

SANDOR FERENCZI, THE FATHER OF HUNGARIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS.

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Sandor Ferenczi was born in the best possible time to contribute to the development of psychoanalysis as a Jewish man. The Hungarian Jewish community lived its 'golden years' in the beginning of the twentieth century, half of the university students were Jewish. Also, that was the time when Freud worked on the idea of psychoanalysis, thus Ferenczi had the chance to meet him and take part in the process. However, he could not experience the respect he would have deserved. He died early, in the age of 59, which saved him from the Holocaust, as his brother, Karoly died in Auschwitz in 1944 (Varga-Neubauer, 1999). The recognition and honorable mention of Ferenczi only began fifty years after his death. His important role in the formation and the dissemination of the psychoanalytic approach was entirely neglected, which is one of the reasons why I chose to write about Sandor Ferenczi, in his honor. I will present his life briefly, his friendship with Sigmund Freud and his contributions to the development of psychoanalysis. His entire work is a massive volume; therefore I will only highlight some of his ideas and important inputs.

Sandor Ferenczi was born in 1873 in Miskolc, Hungary (Meszaros, 2008). He was one of the twelve children of the Jewish family that migrated to Hungary from Poland to escape the anti-Semite troubles (Harmat, 1994). His father managed to integrate to the Hungarian society and even fought in the country's War of Independence against Austria in 1848-49 (Meszaros, 2008). After the war, his father changed his name to Ferenczi and worked in a bookstore, and by 1856 he was running his own shop. The bookshop played an important role in Miskolc's cultural life, and it also dealt with publishing and lending (Meszaros, 2008). Baruch Ferenczi had many students, one of them was Fischer Samuel, who later founded the famous German S. Fischer publishing company (Harmat, 1994). Sandor Ferenczi was surrounded with writers, artists, and poets in his young years, which had a significant effect on him (Meszaros, 2008). He spent long hours in the bookstore on the latter and didn't come down until he read everything he was interested in (Harmat, 1994). He enjoyed reading, listening to music and wondering on the beauty of nature (Harmat, 1994). The family was not religious; his father was quite liberal (Meszaros, 2008). The loss of his father at the age of 15 broke the young Ferenczi (Benedek, 1995). He idealized his father, but he also had hidden negative feelings towards him, which he later confessed in his letter to his friend, Groddeck in 1921 (as cited in Benedek, 1995). In this letter he explained his nightmares as fears of being more successful than his father (Benedek, 1995).

Ferenczi's mother, Rosa Eibenschütz was from Vienna, so the Ferenczi family was multilingual, speaking German, Polish, Hungarian and Yiddis (Meszaros, 2008). Ferenczi Sándor spoke Hungarian and German in his childhood, later he studied French and English (Meszaros, 2008).

After his father's death, his mother, Rosa had to take over the bookstore and the difficulties of raising the children alone (Harmat, 1994). She couldn't have paid enough attention to the children in Baruch Ferenczi's life, but with the bookshop's burden, the attention was even less (Harmat, 1994). Ferenczi later wrote that his mother gave him too much rigor and not enough love and caring. He always had a controversial relationship with her. He wanted to get close to her and feel her love, but during the years he and his siblings became estranged from her (Harmat, 1994). This ambivalent relationship was present in his life all along. He wrote about his relationship with his mother to his friend, Groddeck in 1921 (as cited in Benedek, 1995):

“Was I way too demanding or my mother -who had eleven living children, including me as the eighth- was too rigid? What I know for sure -according to my memories- that I had received very little love and a great

amount of rigor. Kindness and cherishing was unknown in our family. However, emotions like respect for parents were highly demanded. Can this style of parenting result in anything else than masquerade?"

Ferenczi lived in a dual moral world: he was eminent, he never used bawdy words, but he stole money and visited prostitutes (Harmat, 1994). He always had affection towards women with lower status in society (Harmat, 1994).

Ferenczi studied in the University of Vienna and got his medical degree in 1894 (Meszaros, 2008). The University of Vienna was one of the leading universities in the area (Eros, 2009a). He chose this profession for many reasons. Most importantly he was interested in a medical career, but also as a Jewish boy, he needed to find a proper profession (Eros, 2009a). In the beginning of the 1900's, half of the active doctors in Hungary were Jewish (Eros, 2009a). As a Jewish person, Ferenczi lived in the best time. Hungary was very open to Jewish immigrants after the war. In 1867, the parliament accepted the "Jewish Emancipation" bill about the equal rights of the Jewish community. Thousands of families arrived to Hungary that time. The golden years and freedom of the Jews lasted until the end of World War I, when the Horthy-era started with the "numerus clausus", anti-Jewish laws and the time of the White Terror.

Ferenczi came back to Hungary in 1896. He started to work at St. Rokus Hospital and treated prostitutes, which he did not enjoy (Harmat, 1994). During this period he met Lajos Lévy, an internist, who introduced Ferenczi to the man who became his patron, Miksa Schaechter (Meszaros, 2008). Schachter was the owner and editor of the medical journal, 'Therapy', where he allowed Ferenczi to publish his early writings (Meszaros, 2008). Ferenczi thought of Miksa Schaechter as a role model (Ferenczi, 1917).

His second job was in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the poor, as a neurologist (Harmat, 1994). He met a homosexual transvestite here, Rosa K. Unlike doctors in this era, he turned toward her with honest interest and the will to help (Eszenyi & Zahuczky, 2008). He encouraged her to write an autobiography, so he could understand what she had been through. The Case of Rosa K was the first paper written in Hungarian with the purpose of having the medical world accept the duality of human sexuality (Eszenyi & Zahuczky, 2008).

He also worked in a private neurological practice and he was appointed to the Royal Court of Justice as an expert psychiatrist till the end of World War I (Harmat, 1994).

At this point, Ferenczi was interested in altered states of consciousness, dreams, and fantasies (Meszaros, 2009). However, he did not know about psychoanalysis, he had some pre-psychoanalytic views, such as: he believed that love should be studied more scientifically, and he declared that in our psychic processes there are many unconscious or partially conscious elements (Harmat, 1994). He read Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, but for the first time he found it irrelevant (Harmat, 1994). He read it again in 1907 and this time he was fascinated with it and put the book on the shelf where he kept all his virtues of high value (Harmat, 1994).

After this breakthrough he read all the available psychoanalytic literature and was deeply affected by them (Harmat, 1994). He was so amazed by Jung's association method, that he tries it with everybody he meets: writers, artists, and even waiters in the coffee house (Harmat, 1994). By that time, Freud already knew about Ferenczi from Jung. When Ferenczi wrote a letter to Freud, he replied immediately (Harmat, 1994). During their long years of friendship, they have changed 1234 letters, of which Ferenczi wrote 687, whereas Freud wrote 547 (Harmat, 1994). These letters were not published until 1992, since the Freud family believed they might overshadow the Master's legacy (Harmat, 1994).

Ferenczi and Freud met in 1908 for the first time. Soon after, Freud invited Ferenczi for a two-week holiday with his family in Berchtesgaden (Harmat, 1994). Ferenczi was a very cheerful, good-tempered and kind person, so Freud and his family liked him immediately (Harmat, 1994).

In the same year, G. Stanley Hall invited Freud to give lectures about psychoanalysis on the 20th anniversary of Clark University in the United States (Meyer, 2005). When Freud asked Ferenczi to join him, he became very excited and started to learn English (Meszaros, 2009). The two friends spend hours together in the mornings to work on Freud's lectures in the afternoon (Meyer, 2005). Freud put it in his necrology of Ferenczi as, "a number of papers that appeared later in the literature under his or my name took their first

shape in our talks” (Freud, 1933, p. 297).

Ferenczi arrived back to Hungary with even more enthusiasm towards psychoanalysis, and he continued to popularize it through medical and social journals and newspapers, lectures in student and intellectual meetings and through guest courses on universities (Eros, 2009b). Despite all his efforts, psychoanalysis did not gain immediate support in Hungary and Europe (Harmat, 1994). The Catholic Church had a great influence and they highly criticized the new Freudian method for turning young people’s attention on sexual issues (Harmat, 1994). They regarded it as an immoral and unscientific approach and their strong opposition remained until the end of the Second World War (Harmat, 1994). Ferenczi, however kept on working; he published his first book about psychoanalysis in 1910 (Meszaros, 2008). In 1911 he advised to establish the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) at the Weimar Psycho-Analytic Congress, and in 1913 he formed the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Association, of which he remained the president until his death (Benedek, 1995). In 1920, he founded the International Journal of Psycho-Analysis (Falzeder & Dupont, 1999).

During the First World War, Ferenczi worked as an army physician, which gave him the opportunity to elaborate on the psychoanalytic approach of the development and treatment of war neuroses (Meszaros, 2009). Ferenczi recognized, that the trauma of the war changed the personality, caused long-lasting distress, and irrational fears. As a matter of fact, the army hospitals had to deal with the disease we know today as PTSD (Meszaros, 2008). This topic became the main subject of the 5th IPA Congress in Budapest, where Ferenczi was chosen as the president of the IPA (Meszaros, 2009). Unfortunately, he could not keep his role for long, as the evolving chaotic situation in Hungary makes it impossible to govern an international association (Benedek, 1995, Falzeder & Dupont, 1999).

Nevertheless, before the White Terror, Ferenczi had an important contribution to the development of psychoanalytic school. He had been working hard to shift psychoanalysis from the private level to the civil service, including the army, the governmental health service and the universities (Eros, 2009b, Meszaros, 2008). He officially applied for the acknowledgement of psychoanalysis as a scientific approach and his aim was to make it an official discipline in universities (Eros, 2009b). From the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence, we know that there has been a strong lobby behind Ferenczi to help him achieve it (Eros, 2009b). He and Freud had many influential friends and some even provided financial support (Eros, 2009b). Their plan was to open bookstores, publishing companies and even a psychoanalytic ambulance in Budapest (Eros, 2009b). At this time, it seemed is that Budapest was going to be the centre of the whole movement. Ferenczi’s application has been denied two times, though it was accepted for the third time, probably due to his numerous supporters (Eros, 2009b).

Ferenczi became a professor of psychoanalysis and psychoanalysis gained professorship at the medical university of Budapest (Meszaros, 2008). He got engaged to his work completely and used his widespread social network to form the face of the Hungarian school (Meszaros, 2008). At this time he was the best man in the worst time: the First World War has just ended, and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy broke apart. The official government was the Hungarian Democratic Republic. Unfortunately, Ferenczi received his assignment during this government, thus when the Democratic Republic failed within a year, all assignments given by its office were withdrawn, including his (Eros, 2009b). On one hand this was a remarkable achievement and very important step in the process of psychoanalysis’ development, but it happened in the biggest chaos and confusion and unfortunately it couldn’t survive (Eros, 2009b). However, it was an essential step in respect of the international acceptance of psychoanalysis. Sandor Ferenczi was the first psychoanalyst in the world who received an official commission as a psychoanalyst in a university, and this was the first time that psychoanalysis was accepted as a discipline and gained professorship (Eros, 2009b).

The following years of political oppression and terror eliminated psychoanalysis on the Hungarian scene. Hungary had lost two-third of its territory in the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, as well as its main sources of raw materials and half of its population. The chaos was followed by the empowerment of Miklos Horthy and his white terror, which started a war against psychoanalysis as well as the Jews (Meszaros, 2008). In 1920, Ferenczi was expelled from the Royal Physician Association of Budapest (Harmat, 1920).

Another important event took place in 1919, as Ferenczi got married with Gizella Palos (Benedek, 1995). Their story is quite unusual. Ferenczi knew the married woman since 1904 (Benedek, 1995, Hamat,

1994). She was 7 years older than him and she had two daughters from her marriage (Harmat, 1994). In 1911 Ferenczi started to treat one of Gizella's daughters, Elma with depression (Benedek, 1995, Harmat, 1994). During the analysis, Ferenczi had fallen in love with the 24-year-old girl (Harmat, 1994). His feelings were so strong that he confessed to Gizella and with her permission, he asked Elma to marry him (Harmat, 1994). Meanwhile, he asked Freud to take over the analysis of Elma (Meyer, 2005). At this point Freud "impermissibly encroaches" into Ferenczi's life, as he advises him not to marry Elma (Benedek, 1995, p.12). Ferenczi had accepted the advice, however later he reproached it to Freud and blamed him for restraining him from a happy marriage and the possibility of having children (Benedek, 1995). Eventually, in 1919 he married Gizella and discarded his chance to have any offspring (Benedek, 1995). An interesting, yet Oedipal aspect of their wedding is, that they learnt the death of Gizella's ex-husband on their way to the registrar's office (Benedek, 1995, Harmat, 1994).

In his career, Ferenczi was dissatisfied with himself, as a psychoanalyst, and he tried to come up with different techniques, of which some he had withdrawn (Benedek, 1995). Freud and the analytic school rejected many of these techniques. "From the beginning of their creation, psychoanalytic institutions regularly declared war on all critics of Freud's theories" (Brabant-Gero, 2007, p.95). During the years, Ferenczi realized that he did not agree with all of Freud's theories and criticized him (Rand & Torok, 1999). Freud did not accept the criticism and as Brabant-Gero (2007) explains: "for him all opposition, whether personal or intellectual, was a sign of pathology he invariably labeled as paranoiac all his friends and followers, whether Fliess, Adler, Jung, Rank, or Ferenczi, whenever they disagreed with him" (p.97). These disagreements finally lead to the breakup of their long lasting friendship (Benedek, 1995). Meyer (2005) explains, that their asymmetric friendship "could only be headed for trouble" (p.19). Due to the difficulty of Ferenczi's language let me cite a slightly edited and translated version of his last book, the Clinical Diary, where he explains his relationship with Freud:

"The anxiety-provoking idea, perhaps very strong in the unconscious, that the father must die when the son grows up, explains Freud's fear of allowing those of us in the movement to become independent. He could tolerate my being a son only until the moment when I contradicted him for the first time. My enthusiasm, my depression when I was neglected even for one day; my inhibition about speaking in his presence, and my burning desire to win his approval, all this reveals me to have been a blindly dependent son. (...)

I remember Freud's remarks, obviously relying on my discretion: "'Patients are a rabble. Patients only serve to provide us with a livelihood and material to learn from. We certainly cannot help them.'" This is therapeutic nihilism. This was the point where I refused to follow him. Against his will I began to deal openly with questions of technique. I refused to abuse the patient's trust in this way, and neither did I share his idea that therapy was worthless. I believed rather that therapy was good, but perhaps we were still deficient, and I began to look for our errors." (as cited in Meyer, 2005, p.27-28)

As Meyer (2005) put it brilliantly, "Freud was the theorist and Ferenczi the therapist"(p. 21). In 1912, Ferenczi visited Freud and without greetings, he insisted that Freud read his latest paper (Meyer, 2005). Freud refused to read the paper and without shaking Ferenczi's hand, he left the room (Meyer, 2005). The above mentioned paper was entitled, Confusion of Tongues Between Adults and the Child: The Language of Tenderness and of Passion. Freud and many other colleagues of Ferenczi disheartened him from reading it on the Wiesbaden Psychoanalytic Congress (Meyer, 2005). Forceful attempts were made to "suppress this paper and it was not published in English until 1949" (Meyer, 2005, p.16). The paper raised powerful issues in the psychoanalytic community. Its main subject was the frequency of psychological and sexual abuse of children. As Erich Fromm puts it, it was "one of the most valuable papers in the psychoanalytic literature" (as cited in Meyer, 2005, p. 17).

In this work, Ferenczi stresses, that many psychological problems of adults root in their childhood traumas; and that the sexual abuse of children is “far more pervasive than most psychoanalysts are willing to admit” (Meyer, 2005, p. 17). Ferenczi explains, that the child has no other means to protect itself than defense mechanisms, such as denial, detachment and dissociation (Meyer, 2005, Kelley-Laine, 2000). In the process of interiorisation, the child identifies with the adult’s desires as well as the remorse, and he eventually identifies himself with the aggressor and as a result the aggressor ceases to exist as an external reality (Kelley-Laine, 2000).

In his paper, Ferenczi also accused the analytic community for their hypocrisy. He stressed, that analysts only neutrally listened to their patients, but they did not allow themselves to have had compassion and empathy for them (Meyer, 2005). In a way, it was a personal criticism appointed to Freud, Ferenczi’s analyst (Meyer, 2005).

Ferenczi also regularly sounded his opinion, that analysts should have also been analyzed before they analyze anybody else. He explained, that an analyst must be completely aware of his repressed feelings “in order to deal with the intense counter transference pressures of extreme cases” (Meyer, 2005, p. 21). He also criticized that the attention of psychoanalysis has shifted from individual traumas toward fantasies and the Oedipal and castration complexes (Rand & Torok, 1999).

Ferenczi also formulated direct critics to Freud in his letters. In one letter of 1932, he wrote to Freud (in Falzeder & Brabant, 2000, as cited in Meyer, 2005):

“It will interest you to know that in our group lively debates are going on about the female castration complex and penis envy. I must admit that in my practice these don’t play the great role that one had expected theoretically.” (p. 24)

In his last years, Ferenczi lived an isolated life and wrote his Clinical Diary (Meszaros, 2008). This work allowed him to “unleash his long-suppressed feelings toward Freud” (Meyer, 2005, p. 25). Meyer (2005) calls the Clinical Diary as “one of the most interesting and compelling documents in psychoanalytic literature” (p. 25). Nonetheless, it had to wait 70 years that acknowledgement. Freud predicted Ferenczi’s future in his work by saying: “It is impossible to believe that the history of our science will ever forget him” (Freud, 1933, as cited in Benedek, 1995, p. 2).

Ferenczi died in 1933, three weeks before his 60th birthday. His death was unsuspected by his former students and colleagues, as they were preparing a surprise volume of their essays for him (Meszaros, 1999). For long weeks after his death, newspapers were filled with the necrologies of Sandor Ferenczi (Meszaros, 1999).

After his death, his work was largely neglected (Meszaros, 2008). The famous psychoanalyst and Freud biographer, Ernest Jones perpetuated a vicious campaign against Ferenczi, stating that he was psychotic at the end of his life (Benedek, 1995, Meszaros, 2008). Today, we know that it was fictitious, but it had severe effects those days (Benedek, 1995, Meyer, 2005). Ferenczi “suffered a de facto excommunication and his work was removed from study in all the approved training institutes of the International Psychoanalytic Association for over 50 years” (Meyer, 2005, p.29). Meszaros (2008) claims that Jones had a significant role in the long abandonment of Ferenczi’s work.

Meyer (2005) claims, that many analysts used Ferenczi’s ideas without attribution. He argues that Ferenczi foreshadowed the ideas of Sullivan, Winnicott or Kohut. He also asserts, that it was Ferenczi and not Anna Freud who first described the above mentioned process of identification with the aggressor in the case of the abused child.

Pfitzer (2005) regards him as one of the founders of analytic psychosomatics. Ferenczi, inspired by his friend, Georg Groddeck, believed, that body and soul cannot be separated from each other and physical and psychological processes affect each other (Pfitzner, 2005).

The publication of his speech at Wiesbaden only appeared in publishing in 1949 (Meyer, 2005). Apart from a few loyal students of his, the psychoanalytic literature forgot about him (Benedek, 1995). In the 60’s

French analysts start to mention him again (Benedek, 1995). In the 80's the Clinical Diary is published in French and in German, as well as the correspondence with Freud (Benedek, 1995). In 1980, a great amount of his work is published in the United States (Benedek, 1995).

In Hungary, the first celebration of Sandor Ferenczi took place in 1973, but the real re-discovery took place only in the beginning of the 90's (Benedek, 1995). Since 1990 there is a scientific journal, called *Thalassa*, which stands for the memory of Sandor Ferenczi (*Thalassa*). In 1999, Ernst Falzeder and Judith Dupont, a translator and researcher of Ferenczi Sandor's works, wrote an open letter to the editor of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* and claimed that the IPA, as well as the journal, neglected their founder and respectfully asked them to remember Ferenczi as he deserves.

Let me finish my essay with a Meyer (2005) quote:

“Mother Ferenczi, welcome home. You had been gone too long and our family was never the same without you.” (p.30)

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