

CASTRATION AND NARCISSISM IN FERENCZI^(*).

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Ferenczi occupies an increasingly important place in contemporary psychoanalytic thought and clinical work. His writings shed light on numerous current pathologies, including borderline conditions, somatizations, and narcissistic frailties. Indeed, Ferenczi is the grand theorist of narcissism. He not only developed Freud's views on the subject but made his own original contribution.

The notion of narcissism becomes pivotal to Ferenczi's writings during the decade from 1917 to 1927. It therefore seems worthwhile to investigate his understanding of the relationship between the castration complex and narcissism¹. We know that for Freud the castration complex provides a structure in much the same way as does the Oedipus complex, with which it is closely allied: in men the castration complex marks the decline of the Oedipus complex, the withdrawal of investment from the objects of infantile love; in women, by contrast, the castration complex introduces the oedipal problematic. Freud later recognized the narcissistic element in the castration complex. The latter is a wound inflicted on the ego, symbolized by the loss (or absence) of the penis, but also, as Freud argues in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926), by the loss of love, the loss of the object, separation, and death.

Hence, there are several levels of the castration complex, insofar as the ego instincts may or may not support erotic drives, and also depending on which of them are involved. Self-preservation is a reaction to a direct threat to life; autoerotism is an erotic self-investment in parts of one's body; narcissism refers to a specular image of oneself as a whole. These functions are quite distinct. Given this complexity, the lost or lacking penis could be considered as a metaphor for a lack of some part of the self, and sometimes of the whole self. Every lost object implies such an experience of lack projected into the external world.

Concerning some archaic structures of the mind, the key point is not with which body image the ego may be identified, but rather whether a person can love himself or herself sufficiently to live and share anything with fellow human beings. Ferenczi works throw a new light on this problem.

In his earlier papers, Ferenczi adheres to a classical Freudian line of thinking. He accepts the idea of castration as meaning a loss of the penis or, more precisely, the phallic symbol and all that it represents. But he still gives much greater emphasis than Freud to the notion of a narcissistic wound. He also demonstrates that not only in certain mental disturbances but also in the very constitution of the subject this wound has a structural character, which one could call fundamental.

Ferenczi's early writings -those from 1908 to 1917- make no mention of the notion of narcissism. (Freud himself did not accord it its full value until "On Narcissism" in 1914.)² Nonetheless, certain elements of his discussion of the castration complex bring to mind a narcissistic wound. Such a wound appears mainly in two forms: in the memory of humiliating experience, and in the memory of pain following a bodily attack.

In "The Analytic Interpretation and Treatment of Psychosexual Impotence" (1908), Ferenczi discusses a boy who feels humiliated by the habit of masturbation. In addition, the external pressure felt by the child in his daily surroundings is accompanied by threats not strictly of castration, but rather of bodily attacks and illness. In this paper Ferenczi thus associates the castration complex with the memory of bodily pain. Already a minor difference from Freud is apparent. Freud emphasizes the image of the body; for him, the fear produced by the threat of castration is connected to the boy's vision of the female body lacking a penis. For Ferenczi this fear is connected primarily to the memory of a real injury to the body, which is

not necessarily to the genital organs. To put it simply, to the extent that the threat of castration highlights humiliation, a wound to self-esteem, or the memory of a bodily attack, one can say that for Ferenczi it refers proleptically to narcissism.

The term “narcissism” first appears in 1913, both in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* as well as in Ferenczi’s “Stages in the Development of the Sense of Reality.” Ferenczi recurrently presents castration in a way that stresses the more general loss of a part of the self rather than the specific loss of the penis. “The Psychic Consequences of a ‘Castration’ in Childhood” (1916—17) does not discuss a castration in the strict sense, but a circumcision. “Nonum Prematur in Annum” (1915) concerns the loss of bodily or intellectual products and attributes the difficulty some people have in separating themselves from them to a “derivative from abnormal narcissism” (419). This separation is also equated with that between mother and child, which, according to Ferenczi, takes place not with the severing of the umbilical cord, but with the gradual withdrawal of maternal libido.

With Freud we are used to reading these representations as so many symbolic equivalents of the loss of the penis. What is at issue is a difference in emphasis. Whereas for Freud all these mutilations or losses are symbolic of the loss of the penis, for Ferenczi the loss of the penis is but one mutilation among many, one loss among others. There is the same chain of substitutions, but the universal role that Freud allots to the loss of the penis seems to be absent in Ferenczi. According to Freud, the fear aroused by traumas endangering the subject’s life or physical and psychic integrity bear upon the representation of the self through its identifications and specular image; according to Ferenczi, the threat of castration draws its force less from a representation (the body without penis) than from a mnemonic mark left by pain already suffered.

Another point of no small importance is the age at which this first traumatic experience takes place. In “The Psychic Consequences of a ‘Castration’ in Childhood,” Ferenczi affirms that the critical age for narcissism is three. It therefore seems that if the circumcision had been performed earlier (or later), its effects on the child would not have been so pathological. This observation is tied to a genetic conception of psychic development, which Freud too held at this time. But it is noteworthy that many cultures practice ritual circumcision, and the rite is generally carried out at an age other than the one designated by Ferenczi as critical for narcissism. Jews circumcise on the eighth day after birth, Muslims during the sixth year of life, and certain African populations at puberty. The question arises whether circumcision is less harmful because it is practiced outside the critical phase of the fourth year of life, or simply because it is ritualized, part of a set of rules that are the same for everyone, a rite of social integration.

Freud’s genetic conception includes the development of the Oedipus complex and its identifications, which even in Ferenczi’s early period were not among his main concerns. One significant turning point occurs from 1916 to 1918, when he published several studies of war neuroses. From a certain point of view, these papers are consistent with Freudian theory, but they also explore new paths and themes that are unique to Ferenczi.

In “Two Types of War Neuroses” (1916—17b) Ferenczi analyzes the symptoms that follow a psychological shock caused by the terror induced by a shell explosion. He notes that they sometimes appear immediately, but at other times only after a second incident, which is insignificant in itself. This temporal model of deferred action recalls the original Freudian theory of trauma.

The symptoms of psychological shock include motor disturbances (tremors, spasms, ataxia, difficulty in walking, astasia-abasia), sensory disturbances (hyperesthesia, hyperacusia, photophobia), difficulties in sleeping and breathing, irregular heartbeat, anxiety, and, often, impotence and the loss of sexual desire. Many of these symptoms recall those of hysteria, and the idea of trauma is central to both. The question, then, becomes whether or not war neuroses are related to hysteria. The answer depends on whether one explains war neuroses in terms of a sexual or a narcissistic etiology. Ferenczi seems to waver between the two. His loyalty to Freud compels him to defend the master’s theories of sexual etiology against criticisms from the medical establishment, whose preferred ground of attack was war neuroses. But he hesitates: “It is therefore not impossible that ordinary shocks may lead to the neuroses by way of a *sexual disturbance*” (1916—17b, 141).

A sexual etiology is in no way excluded, but neither is it proven. In fact, the cases Ferenczi cites seem to lead down other paths. What he shows above all is that the neurotic regression in war neuroses is primarily connected to a narcissistic loss, a breakdown in self-confidence going back to infantile megalomania: “For us psycho-analysts the assumption serves, as a preliminary explanation, we are dealing in these traumata with an *ego-injury*, an *injury to self-love*, to *narcissism*, the natural result of which is the retraction of the range of the ‘object cathexis of the libido,’ that is the cessation of the capacity to love anyone else than oneself” (141).

It is useful here to recall the specificity of narcissism, as distinguished from autoerotism. As I have already noted, Freud holds that in autoerotism the body itself is invested, but only by partial impulses, whereas in narcissism the ego is invested as a total object, which becomes unified through a self-image. But Ferenczi seems to favor a functionalist theory of narcissism tied to a partial impulse exchange, rather than a theory of the union of the self-image through identifications. In “Disease- or Patho-Neuroses” (1916—17a), Ferenczi shows that if one part of the body is libidinally invested, it is less because of the part itself than because it represents the entire ego. This is especially true for the face, since “the identification of the whole ego with parts of the face is common to all mankind” (85). Similarly, in the example of “The Psychic Consequences of a ‘Castration’ in Childhood,” it appears that the actual wound has a specific role, in that it is not just an instigating factor, but undermines the entire self-image. For Ferenczi the distinction between primary and secondary narcissism is not clearly established.

Nevertheless, the major role played by narcissism in Ferenczi’s thinking leads him to oppose hysterical neurosis and narcissistic neurosis. In the former, the subject defends himself against local libidinal increases through repression, so that the invested part of the body represents, by displacement, the sexual organs. In the latter, the subject identifies completely with himself, whether because of a narcissistic neurosis or because of the simple affliction of narcissism.

In his Introduction to *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses* (1919), Freud distinguishes between several different kinds of neuroses: (1) transference neuroses, caused by “frustration in love” or the unsatisfied demands of the libido, where there is danger of a psychic conflict; (2) pure traumatic neuroses, where the danger is external; and (3) war neuroses, situated between the two, which Freud conceives as traumatic neuroses made possible or facilitated by an ego conflict or narcissistic injury, where the sexual element is unclear. However, Freud holds, the libido theory can be extended even to narcissistic (and traumatic) neuroses by positing the existence of narcissistic libido or “an amount of sexual energy attached to the ego itself” (209). Freud concludes that the problem is solved, once the relation between terror, anxiety, and narcissistic libido has been demonstrated. I would add that the representation of a “castration” must also be factored into the equation, but this fourth notion will show up only in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*.

It is clear that at this time Freud’s and Ferenczi’s concepts are not in absolute agreement. Ferenczi places traumatic neurosis and war neurosis on the side of narcissistic neuroses, while Freud contrasts traumatic and narcissistic neuroses and concludes that war neuroses are an intermediary form between the transference and traumatic neuroses. Ferenczi develops his theory of narcissism more amply from 1921 to 1927, distinguishing between the symptoms of transference neuroses and narcissistic disorders. The latter are manifested by tics, epilepsy, and the psychoneuroses accompanying menopause.

In “Psycho-Analytical Observations on Tic” (1921), Ferenczi identifies tics (which he does not essentially distinguish from stereotyped behavior) as “signs of narcissistic disorder that are at the most attached to the symptoms of transference neurosis but are not capable of fusing with them” (144). He cites the case of a young man who is constantly coughing, touching his mustache, or fidgeting with his collar, and thus paying unconscious attention to his body or clothing. In this hyperesthesia Ferenczi detects the inability to tolerate the slightest physical stimulation without a defensive reaction.

At first comparing it to onanism, for which it substitutes, Ferenczi places the tic at the borderline between the psychic and the somatic, which indicates that the mnemonic mark left on the body and “narcissistic disease” (145) are dominant here. He notes that the tic often follows a bodily affliction; for example, spasms of the eyelid often appear after a case of conjunctivitis or blepharitis. He goes on to specify three possible

conditions that give rise to narcissistic disorders and the fixation of the libido on a given part of the body. These are the danger of death, injury to a libidinally invested part of the body (erogenous zone), and a constitutional narcissism that causes a wound to even the smallest part of the body to affect the entire ego. This last possibility, which marks narcissistic pathologies, seems to characterize subjects with tics.

Narcissism thus involves the integrity simultaneously of the body itself and of an image of the body. Yet this image remains unconscious, inscribed in the body and symbolized in the sense in which Freud uses the term in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895). That is to say, it is an image revealed by stereotypes rather than a specular image of the self as others see it and an awareness that they see it. Freud's "organic" hypothesis of narcissism thus seems verified, even though, according to Ferenczi, one cannot know whether the libido is connected to the organ itself or to its psychological representative.

The way to recovery from tics, then, seems to be through the transformation of this unconscious image into a conscious one, by making the stereotyped image specular. Here Ferenczi recalls the exercises that patients with tics are often made to perform in front of a mirror. Contrary to those who view the mirror as a simple means of control, Ferenczi considers its role to be of primary importance. The mirror shows the subject the deforming effect of the tic on his face and body. An elaboration of the specular image brings about recovery. The narcissistic dimension of tics is confirmed by the character traits of pride and an extreme sensitivity to praise and criticism that authors such as Henry Meije and E. Feindel (whose work is approvingly cited by Ferenczi) find in subjects with tics. These individuals cannot stand the idea of being mocked or appearing ridiculous.

Tics differ from hysterical conversion in that in the latter the libidinal relationship with the object is repressed and shows up as the symptom of an autoerotic symbolization of the body. In tics it is the memory of the organic trauma and not the object relationship that has a pathogenic effect. The symptomatology is reversed. In both hysterical conversion and tics there is a displacement of sexual libido onto the body itself and hence a sexualization of the body -the psychic leap into the somatic. But the most important factor in tics caused by constitutional narcissism is the traumatic memory of the ego. Ferenczi maintains that this is an autoerotism that takes on genital qualities. He continues that the tic is a hysteria of the ego and proposes to add to Freudian theory by hypothesizing a mnemic system of the ego, whose job it would be to register the psychic or somatic processes of the subject herself or himself. This system would be particularly well developed in constitutional narcissism, so that a powerful trauma could provoke, as with tics and traumatic neuroses, an excessive mnemic fixation of the expression worn by the body when the trauma struck. The fixation would be strong enough to cause a permanent or paroxysmal reproduction of this expression. There would thus be a residue of unreleased impulses of stimulation satisfied through motility. A tic is "a new instinct" (158). In order to explain the formation of the symbol in the tic, one must suppose that a conflict exists between the nucleus of the ego -perhaps the result of identifications- and narcissism, and that a process analogous to repression exists with tics as well.

This theoretical outline develops certain new points. The process of somatic symbolization offers an analogue to repression, but it differs from hysterical conversion in that it leaves out the sexual libido. Whereas in war neuroses the conflict is played out between the ego and the sexual libido (with the ego's narcissistic folding in on itself accomplished at the expense of the libido), here there is a different conflict between the nucleus of the ego and narcissism. Or, should we say, between identifications (and introjections) and primary narcissism?

This is indeed what Ferenczi intends by the therapeutic role of the mirror and the fact that various kinds of tics are at once substitutes for autoerotism (in the sense of partial impulses) and defense mechanisms against stimulation, with an element of turning against the self -for example, when scratching extends to the point of self-mutilation (comparable to autotomy in inferior animal species). The tendency to scratch and mutilate oneself is symbolic; what is at issue is not resisting actual stimulation but rather stimulating impulses, which are detached from the ego's mnemic system.

Considered in the preceding context, castration comes to be represented less by the loss of the penis as a symbol of power than by narcissistic losses of bodily integrity or of the ego. Although the word

“castration” does not appear expressly in “The Symbolism of the Bridge” (1921), this paper demands such an interpretation. For Ferenczi the bridge recalls the virile member connecting the two parents. But it also extends over a vast and dangerous stretch of water, from whence all life springs; the bridge thus evokes the act of giving birth as well and the appearance and disappearance of the child’s body. This coming and going, the conjunction between what is and is not yet -or no longer- living, underlies the anxiety and phobia concerning bridges.

Ferenczi’s theory of castration thus shifts from an oedipal context to a more archaic organization of the ego, where the object relationship immediately draws on impulses of self-preservation. This is the opposite of anaclysis, where the sexual instinct is held to lean on survival needs. Ferenczi elaborates these ideas more fully in “On Epileptic Fits” (c. 1921) and “A Contribution to the Understanding of the Psychoneuroses of the Age of Involution” (c. 1921-22).

Like tics, epilepsy falls into an intermediate area between transference and narcissistic neuroses. Epileptic seizures, which Ferenczi observed in a hospital for incurables in Budapest, are “a regression to an extremely primitive level of infantile ego-organization in which wishes were still expressed by uncoordinated movements,” such as one also finds in infants (c. 1921, 197—98). By blocking his patients’ respiratory passages for a short period of time, Ferenczi was able to interrupt their seizures artificially and awaken them. For him the epileptic seizure constitutes a kind of turning against the self, a withdrawal of libidinal investment from the organism, which is then treated like something foreign and hostile to the ego. Since acute pain can strengthen the desire for absolute peace, the peace of death, the epileptic seizure is a suicide attempt by means of suffocation. Such an affliction threatens those with especially strong and violent impulses, against the explosions of which they seek to protect themselves by a severe repression of their impulses and by reaction formations, such as religiosity or submission. Yet periodically these individuals must let themselves rage, at times against their own persons, which have become foreign and hostile.

In the neuroses of menopause, which can occur in men as well as women, one finds the same narcissistic retreat. Ferenczi holds that people, as they grow older, tend to transfer their libido from objects back into the ego. Old people revert to the narcissism of infancy. They often lose their social interests and ability to sublimate. Their libido regresses to pregenital stages and partial impulses: anal and urethral eroticism, homosexuality, voyeurism, exhibitionism. They become mean and stingy, like the Struldbrugs of *Gulliver’s Travels*, old men and women condemned to immortality. The Struldbrugs lose all these vices, says Swift, after they turn eighty, but in the process they become senile. Senile dementia thus compounds the loss of libido with that of intelligence. A meager consolation!

Strangely enough, however, neurotics of both sexes who go through this critical stage of menopause do not give any of the psychological signs of old age. They are generous, modest, and helpful to their families whenever the occasion arises. Yet they suffer from depression and a feeling of degeneration. They attempt to protect themselves through various means of defense -by becoming religious or falling madly in love. But this amorous turmoil, says Ferenczi, is “comparable with the roll of drums used at executions to drown the shrieks of the victim, which in this case is object libido” (c. 1921—22, 206). In reality, the libido has already been withdrawn from objects, and only the ego obliges the individual to maintain his old affective ties and conceal his present regression through these excessive demonstrations. The depression itself is an expression of the displeasure, the repugnance a highly civilized conscience feels toward incompatible desires. Ferenczi interprets the amorous compulsion that seizes certain people at the critical age as an offshoot of the narcissistic anxiety of castration.

This narcissistic component explains the depression (or manic overcompensation) that marks a double conflict -between the object libido and narcissism, but also, within narcissism, between various autoerotisms, to the extent that only one erogenous zone is used. This libidinal degeneration, which indicates a narcissistic loss, characterizes melancholy, neurasthenia, and senile dementia. The same holds true for the transitory depression following coitus; this corresponds (in men) to a temporary loss of the libido and bodily substance. The double narcissistic loss also explains the symbolic displacements of the aged onto money, and the resulting avarice. In “Psycho-Analysis and the Mental Disorders of General Paralysis of the Insane” (1922),

Ferenczi adds that one finds the same features in the depressive symptoms of general paralysis -the “end of the world” feeling that expresses the unconscious grief at the loss of an ideal with which the ego has identified completely, and the wound the ego suffers because of its compromised value (362).

We have seen that throughout his writings Ferenczi postulates various equivalents of castration, along a narcissistic fault line: the loss of bodily integrity; the loss of bodily substance (sperm) or of one part of the self as a representative of the whole; the loss of object libido; the loss of the self in the face of death or the possibility of extinction; even the loss of a part of the ego and its identifications, in particular its social ideals and ego ideal; and last, the loss of the libidinal investment in the organism itself and a turning against the self, as in epilepsy or melancholy. In the final analysis, suicide would be the ultimate way to hold onto a residue of narcissism, since inflicting death on oneself is less painful than being subjected to it involuntarily. Ferenczi's speculative masterwork *Thalassa* (1924) provides the theoretical underpinning to his meditations on castration and narcissism, by articulating these equivalencies in a symbolic chain and finding a universal equivalent for them in the fantasy of the return to the womb.

Thalassa introduces the essential notion of *amphimixis*, the fusion of eroticisms or partial impulses into a higher union. Such a fusion implies a quantitative and qualitative displacement of the libido. In its progression toward genitality, *amphimixis* is the obverse of hysterical conversion, which constitutes a regressive genitalization of other parts of the body. The progress that makes up the primacy of the genital lies in the desexualizing of partial erogenous zones, thus leaving each organ free to accomplish its own functions. Behind this idea of *amphimixis* lie biological theories according to which the “organic division of labor” proceeds toward increased specialization and greater functionality, as one rises through the hierarchy of animal species.

In this functionalist perspective, coitus appears as the *amphimictic* process par excellence because it achieves a triple identification: of one partner with the other, of the organism with the genital organ, and of the (male) ego with the semen³. This triple identification is, in effect, the union of the part with the whole, of the partial impulse with the total object impulse, and of the ego libido with the object libido. All this, says Ferenczi, takes place in order “to return to the mother's womb” (1924, 18). The oedipal desire is thus “the psychological expression of an extremely general biological tendency which lures the organism to a return to the state of rest enjoyed before birth” (19).

We can thus discern the unconscious teleology of all these identifications -to bring about the primary merger or integration into an undifferentiated whole. The biological tendency of every living being, according to Ferenczi, is to return to its inorganic state, which is also a mystical or oceanic tendency on the part of life itself to fuse with the great Whole. It is not a coincidence that Ferenczi expounds these ideas in a work entitled *Thalassa*.

This tendency toward dissolution is unconscious and it is the ultimate aim of sexuality at each of its stages: orally, through incorporation into or penetration of the mother's body; anally, through the infant's identification with his feces, so that the container retains control of the content; autoerotically, through the symbolic equation between infant and penis, and between penis and clitoris, which enables every child to enact with its own body the double role of itself and mother; and genitally, through the realization of maternal regression in coitus. Although the return to the womb holds the key to every stage of sexual development for Ferenczi, it is also a symbolic castration. Thalassic regression ultimately means the loss of oneself in another, the annihilation of one's own identity.

Especially for the male, the emission of sperm in the sexual act is a kind of self-castration. The animal kingdom offers many examples of actual self-castration in coitus. As I have noted, this leads Ferenczi to consider autonomy as a biological model of coitus; erection is likewise the incomplete result of a tendency to detach the genital organ, filled with sensations of unpleasure, from the body. Erection can be seen as a by-product of repression, a battle between rejection and preservation of the endangered organ.

In contrast to Freud, who considers death a psychological representation of castration, Ferenczi deems castration to be a psychological representation of the annihilation or loss of self. This explains the anxiety caused by coitus. The sexual act not only brings pleasure, but also replays the first experience of anxiety

-that is, birth- and the passing from nonbeing into being. Coitus therefore entails the compulsion to repeat and has the qualities of a traumatic neurosis.

From ontogeny Ferenczi proceeds to the vaster perspective of phylogeny. The individual catastrophe of birth duplicates the collective catastrophe of the drying up of the oceans, which finds reverse expression in the flood accounts of many cultures. In biblical and other cosmic narratives, the earth separates from the primitive ocean, of which the mother is the symbol and substitute. Ferenczi remarks that the amniotic liquid exists only for terrestrial species.

Thus, the acts of coitus and insemination conflate not only the primal catastrophes of the individual and the species, but all the other catastrophes that have occurred since life began. And orgasm is the expression not just of intrauterine peace, but of the peace of inorganic existence that preceded the appearance of life. Ferenczi concludes that heredity is but the transmission to our descendants of the difficult task of eliminating the traumas that have left their marks on our bodies, no longer mnemonic marks, but “engrams” a literal bodily memory. In this way sexuality, like sleep, accomplishes the return to a blissful edenic state without struggle, a primary narcissism of the womb or the inorganic. The death of the little mermaid dissolved in the great ocean.

With all due respect to Ferenczi, however, one cannot help but feel a certain skepticism in reading *Thalassa*. For me there is no doubt that his personal equation and mystical search affects the way he resolves the castration complex on the theoretical plane. It is no small paradox to say that castration means access to a state of paradise that is, in fact, the negation of castration. Castration, in the sense that I use it, is a recognition of the fact that one is not the accomplished, completed, reconciled person that the specular image gives one the illusion of being. The human subject remains inescapably separate from himself, foreign to himself, at least in part.

There is nonetheless some truth to Ferenczi’s paradisiacal representation, if one considers that this (phantasmatic) perspective supports the entire dynamics of human development. It is true that the recognition of castration gives access to desire and love. But it is also true, as Ferenczi elaborates in “Psycho-Analysis of Sexual Habits” (1925), that the unconscious representation of endless bliss -the negation of castration- allows one to cope with the anxiety that pleasure arouses.

He observes that many neurotics turn out to be hyper anxious subjects who forbid themselves the pleasure of anal and urethral eroticism for fear of the inevitable pain associated with it. He proposes that the courage to confront pregenital eroticism is a necessary factor without which there can be no secure genital eroticism. In other words, at every stage of sexual development the human being must meet -and overcome- castration anxiety. The inability to face castration anxiety causes the displacement of its threats through neurotic avoidance. Some rituals, on the contrary, as Ferenczi recognizes in “Contra-Indications to the ‘Active’ Psycho-Analytical Technique” (1925) -for example, the practice of circumcision by certain groups with the apparent aim of hardening the penis and preparing it for sexual pleasure- help to overcome castration anxiety.

We can only love objects at the price of our own narcissism. In “Gulliver Fantasies” (1926b), Ferenczi argues that anxiety in fact represents the fear of castration, associated with coitus. The threat of castration thus becomes over time the greatest trauma, erasing even the trauma of birth. It is perhaps ultimately the sole trauma, if one takes all its equivalents -oral (the threat of being devoured or swallowed), anal (the threat of separation), and phallic (the threat of mutilation)- as symbolic avatars. Although the mother in practice often holds “the word” and disciplinary power, it ultimately falls on the father and his paternal role to accompany and give identity to the child in a way that will allow him to confront this anxiety. Citing the case of Swift, whose father died when he was a child -and probably thinking of himself as well, since he was fifteen when his father died- Ferenczi writes: “Our psycho-analytical experience teaches us that sons who grow up without a father are seldom normal in their sexual life; most of them become neurotic or homosexual. The fixation to the mother is in these cases by no means the result of any birth-trauma but must be attributed to the lack of a father, with whom a boy has to fight out the Oedipus conflict and whose presence helps to resolve the castration anxiety through the process of identification” (58). The Father, bearer of the Law, the

Name of the Father, as Lacan would say, has the function of permitting separation, relieving mortal beings of their hallucinations of omnipotence. To the myth of perfect bliss, castration opposes the reality of human limits, and thereby grants access to the possibilities of life and love.

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Notas al final

- 1.- I define “castration” as the limits involved in the human condition: people must die, they cannot be both male and female, simultaneously realize contradictory wishes, etc.
- 2.- As Andre Haynal points out in his chapter of this volume, however, Otto Rank did write a paper on narcissism as early as 1911.
- 3.- From this identification is derived the expression “to give oneself” in sexual intercourse.