

FREUD, FERENCZI, AND ROSMERSHOLM: INCESTUOUS TRIANGLES AND ANALYTIC THIRDS^(*).

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SUMMARY

Utilizing a field theory of unconscious communication, and in particular the concept of the analytic third, this paper situates Freud's interpretation of Ibsen's 1886 Rosmersholm, presented in the section of his essay "Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work" (1916) entitled "Those Wrecked by Success," in the context of his relationship with Ferenczi. Both in his interpretation of *Rosmersholm* and in his earlier papers on the psychology of love, it is argued, Freud may be seen to commenting both on Ferenczi's incestuous love triangle with Gizella and Elma Pálos and on his equally incestuous triangle with Martha and Minna Bernays. In a postscript, the challenge offered by Groddeck to Freud's oedipal reading of Rosmersholm is assessed.

KEY WORDS: history of psychoanalysis; unconscious communication; Ibsen; Groddeck; Minna Bernays.

RESUMEN

Utilizando una teoría de campo de la comunicación inconsciente, y en particular el concepto del tercero analítico, este artículo sitúa la interpretación de Freud de la Casa de Rosmer o El legado de los Rosmer (Rosmersholm) de Ibsen de 1886, presentado en la sección de su ensayo "Algunos tipos de carácter encontrados con el trabajo psicoanalítico" (1916).) titulado "Los que fracasan cuando triunfa", en el contexto de su relación con Ferenczi. Tanto en su interpretación de *Rosmersholm* como en sus trabajos anteriores sobre la psicología del amor, tal como se argumenta, se puede ver a Freud comentando tanto sobre el triángulo amoroso incestuoso de Ferenczi con Gizella y Elma Pálos como sobre su triángulo igualmente incestuoso con Martha y Minna Bernays. En una posdata, se evalúa el desafío que Groddeck ofrece a la lectura edípica de Rosmersholm que hace Freud.

PALABRAS CLAVE: historia del psicoanálisis; comunicación inconsciente; Ibsen; Groddeck; Minna Bernays.

"My thoughts flow into the immeasurable."
Ferenczi, "The Dream of the Occlusive Pessary" (1915a, p. 310)

Ever since Freud's belated acknowledgment in the preface to the second edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1909, that his book had a "further subjective significance" and formed a "portion of my own self-analysis" (1900, p. xxvi), the notion that analytic writings inevitably possess a latent autobiographical dimension, which resonates in complex counterpoint with their manifest theoretical argument, can scarcely be deemed to be controversial.

In the present paper, I would like to extend this approach to reading analytic texts in a way that is in keeping with a perspective that has come to be increasingly influential in clinical practice. As so often, the inception of what seems to be most modern in psychoanalysis can be found in the work of Ferenczi, who,

in 1915, introduced the concept of “*Dialogues of the Unconscious*”, in which “the unconscious of two people completely understands themselves and each other, without the remotest conception of this on the part of the consciousness of either” (1915b, p. 109). This evocative notion itself gains an intersubjective -or interpsychic- meaning when it is used again by Ferenczi in his December 25, 1917 letter to Freud, in which Ferenczi explains how he arrived at a “correct understanding” of a story he had just told his lover, Gizella Pálos, about a female patient who had committed suicide through a “dialogue of the unconscious” that “began with Frau G.’s reaction to my depression with a definite ill feeling” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1914–1919, p. 254). In the contemporary idiom, this *field theory* of unconscious communication is closely associated with what has come to be known as the “analytic third,” defined by Thomas Ogden (1995) as “a third subject created by the unconscious interplay of analyst and analysand” (p. 697), which co-constructed reality in turn generates the identities of both members of the evolving dyad. Another valuable iteration of this theme is what Samuel Gerson (2004) has termed a “*relational unconscious*”, which arises from the “reciprocal and mutual influence of unconscious minds upon one another”, and -in a formulation with special pertinence to the lifelong struggle between Freud and Ferenczi- carries with it the corollary that “the uniqueness of each relationship is in large part due to its singular mix of the permitted and the prohibited, a mix that is formed from, yet transcends, the individual conscious and unconscious elements of each partner” (p. 71).

My thesis, in brief, is that the interpretation of Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm* (1886) set forth by Freud in “Those Wrecked by Success,” a section of his paper “Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work” -published in 1916, between Ferenczi’s public and private uses of the phrase “dialogue(s) of the unconscious”- allows us to read not only Ibsen’s tragedy, as filtered through Freud’s lens, but also Freud’s earlier papers on the psychology of love as “analytic thirds” arising out of the force field activated by the interplay between Ferenczi’s incestuous love triangle involving Gizella Pálos and her daughter Elma, in which Freud was himself deeply implicated, and Freud’s own clandestine but equally incestuous love triangle with his wife Martha and her younger sister Minna Bernays.

By way of background, it is noteworthy that Ferenczi as well as Freud displayed a keen interest in Ibsen from the beginning of their relationship, as evidenced by Ferenczi’s letter of July 17, 1908, in which he informs Freud, “My next project will be a commentary on Ibsen’s works in light of their psychology,” expressly naming *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), and continues: “Before I became acquainted with your work I never fully understood Ibsen” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1908–1914, p. 16). Two years later, on February 16, 1910, Ferenczi compared one of his patients with “the liar-hero Peer Gynt” who wishes “to appear great in the eyes of his mother” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1908–1914, p. 141), to which Freud responded encouragingly, “Your book on Ibsen should come into being one day” (*ibid.*, p. 146). Ferenczi never completed his projected book on Ibsen, though he did develop his interpretation of *The Lady from the Sea* in his paper “Suggestion and Psychoanalysis,” written in 1912, a year that was climactic not only in Ferenczi’s life but also for Freud’s relationship to Jung, and hence for the psychoanalytic movement as a whole.¹

Although Ferenczi did not take Elma Pálos into analysis until July 1911, with the situation coming to a head by the end of that year, he had been sexually involved with her mother, the still-married Gizella, a woman 8 years his senior, since 1900, 8 years prior to his first meeting with Freud.² Thus, even before Ferenczi became enmeshed in his mother-daughter triangle, his love life did not lack interest from a psychoanalytic standpoint. So when, in two letters of April 1910, Freud informed Ferenczi that he intended to write on the “maternal etiology” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1908–1914, pp. 156, 161) in what became the first of his contributions to the psychology of love, “A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men” (Freud, 1910), where he employed the term “Oedipus complex” for the first time, it is safe to infer not only that Ferenczi would have recognized himself in Freud’s portrait but also that he had in some measure served as its model in real life.

By the time of Freud’s second paper on love, “The Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love” (1912), Ferenczi was a prisoner of his fateful triangle, and there is ample evidence that he acknowledged the applicability of Freud’s schema to his own case. In this paper, Freud is concerned to explain the condition of “psychical impotence” (p. 179), which he attributes to the failure of the male to

direct both “*the affectionate and the sensual current*” (p. 180) of love toward a single object. Strikingly, Freud extends the concept of impotence to include “psychanaesthetic” men, that is, those who “never fail in the act but who carry it out without getting any particular pleasure from it” with their primary partners – “a state of affairs,” Freud pointedly adds, “that is more common than one would think” (pp. 184–185).

Not only did Ferenczi devote one of his earliest psychoanalytic papers to “The Analytic Interpretation and Treatment of Psychosexual Impotence” (1908), but once Freud introduced his concepts of the “maternal etiology” and the split between the affectionate and the sensual currents, Ferenczi repeatedly echoed them both in his private correspondence and in his published writings. In a letter to Freud on January 17, 1916, for instance, Ferenczi reports having had a dream about a cigarette case made of gold that was “not quite pure,” which he interprets as a symbol of women who are “*impure*, in contrast to the respectable Frau G.” Ferenczi elaborates: “Elma is the representative of this series; hence the great libido (probably also potency) with respect to her. Frau G., on the other hand, is the clear, pure one -whom one ... is not permitted to touch, like the mother- if one doesn’t want to be castrated” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1914–1919, pp. 103–104). Similarly, in a letter on October 17, 1916, Ferenczi alludes to “the contrast between tenderness and sensuality, which you have unmasked as a symptom of mother fixation” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1914–1919, p. 145)³

But if Freud’s papers on love were in part inspired by Ferenczi, and received by him as analytic communications, it cannot be denied that they also harbor a covert dimension of “further subjective significance” for Freud himself. As early as 1893, Freud confided to Fliess that he and Martha were “living in abstinence” (Freud and Fliess, 1887–1904, p. 54); and though he attributed this renunciation to an intention to spare his wife yet another pregnancy, by 1897 he wrote resignedly that “sexual excitement, too, is no longer of use for someone like me” (p. 276). Freud, therefore, no longer experienced pleasure in intercourse with his wife, and by his own definition belonged to the category of “‘psychanaesthetic’ men,” a diagnosis confirmed by his confession to Emma Jung in 1911 that his marriage “had long been ‘amortized’” (Freud and Jung, 1906–1914, p. 456). Not surprisingly, Freud traces “psychical impotence” to “an intense incestuous fixation in childhood,” though it may give the reader pause when he goes on to declare that “anyone who is to be free and happy in love must have surmounted his respect for women and have come to terms with the idea of incest with his mother or sister” (1912, p. 186). Despite the prevalence of sibling incest as a theme in Romantic literature, it is not immediately obvious why Freud should have included the sister as well as the mother among the objects of childhood fixation. It must suffice to say that I have elsewhere (Rudnytsky, 2012) sought to trace the infantile origins of Freud’s affair with his sister-in-law, Minna Bernays, to his sexual abuse by his nanny, which in turn led him to perpetrate acts of sexual aggression against both his sister Anna and his half-niece Pauline. Many years ago, moreover, this sentence in “Debasement” caught the attention of Peter Swales (1982), who took it as the epigraph to his landmark paper in which he propounded his thesis that Freud in the summer of 1900 entered into a love affair with Minna, which likely led to her undergoing an abortion for the resulting pregnancy.

To my knowledge, the first and, to date, only scholar to have discerned a connection between Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm* and Freud’s personal circumstances is Samuel Rosenberg in his exuberant book of psychobiographical sleuthing, *Why Freud Fainted* (1978). Writing in the pre-Swales era, Rosenberg approvingly quotes the late Paul Roazen, who postulated that “Freud seemed to have a split in his love life, his sexuality remaining with Martha, and his spiritual involvement shifting to Minna” (qtd. p. 151). Although Roazen has gotten it backwards, since it was Minna who became the object of Freud’s sexual passion, while his relationship with Martha came to betoken the “spiritual,” Roazen does bring out how Freud’s account of the tendency in the male to polarize the affectionate and erotic currents of desire applies to himself no less than to Ferenczi. Recording his thoughts upon visiting Berggasse 19 in Vienna, Rosenberg muses that Freud seems “to have restaged the basic situation of Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm*, or Rosmer’s home -without the tragic ending- right here in this house... with his sister-in-law, Miss Minna Bernays,” who, in 1896, 10 years after the death of her fiancé, Ignaz Schönberg, “moved in with the Freuds to be, like [Ibsen’s heroine] ‘Rebecca West’⁴ ... a ‘spiritual’ companion to Freud, displacing her sister” (p. 149; initial ellipses in original).

Rosenberg (1978) does not pursue this comparison in detail, though he does quote Ernest Jones’s

castigation of “the malicious and entirely untrue legend that [Minna] displaced [Freud’s] wife in his affections,” and pertinently notes that “the same ‘malicious and entirely untrue legend’ afflicted Rosmer and Rebecca West” (p. 150). Indeed, in Ibsen’s play, the firebrand journalist Peder Mortensgaard reports having received a letter from Rosmer’s deceased wife in which she protested that “if I should come to hear of anything sinful going on at Rosmersholm, I mustn’t believe anything of that kind,” and “she doesn’t know of any sinful relationship at Rosmersholm” (Ibsen, 1886, pp. 71–72).

Once one embarks on reading Ibsen’s tragedy as an allegory of the FreudMartha-Minna triangle, one can readily extend the parallels further than Rosenberg was able to take them. It is, for instance, easy to imagine Freud saying to Minna, as Rosmer did to Rebekka West, “I keep struggling with the question whether we two weren’t deceiving ourselves all the time, when we called our relation friendship” (1886, p. 87), or to apply to Martha Freud what Rosmer says of his late wife Beate, “She must have noticed how happy I began to feel from the time you came here” (p. 75). Certainly, in light of the notorious Swiss hotel log in which Freud in 1898 registered with Minna Bernays as his wife (Maciejewski, 2006), it does not require any great stretch of the imagination to impute to Freud Rosmer’s words: “I could imagine that sooner or later our fine, clear relationship would be misinterpreted and suspected Oh yes, Rebekka, I’d good enough grounds for it, when I so jealously concealed our relationship. It was a dangerous secret” (p. 74). And if one accepts Swales’s reconstruction that Minna had to be dispatched to the health resort of Meran to undergo an abortion following the consummation of her affair with Freud, it cannot be inconsequential that Rebekka appears to have driven Beate to suicide by leading her to believe, in the words of Rosmer’s brother-in-law Headmaster Kroll, “that it was necessary -for your sake and Rosmer’s, that you should go away somewhere else- as soon as possible” (p. 99), unmistakably for the purpose of terminating a pregnancy.

Freud’s interpretation of *Rosmersholm* in “Character-Types” is one of his most brilliant and rhetorically successful pieces of literary criticism. He mounts a powerful case in support of his thesis that “the enigma of Rebekka’s behavior is susceptible of only one solution” (1916a, p. 328), to wit, that Rebekka does not realize that Dr. West, whom she had believed to be her foster father and with whom she had had a love affair prior to her arrival at Rosmersholm, was in reality her biological father until she is informed of this circumstance by Headmaster Kroll, although Kroll for his part is unaware of her affair with Dr. West. According to Freud, it is the guilt stemming from her fulfillment of the forbidden wishes of the Oedipus complex, even before she knows consciously that Dr. West is her father, that both impels Rebekka to repeat her actions at Rosmersholm by “getting rid of the wife and mother, so that she might take her place with the husband and father” (p. 330), but then also causes her to refuse Rosmer’s proposal of marriage when she has the prize of victory within her grasp, before leading her and Rosmer to end the play in a double suicide in which they at once achieve their tabooed union and inflict upon themselves the condign punishment for their transgressions.⁵

In contrast to *Hamlet*, where Freud’s boast that the underlying conflict “is so effectively concealed that it was left to me to unearth it” (1906, p. 310) has been roundly decried by literary scholars as presumptuous, when it comes to *Rosmersholm* it seems far more plausible that there should be “only one solution” to the mystery of Rebekka West’s motivations, in which case Freud’s oedipal interpretation may be said to have uncovered the hidden design of Ibsen’s play.⁶ That Freud appears to have hit the mark with Ibsen’s tragedy where he missed it with Shakespeare’s is due above all to their sharing the same late 19th-century culture, not to mention that the Norwegian, despite being the greatest modern dramatist, is still a far cry from Shakespeare. Shortly before the famous passage in which he couples *Oedipus the King and Hamlet*, in chapter 5 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud reveals his own nostalgia for patriarchy when he remarks, “In our society today fathers are apt to cling desperately to what is left of a now sadly antiquated *potestas patris familias*; and an author who, like Ibsen, brings the immemorial struggle between fathers and sons into prominence in his writings may be certain of producing his effect” (p. 257).

If one takes a bird’s eye view, it is not difficult to see Johannes Rosmer, the former pastor torn between his radical aspirations for free thought and free love, on the one hand, and his enslavement by the chains of duty and tradition, on the other, as a surrogate for Freud, whose inner bohemian expressed itself in his illicit love

for Minna, while his outward façade of bourgeois respectability was maintained by his marriage to Martha. Freud ends “Those Wrecked by Success” by remarking how frequently “a girl who enters a household as servant, companion, or governess will consciously or unconsciously weave a daydream, which derives from the Oedipus complex, of the mistress of the house disappearing and the master taking the newcomer as his wife in her place,” calling *Rosmersholm* “the greatest work of art of the class that treats of this common fantasy in girls” (1916a, b, pp. 330–331). In an editorial footnote, James Strachey directs the reader to the case of Miss Lucy R. in *Studies on Hysteria*, the governess to whom Freud confidently imparted the interpretation that “really you are in love with your employer, the Director, though perhaps without being aware of it yourself, and that you have a secret hope of taking their mother’s place in actual fact” (Breuer and Freud, 1895, p. 117). But Strachey could just as easily have adduced Fräulein Elisabeth von R., pining with love with her brother-in-law, who converted into somatic symptoms the repressed thought that shot through her mind upon learning that her beloved sister had died, “Now he is free again and I can be his wife” (pp. 156–157). If Freud finds a double in Rosmer, then surely Minna Bernays, at once companion, governess, and sister-in-law, constitutes the prototype of those young women whose “common fantasy” receives its consummate artistic expression in *Rosmersholm*⁷.

And what of Ferenczi? As I have noted, it appears that Rebekka induced Beate to plunge to her death in the mill-race by leading her to believe that she, the fertile one, needed to disappear temporarily in order to abort the child she had conceived with Rosmer; she had likewise manipulated the hapless woman into reading a medical book that held the purpose of marriage to be the generation of children, causing Beate, in Rebekka’s words, to get it “fixed in her mind that she—as a childless wife—had no right to be here” (Ibsen, 1886, p. 99). Gizella Pálos was not childless, but from Ferenczi’s perspective a key aspect of his attraction to Elma was the prospect that the younger woman could bear him children, which Gizella could no longer do. As Ferenczi wrote to Freud on November 18, 1917, he was perturbed by “the unmistakable signs of age on Gizella’s facial features and forms” and by “the hopelessness of marriage without children” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1914–1919, p. 246).

An even more far-reaching resemblance between Ibsen’s play and Ferenczi’s triangle with Gizella and Elma Pálos is furnished by the prehistory of Rebekka West’s liaison with the man who proves to be not merely her foster father but also her biological father. Beginning with the symbolic apparition of white horses, which stand in the first instance for the trauma of Beate’s death, and more generally for the dead hand of the past that strangles everyone at Rosmersholm, the entire play can be regarded as the manifestation of a transference neurosis in which the repressed secrets of the past, both conscious and unconscious, are reenacted with substitute objects in the present. For Rebekka, in Freud’s reading, the fulfillment of her death wishes against Beate, which forms the immediate backdrop of the play, constitutes a repetition of her victory on the primal oedipal battlefield, and hence she is unable to accept Rosmer’s proposal to put Beate “out of the story” once and for all by assuming her vacated place and becoming “the only wife I have ever had” (Ibsen, 1886, p. 78). As Freud (1916a) summarizes the linchpin of his interpretation, “we may feel sure that [Rebekka] cannot have been without some inkling of the intimate relation between her mother and Dr. West. It must have made a great impression on her when she became her mother’s successor with this man” (pp. 329–330).

The back story of Rosmersholm closely corresponds to the Ferenczi-Gizella-Elma triangle, as seen from Elma’s point of view, with Ferenczi standing in for Elma’s father. The literary qualities of Ferenczi’s imbroglio were not lost on Freud, who admonished his disciple on December 17, 1911: “if it had been the case that the girl had fallen in love with her mother’s youthful friend, pined for him, and suffered in the process until both of the others discovered the secret, it would have been a beautiful novel with a touching conclusion” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1908–1914, p. 320). As matters stood, however, Freud wondered, in an almost verbatim anticipation of his analysis of Rebekka West, “Does one want to build this alliance for life on concealing the fact that the man has been her mother’s lover in the fullest sense of the word? And can one rely on the fact that she will take it well and overcome it in a superior manner when she knows it? That requires a high degree of mental freedom, not a piece of infantilism” (pp. 320–321).

Like Rebekka West, Elma “became her mother’s successor” with Ferenczi, and even at the time “cannot have been without some inkling of the intimate relation between her mother” and the man with whom she herself had fallen in love, who was now also her psychoanalyst. Characteristically, Freud assesses the situation in a fashion devoid of ethical scruples. Although he exerted unremitting pressure on Ferenczi to renounce Elma in favor of Gizella, for what were doubtless unconsciously overdetermined motives, he concentrates in his December 17, 1911, letter on the purely pragmatic

question of whether Elma possessed the “mental freedom” to overcome her sense of guilt in a “superior manner” (p. 321) by inheriting her mother’s lover without being “wrecked by success” in the process.

Did Freud recall his letter to Ferenczi when he advanced his interpretation of *Rosmersholm* in “Some Character-Types Met with in Psychoanalytic Work”? Was he conscious of the isomorphism between the incestuous triangles in Ibsen’s play and those in Ferenczi’s life as well as his own? Ferenczi explicitly acknowledged the applicability of Freud’s analysis of “the contrast between tenderness and sensuality,” and its derivation from a “mother fixation,” to his own case; but for the rest, including the degree to which Freud would have endorsed my excavations of a “further subjective significance” in his papers on the psychology of love, we must have recourse to speculation. In the words of Ferenczi that I have taken as my epigraph, “My thoughts flow into the immeasurable.”

In Ferenczi’s spirit, however, in which a belief in the possibility of “dialogues of the unconscious” can extend to thought transference and even telepathy, let us conclude by revisiting the case about which he had used this phrase in his December 25, 1917, letter to Freud, as he spelled out its particulars in a letter 5 days earlier. It turns out that the female patient whose suicide induced a depression in Ferenczi, which in turn elicited “a definite ill feeling” in Gizella when he recounted the story to her, was in his mind a countertransference substitute for Elma Pálos, whom Ferenczi had renounced at Freud’s instigation. Indeed, Ferenczi states that this “very poor” woman, by whose “youth and charm” he was “enchanted,” was “the repetition of the case of Elma” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1914–1919, p. 253). During a “period of vacillation with respect to Frau G.,” Ferenczi “gave way to a kiss” with this girl, who subsequently “vehemently demanded analysis,” which “flattened out more and more” until it was suspended by the patient.

After a considerable hiatus, the young woman again reached out to Ferenczi by writing “a despairing letter” because “her brother-in-law (who years ago had been her ideal and also wanted to touch her sexually) shot himself” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1914–1919, p. 253). She asked to resume the analysis, saying “she couldn’t love,” and even informed Ferenczi that she wanted to shoot herself with a revolver she had bought, but still he put her off. Then, a week after he saw her for what proved to be the last time, Ferenczi was visited by the patient’s sister, who informed him that she had indeed committed suicide, on the day of her final visit to him.

During their conversation, this sister, who “seemed to be initiated to a certain extent,” at first asked Ferenczi, with what he calls “a distorted idea of the reality,” whether her sister -Ferenczi’s patient- “didn’t die because I had ‘suggested’ to her that she had been in love with her brother-in-law” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1914–1919, p. 253), the husband of the woman to whom Ferenczi was now speaking, and who had himself committed suicide not long ago. “But then,” in a final twist, the deceased woman’s sister said, “very suddenly, she knew her sister had died only because she had been in love with me,” and “since I didn’t love her, she went to her death.” Ferenczi concludes his letter by telling Freud, “the case depresses me extraordinarily,” but he regards it as a “sign of health” that he was able to maintain his composure toward this visitor who was “the bearer of bad tidings.”

If we ponder this letter in the context of the Freud-Ferenczi relationship, it becomes truly uncanny to see how the same patient who for Ferenczi is a surrogate for Elma is emotionally and sexually involved with her brother-in-law and is thus simultaneously in the position of Minna Bernays for Freud. Thus, as with Rebekka West in *Rosmersholm*, this tragic woman’s case condenses in dreamlike fashion the incestuous triangles of both analysts and takes on haunting new resonances when read as part of their unconscious dialogue. It is, after all, only through the haze of a dream that Ferenczi, in his letter on December 26, 1912, is able to glimpse the “infantile thought” that his own “forbidden sexual desires” for Elma find a counterpart -and hence a

justification- in Freud's "*voyage de lit-à-lit*" with Minna in Italy (Freud and Ferenczi, 1908 –1914, p. 453).⁸ That Ferenczi feels obliged to disavow his knowledge of Freud's affair exemplifies what Gerson has termed "the singular mix of the permitted and the prohibited" that governs the "*relational unconscious*" created by the "reciprocal and mutual influence" of his unconscious mind and Freud's (Gerson, 2004, p. 71).

As it has been my aim to illustrate that Freud's interpretation of *Rosmersholm*, as well as papers on love, can be read not simply as fragments of an autobiographical confession but also as analytic thirds arising out of an intersubjective matrix, the same can be said of the present essay. In his distinctively Italian inflection of the contemporary trend toward an intersubjective theory of analytic practice, inspired above all by Bion, Antonino Ferro (2006) has proposed that "listening to the communication as a 'narrative derivative' of the dream of the field at that instant would as it were constitute the specific psychoanalytic status of the encounter," and all the characters mentioned in a session should be regarded as "included in the field and generated by it" (pp. 159, 67). If we hearken to Ferro, then this "narrative derivative" of my dream of Freud, Ferenczi, and *Rosmersholm* can only come to life if it becomes truly a shared experience and hence your dream as well.

POSTSCRIPT

Groddeck v. Freud on Rosmersholm

Although we have seen how compelling is Freud's claim that "the enigma of Rebekka's behavior is susceptible of only one solution," an unexpected challenge to his interpretation of *Rosmersholm* was offered from the margins of the psychoanalytic movement in the person of Georg Groddeck.⁹ Especially in light of the importance of Groddeck's friendship to Ferenczi beginning in the 1920s as he grew increasingly estranged from Freud, an account of the intersubjective field in which Freud's essay on character-types is embedded would not be complete without taking stock of Groddeck's dissenting view.

Early in their correspondence, evidently in response to reading Freud's essay, Groddeck must have sent Freud his 1910 paper, "Rebekka West (Tragedy or Comedy?)," written (along with a paper on the character of Nora in *A Doll's House*) during his prepsychoanalytic period, because in his letter of October 28, 1917, after discussing the play with Hanns Sachs, Freud informs Groddeck, "We agree that we cannot give in to you. Everything seems to speak against the idea that Rebekka West's confession is fictitious" (Schacht, 1977, p. 44). As Freud's riposte indicates, Groddeck's (1910) exegesis of the play rests on a number of seemingly quite dubious propositions: that Rebekka does not want to marry Rosmer, but only to ennoble him by emboldening him to cross the footbridge that he has been phobically avoiding ever since his wife jumped from it into the waters below; that Rebekka "has nothing to do with Beate's death"; and that it is in reality Kroll's wife who drove Beate to suicide because it was she who had convinced the childless woman that the purpose of marriage is the procreation of children (pp. 113, 118, 120). Citing the speech in which Rebekka makes her confession to Kroll and Rosmer, where she admits that she "wanted Beate gone" but "never believed it would happen, all the same," and thus could not heed the voice that cried within her "Not a step further!" until she brought about the fatal deed (Ibsen, 1886, p. 100), Freud offers the counterargument that "the honest excitement of the passage" speaks against its being a contrivance on Rebekka's part (Schacht, 1977, p. 44). What is more, he adds, "To get Rosmer over the bridge is the symbol of an aim and not in itself an aim for which one might give one's life" (p. 44).

Despite the force of Freud's objections, however, Groddeck's reading does call attention to some inconspicuous details of the text and pieces them together in a way that imbues them with significance. Above all, he underscores that Rebekka eavesdrops on Rosmer's conversations first with Kroll and then with Mortensgaard, in which Beate's despair over her own childlessness and desire to put an end to her own life so that Rosmer could marry Rebekka are discussed. This would account for how Rebekka was able to manufacture her false confession, which Groddeck interprets as her attempt to relieve Rosmer of his sense of guilt over his wife's death so that he can overcome his inhibition concerning the footbridge and prove worthy of Rebekka's quintessentially feminine adoration. There is also the point that the housekeeper, Mrs. Helseth, informs Rebekka that it was Kroll's wife who had led Beate to believe "something dreadful" (Ibsen, 1886, p. 83) that precipitated her demise; and Rebekka herself rebuts Kroll's

insinuations against her by saying that he had gotten them from his wife (p. 90). In Groddeck's analysis, Ibsen's play is unrelentingly ironic because, first, Rebekka's self-sacrifice proves to be in vain since Rosmer's remains crippled by the spirit of his ancestral home; and, second, when Rebekka finally succeeds in persuading him to join her in a double suicide on the footbridge, "she dies joyfully, happy, dies in the illusion that she has reached her goal" (Groddeck, 1910, p. 122), whereas in reality Rosmer remains as far from spiritual nobility at the end of the play as he was in the beginning.

Upon closer inspection, therefore, Groddeck's reading is by no means as far-fetched as it appears at first glance, and certainly deserves to be taken seriously. In his November 1917 response to Freud's critique, Groddeck contents himself with observing, "So you haven't changed your views about Rebekka West," adding that he is "merely curious to know" how Freud would explain Rebekka's eavesdropping and the role of Kroll's wife (Schacht, 1977, p. 44). Groddeck, in his essay, had recognized that Kroll's revelation to Rebekka concerning her paternity overwhelms her with the thought that she had lived in incest. Hence, he is able to assure Freud, "The play's vital nerve is in my view not altered by my interpretation, the entire play merely appears in a new light and the pathos is changed into dramatic irony." Ibsen, he reiterates, "was thoroughly familiar with the silent laughter of the ironist," and intended to leave us at once crying and laughing over the absurdity that "a splendid woman like Rebekka should perish because of the milieu of Rosmersholm and a 'noble human being'" (p. 45).

Freud, unfortunately, never responded to Groddeck's elaboration of his ideas concerning *Rosmersholm* or to his queries as to how Freud would account for the features of the play to which he had drawn attention. The next letter in their correspondence does not come for nearly 2 years, when, on October 19, 1919, Groddeck sent Freud the manuscript of his "psychoanalytical novel" (Schacht, 1977, p. 45), which was published in 1921 as *The Seeker of Souls*, and Ibsen is not mentioned again in their epistolary dialogue. It seems likely that Freud's views remained unchanged, or that he simply did not feel the need to continue to brush aside Groddeck's pinpricks when he had already solved the mystery of Ibsen's play.

As Groddeck noted, the "play's vital nerve" is "not altered" by his interpretation, which is indeed in many respects compatible with Freud's. Whether or not Rebekka West was the mastermind of Beate's demise, and whether she desired to marry Rosmer or simply to live with him in an exalted spiritual union, in both cases she is a woman whose present actions are dictated by the past, including the stigma of her illegitimate birth, her affair with Dr. West, and the discovery that Dr. West is her biological father. The chief difference between the two interpretations is that, for Freud, Rebekka is playing out a preordained script written by her unconscious desires and fantasies -the oedipal scenario that is the universal lot of humankind- whereas for Groddeck her actions are far more idiosyncratic and comprehensible in light of her actual experiences, not only her past traumas but also the unpredictable revelations that transpire in the course of the play. From this perspective, the interpretations of *Rosmersholm* offered by Freud and Groddeck, rather than being compatible, are at once complementary and incompatible, like the famous vase-profile illusion used by Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin to illustrate the role of the observer in sorting out the paradoxes of figure-ground perception.

At a deeper level, the challenge posed by Groddeck to Freud has to do with whether it is ever justified to claim, as Freud did, that there is "only one solution" to the enigma of a work of art, whether it be a supreme masterpiece such as *Hamlet* or even a lesser but still great play such as *Rosmersholm*. For Groddeck, on the other hand, there is no final answer and always something more to be learned from each encounter with a text: "I have found that with Ibsen's writings one always comes up against new problems, both aesthetic and psychoanalytic, with every new reading" (Schacht, 1977, p. 44). The same debate that arose in incipient fashion between Freud and Groddeck at the outset of their correspondence was rekindled a decade later for higher stakes over the concept of the It, which Freud acknowledged appropriating from Groddeck, but which the two men deployed to radically different ends. In daring to express his abiding loyalty to Freud by his willingness to disagree with him in fundamental respects, Groddeck was Ferenczi's indispensable comrade in arms, and it is this revisionary stance that has made them the two most important precursors of contemporary psychoanalysis. Can it be an accident that Groddeck, ever the silently laughing ironist, signed his letters in *The Book of the It* (1923) "Patrik Troll," in honor of the hero of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1867)?¹⁰

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Notas al final

- 1.- Like all the other texts discussed in this paper, “Suggestion and Psychoanalysis” (1912) can be read in the context of Ferenczi’s dialogue with Freud. Its main theme implicitly touches on Ferenczi’s awe of Freud in its description of how suggestion, in contrast to psychoanalysis, “reduces people precisely to the level of a helpless child incapable of contradicting or of independent thought” (p. 56), while their respective romantic triangles are refracted in Ferenczi’s account of the conflict of Ibsen’s heroine, who is “forever tormenting herself with the thought that she does not love her husband”—who happens to be a doctor—and that “her heart still belongs to the adventurer” from the sea (p. 59). In the end, she is freed from her obsessive brooding when the adventurous sailor returns, and her husband secures his wife’s heart by magnanimously allowing her to choose freely between them.
- 2.- Writing to Freud on October 17, 1916, Ferenczi informs him that he and Gizella “had taken a walk in the same area which had been the scene of our union in 1900” (Freud and Ferenczi, 1914–1919, p. 141; see Berman, 2004, p. 493)
- 3.- In Ferenczi’s published writings, the clearest expression of his erotic conflict, and of its entanglement with his impending analysis with Freud (see Falzeder, 1997), is to be found in the disguised autobiographical case history in “The Dream of the Occlusive Pessary” (1915a), the manuscript of which he sent to Freud on September 8, 1914. Speaking with the voice of the analyst to the patient who is reality himself, Ferenczi interprets the dream in question as deriving from the time “when you felt yourself attracted by no other woman than by your mother”; his split between mother and daughter figures is shown to be represented by a choice between “the woman with the too wide and the bride with the too narrow vagina” (p. 309).
- 4.- Rosenberg (1978) refers to Ibsen’s heroine, Rebekka West, by using Rebecca, the version found in the English language version of Freud’s works (1916a), although in the original German Freud uses the name Rebekka (Freud, 1916b). I will follow Ibsen and Freud, in their original usage. Groddeck (1910) also refers to her as Rebekka West.
- 5.- On “dying together” as simultaneously a gratification of, and punishment for, incestuous desires, see Jones (1911).
- 6.- See, however, the postscript to this paper, where I examine the challenge posed by Georg Groddeck to Freud’s interpretation of Rosmersholm.
- 7.- In my companion paper (Rudnytsky, 2012) on the infantile determinants of Freud’s affair with Minna Bernays, I have cited the case of Fräulein Elisabeth von R. in the course of tracing a sequence of veiled literary allusions to this relationship in Freud’s writings between 1895 and 1901.
- 8.- For an extended discussion of Ferenczi’s “infantile thoughts” concerning Freud and Minna, see chapter 2 of my *Rescuing Psychoanalysis from Freud* (Rudnytsky, 2011). As Peter Swales has suggested to me in a personal communication, it is likely during their trip to Sicily in 1910 that Ferenczi learned from Freud about his sentimental journey with Minna.
- 9.- I am grateful to Mark F. Poster for reminding me of the presence of Rosmersholm in the Freud-Groddeck correspondence, and to Galina Hristeva for supplying me with the text of Groddeck’s essay on Rebekka West.
- 10.- Groddeck offers an extended interpretation of Peer Gynt in a 1927 essay, in which he moves beyond the concept of the It to espouse a notion of the self as an even more radical alternative to the ego. On Groddeck’s critique of Freud’s domesticated understanding of the “Id,” see my *Reading Psychoanalysis* (Rudnytsky, 2002, pp. 151–152, pp. 203–204).