits instead that the change is driven by the reversal of a backward-looking desire, which was, in turn, triggered by an earlier disturbance. ‘The observations that we made of hysteria and pathoneuroses showed us how ... an overpowering counter-cathexis targets the disturbed part of the body’ (p. 396). Motives, wishes and needs are central to Lamarckism. When Ferenczi’s Lamarckism seems to climax with the question of ‘what motives may have persuaded amphibians and reptiles to acquire a penis’ (p. 364), it should be emphasized that he explicitly derives the ‘psychic power of the desire’ from the psychoanalytic ‘observation of hysteria’ (p. 396). The wishes/desires (*Wunsch*) that interest Ferenczi can hardly be reconciled with the Lamarckian concept of *besoin* (need). They find expression only in distorted form, as physical symptoms. While Lamarck’s view of the development of organs can be analogized to the process of erection resulting from penile stimulation (Schuller, 2018, p. 224), Ferenczi instead focuses on the referential, representational and expressive qualities of organs, which he understands in terms of a trauma theory of hysteria. In a displaced manner, the organs relay information about catastrophes that evade empirical observation.

Ferenczi’s organology is more densely packed with references to the divergent psychoanalytic theories of hysteria than may at first appear.⁸ This is related to how the phylogenetic speculations of Freud and Ferenczi to no small extent serve as a field, removed from public view, within which they could pursue a vexatious

and unsolved question: how to integrate the trauma model with the drive model (Grubrich-Simitis, 2007, p. 649). This parallels a consistent tendency in Ferenczi's work with traumatized patients. On the one hand, his genital theory refers back to the early trauma theory of hysteria. On the other hand, for all his emphasis on catastrophes, he also draws on 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (1905), wherein Freud articulated the theory of wish fulfilment using the case of Dora, a patient diagnosed with hysteria. In this telling, somatic processes are 'available as a means of expression' for repressed wishes (Freud, 1989a, p. 116). A symptom signifies the 'action – a realization of a fantasy with sexual content' and is fundamentally overdetermined, although the different meanings of a symptom are not necessarily 'consistent with one another' (pp. 127, 122).

Freud elaborates the structure of the hysterical symptom using at least six determinations of the nervous cough suffered by the patient Dora. Her cough (1) imitates sympathy with her father, while at the same time (2) expressing a self-accusation, and (3) representing her relationship with Herr K. as well as (4) her regret at his absence; (5) her cough further expresses the wish that she were a better woman for him, while also (6) portraying sexual intercourse with her own father, in identification with his mistress, Frau K. (p. 152). Now of course there is no talk of coughing penises in Ferenczi's work, although he does speak of 'genital stuttering' (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 324) when describing disorders of ejaculation. Ferenczi does, however, draw an analogy between the uninhibited, healthy functioning of the male genital organ and a hysterical symptom, in a discussion of various forms of distortion: condensation, displacement and reversal into the opposite (p. 392).

For Ferenczi, an organ is a symptom, and a symptom in turn (as already formulated by Freud) is an 'old skin filled with new wine' (Freud, 1989a, p. 129). When Ferenczi seeks to decode the determinations of the male member, he follows the pattern Freud established for the coughing hysteric: the penis is (1) the 'symbol of the original drilling tool of evolutionary history, the tooth' (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 337), and the emergence of the glans (2) symbolizes birth. During coitus the penis physically acts out (3) the anal desire to remain, in conflict against the (4) urethral will to give, while erection and ejaculation express (5) 'the desire to throw away the over-taut organ (pp. 332, 343). Above all, the penis is presented as (6) a 'fish set down on land', enacting 'the struggles of that primal creature among its ancestors which suffered the great catastrophe of the drying up of the sea'

(pp. 359, 361). If Ferenczi at this point substitutes the 'penis signification of the fish' with the 'fish signification of the penis' (p. 361), it is programmatic of his intent. As the master signifier of organs, the penis is the paradigm of the uncanny, it stages a hysterical theatre, it is out of its mind, its status is artificial, it signifies everything other than itself. Ferenczi describes this organ, shaken by its afflictions, as a doppelganger for the ego (p. 331), as the 'container' in which sexual arousals are stacked, as the 'executive manager' that handles the business of disposing sexual tension on behalf of the entire organism (p. 331).

While Lamarck's conception of the development of all organs bears a structural comparison to an erection caused by stimulation, Ferenczi argues that 'we should thus have in the hysterical and pathoneurotic type of reaction a prototype of the energy displacements that take place in the accomplishing of every adaptation and development' (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 397). All this he relates above all – he is not writing a theory of genitality for nothing – to the penis. He quotes affirmatively

Bölsche's exclamation about the historicity of the human male reproductive organ: 'Certainly, there lies a past in this member. It is a Melusinian member', that is, a hybrid of human and fish. 'Here man looks down at the fish, from which in distant purple days he descended' (Bölsche, 1898–1903, vol. 2, p. 265).⁹ Bölsche's next sentence, however, is incompatible with bioanalysis, and Ferenczi leaves it out: 'It also follows along the entire path, up to the crown of humanity' (Bölsche, 1898–1903, vol. 2, p. 265).

While Ferenczi's genital theory has the penis pointing backwards, in Bölsche the 'love member' (Bölsche, 1898–1903, vol. 1, p. viii) of pre-human ancestors is always looking to the future, from the crocodile forward (p. viii). In a school of herring, Bölsche envisions the prefiguration of the male human's moment of ejaculation. He anthropomorphizes the fish-milk as 'dense clouds of male seminal fluid, so immense that the ocean turns cloudy, that the whole silver island of voluptuously moving fish bathe in it,

swim in it' (p. 19). Beaten by the 'convulsions' and 'wild outpourings' of procreation, the ocean 'swells and ferments' (p. 20). In Bölsche, animalistic rutting creates a long continuity that should be accessible to subjective feeling, although it stretches out over the 'aeons of time' (p. 6). The biogenetic basic law builds an affective and orgiastic union with all non-human animal species. Because as an embryo every human being recapitulated existence as a fish in his or her mother's womb, we all gain a capacity to empathize with a fish orgy, at least in principle. Over the course of three volumes, Bölsche entices his reader – 'you too', 'remember, remember' (vol. 1, pp. 60, 7ff.) – with the promise of direct participation in the potency of the animalistic and natural. And yet his incantation of our intimate connection to the copulating line of our ancestors cannot evade the impression of a desperate attempt to summon a measure of virility into the age of alienation and degeneration.

Bölsche's fantasies of potency make plain the libidinous and ideological dimensions of an entire discourse: evolution, growth, heredity, procreation, and, in the biogenetic extension, scientific, technological and cultural progress. Bölsche turns the 'world-power of love' (Bölsche, 1898–1903, vol. 1, p. 73) into the engine of developmental-biogenetic progress, imagining with Haeckel its direct extension into science and technology. The 'rhythmotropism' (vol. 3, pp. 26ff.) that keeps all life-forms in a harmony of copulatory movements pumps forward like a steam engine.

And then bioanalysis reaches for the emergency break. This is clear already in the writing style. Eschewing Bölsche's animated murmur, Ferenczi describes coitus in sentences that wonder what possibly could be the 'meaning of this periodically repeated process with its curious uniformity' (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 350). On top of that, he has placed hysteria at the centre of the developmental process, breaking substantively with progressive optimism, a fundamental feature of Bölsche's text, which Ferenczi, at a first glance, seems to unequivocally celebrate. A deeper understanding of the bioanalytic intervention requires us to examine the obsessive preoccupation of the early twentieth century with alienation, deracination and degeneration. At the time that *Thalassa* was written, there was broad consensus that Jews were especially vulnerable to neurasthenia, neuroses and of course hysteria. This was partly attributed to their living conditions, and partly to a hereditary susceptibility to the sickening evils of modernity.¹⁰ Sander Gilman has done the most work in showing how the psychiatric discourse is very closely connected the clinical profile of (male) hysteria with Judaism (Gilman, 1993, pp. 93–119). The connection of hysteria to Judaism within French thought on heredity was decisive in causing Freud to distance himself from Charcot (Roith, 2008, pp. 149–168). Ferenczi builds his narrative of evolution on this element commonly understood to endanger development of any kind, seen as a degeneration that predestines a line to extinction by natural means, or that requires eugenicist biopolitical interventions so that it may be minimized, or even eliminated.

There is truth in the idea that the socially progressive movements of the early twentieth century often associated Lamarckism with the hope of achieving biological improvement through assimilation (Slavet, 2009). By improving social conditions, it was believed, group disadvantages and transgenerational effects of oppression that had become hereditary could be reversed. However, this strategy plays no role in bioanalysis, which is as remote as could be from any kind of biopolitical logic of optimization.¹¹ Bioanalysis adopts a different strategy. With his genital theory, Ferenczi declares that which the anti-Semitic norm has ascribed to Jewry to actually be the structural law of organic life itself. The dynamic of hysterical conversion becomes the uncanny cause of organic development.

At first glance, Ferenczi's genital theory evokes oceans and intrauterine life, just like Bölsche's *Love-Life*. Viewed more precisely, however, bioanalysis precludes the notion of a pristine origin, whether as the starting point towards perfection or towards degeneration. This is what separates Ferenczi's approach not only from Haeckel und Bölsche, but also from the understanding of the psychosomatic found among his contemporaries, Felix Deutsch and Franz Alexander (Wilson, 2015, p. 57). The idea of a physicality freed from cathexis, as might be hoped for in purification treatments, also plays no role in Ferenczi's concept of neo-catharsis (Wilson, 2015, p. 57). The idea of an uncontaminated origin has no place whatsoever in Ferenczi's theory, except as a neurotic fantasy.¹² Ferenczi, however, took fantasies very seriously.

THE POLITICS OF BIOANALYSIS

Ferenczi's treatment of patients paralleled his thinking about organs. What most distinguished him from Freud was an extraordinary concern for the forms of post-traumatic survival. Not long before his death, in his *Clinical Diary of 1932*¹³ he drafted a metapsychology of splitting and the psychic life of fragments, always making use of both anatomical analogies and the hallucinations of patients (Soreanu, 2018). The comparison of the diary to the genital theory drafted some 18 years earlier lends a new perspective on the latter. *Thalassa* seems as though it was written in a state of astonishment that life was able to go on at all, that death did not always come in short order. Ferenczi shows a striking sensitivity to the forms of post-traumatic survival; this sensitivity also encompasses everything that is normally described as development and progress. Nevertheless Ferenczi celebrates the pleasure that still arises, despite and because of the pain.

Ferenczi's conception of heredity in his bioanalysis goes far beyond the field of biology. 'What we call heredity is perhaps, therefore, only the displacing upon posterity of the bulk of traumatically unpleasurable experiences in question' (Ferenczi, 2004c, p. 375). Nicolas Abraham's enthusiasm for *Thalassa*¹⁴ is doubtless due to how Ferenczi's bioanalysis at the very least provides a major prefiguration of later psychoanalytic theories of transgenerational transmission of trauma. It centres on forms of broken transmission over the generations. On the one side, the bioanalytic intervention in discourses of heredity follows the pattern set in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, wherein the 'Rat-Man' serves as a model case for the process of civilization. On the other, it prefigures a theory of transgenerational transmission that defamiliarizes the entire notion of evolutionary-biological inheritance, in much the same way as Freud treats the notions of tradition, custom and cultural inheritance in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Freud, who insisted on both his Judaism and his smoking habit, insisted on his Lamarckism too, not, however, as a belief in the transmission of achievements and abilities, but as a displacement upon posterity of traumatically unpleasurable experience.

That Ferenczi's genital theory interprets the function of the male member according to the clinical profile of hysteria accords with his fundamental tendency to read everything that is traditionally conceived of as developmentally 'high' as actually being the products of post-traumatic neo-formations. Analogous clues can be found in two of his later coinages, 'traumatic progression' and 'progressive flight' (Ferenczi, 2013, p. 268). Ferenczi also models intelligence as a phenomenon of traumatic precociousness, arising in the mode of escape and out of the logic of counter-cathexis, with a simultaneous regression of the emotional sphere into embryonic, pre-human and creature-like qualities: the subject 'reduced to the level of a barely intelligent, frightened animal' (p. 89). When in the *Clinical Diary* Ferenczi finally describes masculinity itself as a traumatic symptom, (p. 251) his approach differs, however, from that of the Genital Theory. In place of the comical, there is a sharpened attention towards the psychic consequences of trauma. The diary, written in the year 1932, is a book of mourning.

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Notas al final

- 1.- Original publication in German as Jenny Willner, 'Das Problem mit dem Erbe. Ferenczis Organologie und die Politik der Bioanalyse', *RISS, Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 94 (2021): 81–97. Translated into English by Nicholas Evangelos Levis, MPhil History, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2022. Citations refer to the German original; quotations rendered in English by present translator. English titles of several German-language works are given for reference.
- 2.- First published in English in 1938, and most recently as *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* (Ferenczi, 2018). The German original title is *Versuch einer Genitaltheorie* (Ferenczi, 2004c).
- 3.- On these ambivalences, see Rheinberger & Müller-Wille (2009, pp. 135–6); Pick (1993, p. 101).
- 4.- This is rightly understood as a patho-analysis, proceeding from the anthropological relevance of pathology; see Van Haute & Geyskens (2012, p. 27).
- 5.- On the scene in Pápa, see Berz (2012, p. 20)
- 6.- On Freud in this regard, see Willner (2020).
- 7.- For an authoritative look at Ferenczi's epistemology, see Soreanu (2019, pp. 95–106).
- 8.- Ferenczi's own works on hysteria, in part dating from his practice before he took up psychoanalysis, confirm that the trend started early. The hysteria profile was central to his two lectures on war trauma, delivered in 1916 and 1918. His work on the subject culminates in several publications in the year 1919. Of particular importance for *Thalassa* is *Hysterische Materialisationsphänomene* (1919)
- 9.- Compare to Ferenczi (2004c, pp. 358–9).
- 10.- Gilman (1993, p. 235). Gilman highlights two writings as having been especially influential in making the connection between hysteria and Judaism, Emil Kraepelin's *Zur Entartungsfrage* (1908) and the study published by Dr Marezki in 1918 in Berlin, *Statistik über die Gesundheitsverhältnisse der Juden* ('Statistics on the Health Conditions of the Jews').
- 11.- On the problematics of neo-Lamarckism, see Schuller (2018, pp. 32–4).
- 12.- 'The "birth trauma" reduces in my analyses to a neurotic fantasy', Ferenczi wrote in 1925, assuming distance from Rank. (Ferenczi & Jones, 2008, p. 58; see also pp. 54–5).
- 13.- The *Clinical Diary* was first published in German in 1988 as *Ohne Sympathie keine Heilung: das klinische Tagebuch von 1932*, ed. Judith Dupont, Berlin: S. Fischer; and in English as *The Clinical Diary of Sándor Ferenczi*, ed. J. Dupont, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. References refer to the most recent German edition *Klinisches Tagebuch* (Ferenczi, 2013).
- 14.- Regarding Ferenczi's influence on Abraham, see Goodwin (2020).