THE CASE OF "RN": SÁNDOR FERENCZI'S RADICAL EXPERIMENT IN PSYCHOANALYSIS[1*].

Christopher Fortune[2]**

Late in the summer of 1924, a troubled 44-year-old American woman named Elizabeth Severn stepped off the train in Budapest's Keleti Station. She took a horse-drawn cab to 3 Nagy Diófa, where she climbed the spiral staircase to the third floor apartment of the world-famous Hungarian psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi, M.D. Ferenczi, she believed, was her last hope-the only person who could cure her desperate mental state and save her life.

Ferenczi, 51 years old, known for his success with other analysts' incurables, ushered her into his consulting room. So began an unpriced-dented eight-year therapeutic relationship that radically expanded the bounds of psychoanalysis.

Sixty years after this momentous meeting, Sandor Ferenczi's (1932) *Clinical Diary* was published. Its pages were filled with references to the patient RN -Ferenczi's code-name for Elizabeth Severn. The diary establishes this woman's profound influence in Ferenczi's final radical challenge to classical psychoanalysis and to Freud himself.

On the basis of original research, Ferenczi's diary, and Severn's own writings[3], I have been able to clarify Elizabeth Severn's identity, her therapeutic relationship with Ferenczi, and her critical significance in the development of his last controversial ideas -ideas currently being reassessed by contemporary psychoanalysis (Haynal, 1988; Dupont, introduction, 1988; Fortune, 1989; Rachman, 1989; Wolstein, 1989, 1990; Aron, 1990; Hoffer, 1990, 1991; Hidas, this volume; Stanton, 1991).

Elizabeth Severn's case and her analytic relationship with Ferenczi is a historical missing link-an unacknowledged paradigm case (Fortune, 1991), a pivotal point in the history and development of psychoanalysis in the tradition of Anna O and Dora. Not only was Severn the catalyst for Ferenczi's recognition of the clinical significance of countertransference (Wolstein 1989, 1990), but, I argue, she was a critical factor precipitating his return to Freud's trauma theory (Fortune, 1991)[4].

From the mid-1920s, Elizabeth Severn, described by Ferenczi as his "principal patient," "colleague," and, finally, his "teacher," influenced his revolutionary technical innovations, including activity, elasticity, passivity, and relaxation. Specifically, Severn initiated Ferenczi's most notorious therapeutic experiment, his recently revealed mutual analysis (Ferenczi, 1932). This radical departure from analytic neutrality led directly to his prescient understanding of the dynamics of early sexual trauma, including his own, an understanding that bolstered his challenge to Freud and the cornerstone of psychoanalysis-unconscious fantasy (Ferenczi, 1932, 1933). In fact, Elizabeth Severn may have been the first sexually abused analysand

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2**.- Christopher Fortune, Ph. D. Doctoral Fellow of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in Applied Psychology, the University of Toronto (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education).

3.- Over the past six years, I have conducted extensive interviews with Severn's daughter, Margaret, xamined Margaret's letters to her mother, and studied Elizabeth Severn's published and unpublished books and papers.

4.- Aspects of Ferenczi's return to Freud's so-called seduction theory have been extensively detailed elsewhere (for example, Ferenczi, 1932, 1933; Masson, 1984; Sabourin, 1985; Haynal, 1988, 1989; Gay, 1988; Fortune, 1989).

whose *actual* childhood trauma was the focus of psychoanalytic treatment since Freud abandoned his seduction theory in the late 1890s (Fortune, 1991).

On May 29, 1933, a week after Ferenczi's death, in a letter to Ernest Jones, Freud analyzed his longtime friend and assessed Ferenczi's loss to the psychoanalytic movement. Freud's hurt is palpable. In his analysis, he disparaged Ferenczi as a weak, misguided child, partly turned away from him and psychoanalysis by the "suspect" Elizabeth Severn. Freud wrote:

> [Ferenczi held] the conviction that I did not love him enough, that I did not want to recognize his works, and that I had badly analyzed him. His innovations in technique were connected with this; since he wanted to show me, how lovingly one must treat one's patients in order to help them. In fact, these were regressions to the complexes of his childhood. ... He would himself become a better mother, and in fact found the children he needed. Among them was a suspect *American woman*, to whom he devoted four or five hours a day (Mrs. Severn?). When she left he believed that she could influence him through vibrations sent across the ocean. He said that she analyzed him and thereby saved him. (So he played both roles, was both the mother and the child.) *She seems to have produced in him a pseudologia phantastica, since he believed her accounts of the most strange childhood traumas, which he then defended against us*. In these disorders was snuffed out his once so brilliant intelligence. But let us preserve his sad exit as a secret among ourselves [Freud to Jones, in Masson, 1984, pp. 180-181; italics added].

Jones (1957) was undoubtedly referring to Severn when he wrote that Freud called a certain woman "Ferenczi's evil genius" (p. 407; see also Fortune, 1991)[5].

The secret of Ferenczi's "sad exit" has been kept for nearly 60 years. As Roazen (1975) commented, "As yet we do not have an explanation of the reference to an American woman" (p. 371). In order to understand the historical and contemporary significance of Ferenczi's final work, however, we must now lift this veil of secrecy shrouding his relationship with Elizabeth Severn.

Who was Elizabeth Severn, and how did she come to be vilified by Freud as the wicked architect of Ferenczi's demise?

BACKGROUND

Elizabeth Severn was born Leota Brown, November 17, 1879, and grew up in a small town in the Midwest United States. Leota was a sickly child, plagued with fears and anxieties. Chronically fatigued and bedridden, she suffered from violent headaches, eating disorders, and frequent nervous breakdowns throughout her teenage and early adult years. She took the "cures" prescribed for her symptoms, probably diagnosed as neurasthenia (Lutz, 1991), and spent time in the mountains of Colorado, as well as taking periodic retreats in mental sanitoriums. Relief, however, was always temporary.

By the turn of the century, Leota had married. In 1901, at the age of 22, she gave birth to her only child, a daughter named Margaret. In 1905, Leota's marriage ended. The following year, in the aftermath of a major breakdown, she put herself under the care of a psychologically oriented M.D. whose practice incorporated the "power of positive thinking with a theosophical turn" (M. Severn, personal communication, July, 1989).

On April 18, 1907, emerging from her treatment, the 27-year-old Leota wrote to her mother that she had discovered her calling: "I am going to work now to become a healer myself. There is no question but that I have the power. It would be the delight of my life to help people in that way" (unpublished letter from collection of M. Severn).

5.- At one point, Jones was mistakenly informed that the evil genius was American analyst Clara Thompson, also a patient of Ferenczi's in Budapest (Brome, 1983, p. 177; See Sue Shapiro's contribution to this volume). However, the evidence is overwhelming that Elizabeth Severn was "the woman Freud called Ferenczi's evil genius" (Jones, 1957, p. 407).

Destitute, yet determined to start a new life, Leota gathered up her daughter, took the train to Texas, obtained a divorce, and legally changed her name to Elizabeth Severn, She sold encyclopedias door to door and, to her surprise, found that people sought her advice on their personal problems, advice that she freely gave, although she sold few books. Taking this as a sign, she set up an office in a local hotel room, made up business cards reading "Elizabeth Severn, Metaphysician," and began seeing patients. Using "mental therapeutics" and her psychic "healing touch," she claimed to have effected a number of dramatic cures, including a brain tumor (Severn, 1913).

In 1912, Elizabeth and her daughter, Margaret, sailed for England, where she set up a "psycho-therapy" practice in London. In 1913, Severn published her first book, *Psychotherapy: Its Doctrine and Practice,* using her cases to illustrate the power of positive thinking, will dreams, visualization, and telepathic healing.

Although lacking any formal academic or professional credentials, she identified herself as "Elizabeth Severn, PhD." On May 8, 1914, in London, Severn was elected Honorary Vice-President of The Alchemical Society and delivered the evening's keynote address, later published as an article, "Some Mystical Aspects of Alchemy" (Severn, 1914)[6].

In the fall of 1914, with the outbreak of World War I, mother and daughter retreated to New York, where for the next ten years Elizabeth Severn practiced "psycho-therapy," initially renting a Fifth Avenue hotel suite as her consulting room. While on the surface Severn appeared to be a resourceful, confident, and successful woman who put into practice her own methods based on will power, throughout this period she suffered chronic, often debilitating, psychological and physical symptoms -including confusion, hallucinations, nightmares and severe depression, which often left her suicidal. In despair, she consulted various doctors, including a number of psychiatrists. She also consulted analyst Otto Rank, who had recently arrived from Europe. All were unsuccessful in influencing her difficult pathology. By mid-1924, considered a hopeless case, Severn found her way to the analyst of last resort, Budapest's Sandor Ferenczi.

Budapest between the wars should have been a lively and rich cultural experience for an American woman on her own. However, although Severn lived in an airy two-room suite at the cosmopolitan Hotel Ritz- the *Dunapalota* (Danube palace) -she kept herself apart socially and professionally. She did not participate in the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Society or in any analytic circle. She was a loner and remained one throughout her life.

"My mother was a one-woman show," her daughter recalled. "She had no friends or colleagues, only patients" (M. Severn, personal communication, 24 July 1991). In fact, four or five devoted and financially well-off American patients followed Severn to Budapest to continue therapy with her.

THE ANALYSIS

Elizabeth Severn was in analysis with Ferenczi in Budapest for several months in the fall of 1924. At first, Ferenczi found Severn unpleasant. In his diary (Ferenczi, 1932), he admits to being anxious and in awe of her (p. 97). In his entry for May 5, 1932, recollecting his first impressions of Severn eight years earlier, Ferenczi wrote:

> [She had] excessive independence and self-assurance, immensely strong willpower as reflected by the marble-like rigidity of her facial features, [and] altogether a somewhat sovereign, majestic superiority of a queen, or even the royal imperiousness of a king. . . . All these are characteristics that one certainly cannot call feminine. . . . [Threatened and defensive, Ferenczi assumed an] attitude of superiority of . . . intrepid masculinity ... a conscious professional pose [p. 97].

6.- "Severn's book and article are credited to "Elizabeth Severn, Ph.D." However, to clarify the existing references to her credentials in the literature (Masson, 1984; Stanton, 1991), it should be pointed out that although she used the title "Dr." throughout her life, Elizabeth Severn was never granted a Ph.D. and lacked formal academic or professional accreditation. For her following two books (Severn, 1917, 1933a), she dropped the titles "Dr." and "Phd." and simply used her proper ñame, Elizabeth Severn.

By the end of 1924, Severn had returned to New York and resumed her therapeutic practice. By February 1925, she was back in Budapest and remained there for ten months. The analysis intensified. In May of that year, a despondent Severn wrote to her daughter that she contemplated throwing herself into the Danube (M. Severn to E. Severn, 3 June 1925)[7]. In a poetic passage in his diary, Ferenczi (1932) evoked Severn's daily mental despair: "Behind [her] murdered ego, the ashes of earlier mental sufferings ... are rekindled every night by the fire of suffering" (p. 10). On July 7, Severn marked Ferenczi's birthday by giving him a gift of her second book (Severn, 1917), inscribing it: "With appreciation to one who can still find fragrance in the garlands of former years-Sandor Ferenczi-from his grateful pupil, Elizabeth Severn."

In August, Ferenczi wrote Severn a letter of introduction to Freud identifying her as "Dr. Severn, an American woman and a diligent psychologist who is currently in analysis with me"[8]. It is not clear whether there was a particular reason for Ferenczi's introduction. Since Ferenczi admired Severn (J. Dupont, personal communication, November 1986), and Freud received many visitors, it may simply have been an act of collegiality. It is also possible that Severn sought a consultation with Freud. Regardless, in October, Severn wrote to Margaret that she had had a cordial interview with Freud[9].

In October 1926, again back in New York after a summer in Budapest, Severn attended Ferenczi's eight-month lecture series "Selected Chapters in the Theory and Practice of Psychoanalysis" at the New School for Social Research. She was also pair of a lay analysis group that he formed during his New York visit[10]. Meanwhile, her own analysis continued. In June 1927, Elizabeth sailed back to Britain with Ferenczi and his wife, Gizella, and carried on to Budapest by way of London, Paris, and Baden-Baden.

Despite years of intensive analysis, Severn's case showed little progress. In keeping with his indulgence and elasticity techniques (Ferenczi, 1928), and openly overcompensating, Ferenczi (1932) wrote, "I redoubled my efforts . . . gradually I gave into more and more of the patient's wishes" (p. 97).

A breakthrough carne in March 1928. Utilizing relaxation and regression techniques, and working with trance states, Severn and Ferenczi lifted a veil of early amnesia and began to uncover the missing details of Elizabeth's childhood and fragmented self (M. Severn to E., Severn 30 March 1928, M. Severn collection). They pieced together a picture of severe early abuse-that Severn's father had physically, emotionally, and sexually abused her from the age of one and a half. The recovered unconscious "memories" were horrendous and bizarre. They included Severn's image of having been forced, when she was older, to participate in the murder of a black man. Ferenczi (1932) later wrote in his diary of "R. N.'s extraordinary, incessant protestations that she is no murderer, although she admits to firing the shots" (p. 17). The analysis deepened. Ferenczi and Severn remained incredulous as material that is even more appalling emerged not only murder and mutilation, but also Elizabeth's experience of being drugged, poisoned, and prostituted to other men. A few years later, recording the case history of RN in his clinical diary, Ferenczi wrote that Severn had made a precarious psychological adaptation to her apparently unbearable childhood situation: he theorized that she had established a fragile equilibrium of three split psychic fragments. However, he wrote, this tenuous grip on reality was shattered when she was 11 l/2 years old and her father deserted the family. As a

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7.- For over 30 years Elizabeth and Margaret Severn maintained an intimate, almost daily, correspondence. In 1986, Margaret, honoring Elizabeth's last request, burned her mother's letters.

8.- (Ferenczi-Freud, 13 de agosto de 1925, Baden-Baden, carta manuscrita no publicado, traducción de Michael Molnar, Freud Museum, London.) Ferenczi mas tarde retiro el titulo de "Dr." del nombre de Severn y posteriormente la identificó en forma impresa como "nuestro colega" (Ferenczi, 1929, 1931). En su artículo de 1931, Ferenczi escribió que Severn era alguien que se estaba "haciendo un entrenamiento de análisis conmigo" (p. 133). Teniendo en cuenta sus ocho años, con Ferenczi, Severn podría considerarse un temprana analista lego americana.

9.- Severn met Freud at least one other time. In late 1938, after she had written requesting a visit, Anna Freud invited Severn to the Freud's new London home in Hampstead (A. Freud to E. Severn, 28 August 1938, M. Severn Collection). Given the view of Severn that Freud expressed to Jones, one can only speculate as to the nature of their exchange five years later. According to her daughter —and there is no evidence to this point to doubt it— even though Elizabeth Severn differed with aspects of his views, she continued to hold Freud in the highest esteem throughout her career.

10.- This was Ferenczi's response to the New York Psychoanalytic Institute's 1926 attempt to squelch lay analysis through prohibitive legislation.

farewell gesture, her father had inflicted a final horrific shock upon Severn; he had "cursed the child," wrote Ferenczi, which left her in a state of psychic disintegration, with severe amnesia (pp. 8-10).

In shock, analyst and patient grappled with the central question that often plagues the therapeutic reconstruction and "remembering" of early childhood trauma: could they believe these enigmatic "memories" in all their graphic details? Ferenczi wrote in his diary that each repetition of the trauma in the analysis ended with Severn's statement: "And still I don't know if the whole thing is true" (p. 98).

Seeking objective verification, Severn questioned her mother, hired lawyers to investigate her past, and even considered digging for the remains of the corpse (M. Severn to E. Severn, 22 November 1929, M. Severn collection). Establishing the reality of the traumatic "shocks" became the focus of the analysis.

As this nightmare erupted into consciousness, Elizabeth Severn's condition became acute. She was already Ferenczi's most demanding and difficult patient. By 1928, driven by what Freud called his *furor sanandi* (rage to cure), Ferenczi was regularly seeing her twice a day for a total of four to five hours, as well as on weekends and, if necessary, at night. Severn was often too ill to get out of bed, except to see her own patients, so Ferenczi-reminiscent of the young Freud treating Anna von Lieben (Frau Cäcilie M.) (Swales, 1986)-analyzed her in her rooms at the Dunapalota. In July, Ferenczi wrote to his close friend, and doctor, analyst Georg Groddeck: "A particularly difficult case [undoubtedly Severn] which could not follow me to Germany was the principal reason we [Sandor and Gizella] did not visit you this time" (Dupont et al., 1982, p. 111). However, when possible, he continued Sevem's analysis during vacations abroad[11]. In late September 1928, responding to her insistence not to interrupt the treatment, Ferenczi allowed Severn to accompany him and Gizella on their vacation to Spain.

Not surprisingly, Ferenczi's attentive ministrations convinced Severn that she had found her "perfect lover" (Ferenczi, 1932, p. 98). Faced with this turn of events, Ferenczi took fright and retreated, all the while interpreting for Severn the negative emotions that she ought to have felt toward him. Severn countered with identical interpretations, which Ferenczi had to concede were justified (p. xx).

In 1929, from late June until August, Severn lodged at the Schweizerhof Hotel in St. Moritz, Switzerland, with Ferenczi and his other patients/students, including a number of Americans, mainly women. Among them were psychoanalytic notables, Clara Thompson and Izette de Forest-both mentioned in Ferenczi's diary- who were in analysis with Ferenczi in Budapest in the late 1920s and early 1930s and who had met that summer in the mountain resort of St. Moritz. At summer's end, Ferenczi wrote to Groddeck that Severn was in a "critical phase" and asked if he could bring her to Groddeck's Sanatorium in Baden-Baden (Ferenczi and Groddeck, 1982, p. 117). Groddeck agreed.

In October, back in Budapest, Ferenczi wrote to Groddeck, "I am afraid the patients ... are literally trying to overwhelm me" (Ferenczi and Groddeck, 1982, p. 118). At the Oxford Congress in August, Ferenczi (1929) had introduced the notions of psychotic splitting and dissociation, for which he acknowledged his debt to "discoveries made by our colleague, Elisabeth [sic] Severn, which she personally communicated to me" (pp. 121-122).

In June 1930, Severn's condition deteriorated: she lapsed into periodic comas and could not look after herself. Alarmed, Ferenczi admitted her to a sanatorium near Budapest. Concerned by Severn's grave state and anxious that she might not pull through, Ferenczi cabled Margaret Severn to come from New York to be with her mother. He offered to waive his own analytical fee if it would enable her to remain in Budapest. Margaret responded immediately and stayed four months.

While Severn was in this state of collapse, Ferenczi wrote to Groddeck and Freud about his own failing health, caused in part by the demanding "analysis" of Elizabeth Severn. Later that year, on December 21, in a more optimistic mood, Ferenczi again wrote to Groddeck:

> My principal patient, the "queen," takes up four, sometimes five hours of my time daily.

11.- By today's standards this practice sounds extreme. However, according to well-known Canadian psychoanalyst Dr. Clifford Scott (personal communication, 6 April 1991), who saw Melanie Klein for analytical sessions during her holiday in the early 1930s; it was not uncommon for analysts to see patients during their vacations.

> Exhausting but worthwhile. I believe I will shortly, or in the not too distant future, be in a position finally, to announce what it means to complete an analysis [Dupont et al., 1982, p. 122].

(Did Ferenczi hope to "cure" Severn to prove to Freud and the psychoanalytic community that his new techniques were effective and to convince them that actual trauma was the critical etiological factor in neurosis?)

In his 1931 paper "Child Analysis in the Analysis of Adults," Ferenczi again credited Severn, this time with a perceptive correction to his analytic technique: "[Severn said] I sometimes disturbed the spontaneity of the fantasy-production with my questions and answers. She thought that I ought to confine my assistance to . . . very simple questions instead of statements" (pp. 133-134).

Severn (1933a) herself later claimed to have originated the therapeutic technique on which Ferenczi based his relaxation principia. She wrote that it was a method she devised to induce a "trance state . . . [and] recollection" (p. 95).

MUTUAL ANALYSIS

Sometime in 1929-30, Severn demanded that Ferenczi allow her to analyze him[12]. Even with Ferenczi's superhuman therapeutic efforts, her analysis had been stalled for the last two years. She told Ferenczi that she suspected he harbored hidden negative feelings-hate and anger- toward her, which blocked the analysis. Until *she* analyzed those feelings in *him*, she said, the analysis would remain at an impasse. Ferenczi resisted for a year, and then reluctantly agreed to submit to Severn's analysis of him (Ferenczi, 1932, p. 99).

On the couch in January 1932, the month he began his clinical diary, Ferenczi admitted, "I did hate the patient [Severn] in spite of the friendliness I displayed" (p. 99). Braced for the worst, he was surprised by Severn's reaction. He wrote:

> The first torrent of the patient's affects (desire to die, notions of suicide, flight) is succeeded, quite remarkably, by relative composure and progress in the work: attention becomes freer of exaggerated fantasies (p. 11). Curiously, this had a tranquilizing effect on the patient, who felt vindicated [p. 99].

Ferenczi felt afraid, humiliated, and exposed by his self-disclosures, yet he was intrigued by their positive outcomes:

> Once I had openly admitted the limitations of my capacity, she even began to reduce her demands on me. ... I really find her less disagreeable now. . . . My interest in the details of the analytical material and my ability to deal with them -, which previously seemed paralyzed- improved significantly [p. 99].

As well, Ferenczi discovered that through her analysis of him, Severn had strengthened her belief in the reality of her own early traumas. On January 31, 1932, he noted: "The first real advances toward the patient's gaining conviction [of the external reality of the traumatic events] occurred in conjunction with some genuinely emotionally colored fragments of the . . . analysis of the analyst" (p. 26).

In summary, through mutual analysis, Ferenczi found that honesty- even admitting his dislike for Severn- increased her trust, making him a better analyst and deepening the therapy. Ferenczi deduced that the "real" relationship between analyst and analysand can be therapeutic and can strengthen the therapeutic alliance. "Who should get credit for this success?" he asks (pp. 99-100). His answer? Himself, for risking the experiment, but "foremost, of course, the patient, who . . . never ceased fighting for her rights" (p. 101).

12.- Ferenczi refers to mutual analysis in a letter to Freud, November 6, 1929 (Stanton, 1991, p. 42).

Although the experiment brought analytical progress and yielded valuable clinical insights, Ferenczi decided there was some risk in putting himself "into the hands of a not undangerous patient" (p. 100). Needless to say, there were other practical difficulties. Ferenczi concluded that mutual analysis could only be a last resort. "Proper analysis by a stranger, without any obligation, would be better," he cautioned (p. xxii).

It is unclear from the diary how mutual analysis ended. As early as March 1932, Severn criticized Ferenczi for his half-hearted participation in his analysis by her (Ferenczi, 1932, p. 46). Afterwards, Ferenczi tried to return to a traditional analytic relationship. It proved to be impossible. On October 2, 1932, in his last diary entry, a discouraged and exhausted Ferenczi wrote:

> An attempt to continue analyzing unilaterally. Emotionality disappeared; analysis insipid. Relationship-distant. Once mutuality has been attempted, one-sided analysis then is no longer possible-not productive [p. 213].

Finally, prefiguring the future interest in relational aspects in psychoanalysis, Ferenczi asks: "Now the question: must every case be mutual?-and to what extent?" (p. 213). Ferenczi's query about mutuality begs another: what was Elizabeth Severn's experience of mutual analysis? And, as his analyst, what was Severn's view of Ferenczi? In another study (Fortune, in preparation), I elaborate on these questions in detail. Suffice it to say that Elizabeth Severn not only convinced Ferenczi of her trauma, but, as his analyst, helped uncover and persuade him of the significance of his own childhood traumas. In his diary, he wrote of a "'weak' emotional outburst (grief, shock, regret, breaking down with tears in the eyes)" as a result of "highly painful superperformances of youth and childhood, only grasped through reconstruction as compensation for very significant traumata" (Ferenczi, 1932, p. 26). Ferenczi felt that Severn had helped him, through the analysis, to access deeper layers of his psyche. For example, on July 19, 1932, he wrote: "Psycho-analytical insight into my own emotional emptiness, which was shrouded by overcompensation (repressed-unconscious-psychosis), led to a self-diagnosis of *schizophrenia*" (p. 160). Both Severn and Ferenczi believed that through mutual analysis they had discovered the consequences of their childhood traumas (Ferenczi, 1932, pp. 14, 26; Severn, 1933a, p. 140). In his diary, Ferenczi wrote:

> The combined result of the two analyses is summarized by the patient [Severn]...: "Your [Ferenczi] greatest trauma was the destruction of genitality. Mine was worse: I saw my life destroyed by an insane criminal; my mind destroyed by poisons and suggested stultification, my body defiled by the ugliest mutilation, at a most inappropriate time; ostracism from a society in which no one wants to believe me innocent; finally the horrendous incident of the last 'experience of being murdered' " [p. 14].

In their "dialogue of unconsciousness" (p. 84), as Ferenczi called it, the boundaries between Severn and himself were blurred and, at times, even erased. "It is as though two halves had combined to form a whole soul," he reflected (p. 14). In this analytical confusion of tongues, mutuality infused even the uncovered traumas. Ferenczi believed this could lead to a therapeutic outcome. He wrote:

> What [Severn] has uncovered about the analyst [Ferenczi] she must acknowledge as a distant reflection of her own sufferings. . . [and] if this succeeds, then [her] former disintegration, and consequently the tendency to project (insanity) will in fact be mutually reversed [p. 159].

The experiment in mutual analysis was paradoxical-a brilliantly daring idea, yet possibly a clinical mistake. It remains enigmatic and can be seen from a number of perspectives. For example, Freud wrote that Ferenczi felt "saved" by Severn's analysis (letter to Jones, in Masson, 1984, pp. 180-181). For Ferenczi she succeeded where Freud, as his former analyst, had failed. Yet, to what extent did Ferenczi fall under Severn's spell? Was he so overwhelmed by her power and pathology that he lost his clinical detachment?

By failing to interpret, instead of giving in to, Severn's demand to analyze him, did Ferenczi undermine her analysis? To what degree did she influence his belief that his own deep-rooted traumas were the source of his psychological suffering? In the end, for Ferenczi and Severn, mutual analysis may have remained both a success and a failure.

THE ENDING

Elizabeth Severn's letters to her daughter suggest that she and Ferenczi had difficulties at the end. By the fall of 1932, Ferenczi was sick with pernicious anemia. He attributed it to exhaustion and to his disappointment in Freud (Dupont et al., 1982, p. 127). Severn herself was desperate. She had no money and was distraught, suffering from extremes of emotion as she reacted to Ferenczi's necessary withdrawal to conserve his dwindling strength. She was also distressed because she believed that Ferenczi was avoiding the subject of the termination of her analysis and her imminent departure from Budapest. Adding to her confusion, Severn reported that Ferenczi insisted that she keep his analysis by her a secret. At the same time, she wrote that he wished her to proclaim herself "cured" by his analysis (M. Severn to E. Severn, 23 December, 1932, M. Severn collection).

In late February 1933, Elizabeth Severn said her last good-bye to Ferenczi and boarded the train for Paris to stay with her daughter, Margaret, who was a dancer in a ballet company at the time. She would never see Ferenczi again. On her arrival in Paris, she was in such critical mental and physical collapse that Margaret wrote Ferenczi a "terrible letter" of protest (M. Severn, personal communication, 8 May 1986). But Ferenczi was already bedridden and too weak to reply. On May 22, 1933, he died in Budapest.

AFTER FERENCZI

It is not known what impact Ferenczi's death had on Elizabeth Severn. In any event, by mid-June, she was strong enough to make her way to London, where she recovered emotionally and resumed her own psychotherapy practice.

Severn's (1933a) third book, *The Discovery of the Self*, begun in Budapest in 1932, was published in the fall of 1933. Stylistically dated, the text is lucid for an author so recently in the throes of psychological torment. In the book, Severn attempts to integrate her earlier "psycho-therapy" methods and body-mind philosophy with her later analytic influences and sets them within her overarching metaphysical-spiritual beliefs. Given her subjectivity as a patient, she writes about psychoanalysis evenhandedly, with critical detachment. Severn values psychoanalysis, but challenges its emphasis on the "regressive" over the "progressive" tendencies of the individual, and-reminiscent of her earlier approaches-champions "healing" and "cure" beyond analysis. Although she mentions Ferenczi in only a few places, certain chapters can be seen as a companion to Ferenczi's last writings, particularly the *Clinical Diary* and "Confusion of Tongues" paper.

In an obvious outcome of their work together, Severn demonstrates her solidarity with Ferenczi. In interpreting her cases, she calls for the recognition of the significance of childhood sexual trauma, the dynamics of fragmentation as a reaction to early traumatic shock, and the necessity to relive and repeat the trauma in therapy as a corrective emotional experience. Not surprisingly, her comments on dissociation and multiple personality nave the ring of direct experience. In the extreme, Severn appears to eliminate any influence of phantasy in mental disturbance, claiming that unsettling psychic events, such as nightmares, simply reflect "forgotten facts"-"real" past traumas (Severn, 1933a, p. 120). Although she seems determined to convince the reader of the exclusive role of external reality in psychic trauma, however, she cannot quite bring herself to dispatch phantasy altogether. Subtly, she incorporates phantasy-unnamed as such-by hedging on her definition of reality. She states: "I should like to make a distinction between the two kinds of reality, admitting the existence of a psychic reality, rather than confine the word 'real' to the material plane only" (pp. 120-121).

Whether she acknowledged it or not, with her broader definition, Severn had posited a more complex psychic relationship, albeit undeveloped, between traumatic reality and phantasy. In concluding a brief review of Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory, Severn's (1933a) views on trauma mirror Ferenczi's in their attempt to reclaim the primacy of an early external trauma:

> Experience has convinced me . . . that the patient does not "invent", but always tells the truth, even though in a distorted form: and further, that what he tells is mostly of a severe and specific injury, inflicted on him when he was young and helpless [p. 126].

Professionally, the book made little impact. It was not reviewed by any psychoanalytic journals, and received only marginal interest elsewhere. By May 1935, only 56 copies had been sold in the United States.

In the 1930s in London, as a lay analyst, Severn maintained her isolation from the psychoanalytical community even though, in principia, it should have been more open to her than in the United States, where mainstream psychoanalysis was closed to nonmedical analysts. She found her own particular niche by returning to her original interest in metaphysics. In November 1933, Severn (1933b) published a positive article on psychoanalysis titled "Psycho-Analysis and Spiritual Evolution" in *The London Forum*, formerly *The Occult Review*. In 1936, she joined the Practical Psychology Club of London, and published, "Don't be Ashamed of Your Instincts" in *The Practical Psychology Magazine* (Severn, 1936). Throughout the 1930s, she continued to travel between the United States and Britain, teaching courses and lecturing to clubs and meetings on such topics as "What Is a Psychic Injury?" and "Mental Catharsis: A Means of Cure."

In late 1939, as World War II loomed, Severn left London for New York, where she lived for the last 20 years of her life. She continued to remain outside psychoanalytic circles. Her lack of academic credentials, her own history of mental instability, and the shadow of controversy over Ferenczi's last work-and possibly even her own unvoiced sense of responsibility for his exhaustion and death-all contributed to her professional isolation.

In the early 1940s, Severn wrote her final book (unpublished), *The Anatomy of Love and Sex: A Psychological Study of Love, Sex and Marriage, with some Counsel to Lovers*. She continued to practice in New York until her death from leukemia in February 1959, at the age of 79.

SEVERN IN THE LITERATURE

Elizabeth Severn is one of a number of historical patients, mostly women, whose contributions to the development of psychoanalysis have recently been brought to light and reevaluated (Swales, 1986; Kerr, 1988; Shamdasani, 1990; Ellenberger, 1991). Until now, Severn has been a mysterious figure in the psychoanalytic literature. The few, often veiled, references to her have frequently conveyed suspicion, even hostility. For example, in 1957, American analyst, Clara Thompson, who was in Budapest until Ferenczi's death, wrote to Erich Fromm[13]:

> In February [1933, Ferenczi] had the courage to dismiss a patient who had bullied him for years, Elizabeth Severn . . . she is one of the most destructive people I know, and there is no doubt Ferenczi was afraid of her [C. Thompson to E. Fromm, 5 November 1957, Fromm Archives, Tubingen][14].

There is reason to believe that, as a fellow pupil and patient, Thompson may have been jealous of Severn's closeness to Ferenczi (Ferenczi, 1932; Shapiro, this volume), which could account for her attack on Severn, some 25 years later.

That same year, in his Freud biography, Ernest Jones (1957) observed, "My old friend Ferenczi believed he was being successfully psycho-analyzed by messages transmitted telepathically across the Atlantic from an ex-patient of his -a woman Freud called "Ferenczi's evil genius" (p. 407).[15]

13.- Fromm was writing an article rebutting Jones's (1957) portrayal of Ferenczi as psychotic. He was seeking perspectives on Ferenczi's final mental state from those close to him in his last days. See Fromm (1958) and Eros (1989).

14.- My thanks to Dr. Ferenc Erós, of the Institute for Psychology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Sandor Ferenczi Society, Budapest, for bringing this letter to my attention.

15.- Gay (1988), Hoffer (1990), and Masson (1984) argue that there is no evidence for Jones's (1957) account (twice recorded, p. 178, p. 407) that Ferenczi believed he was telepathically analyzed. The source for Jones's report is probably Freud's letter (Freud

Although he does not name her in his book, *The Basic Fault*, Michael Bálint (1968) characterizes Ferenczi's intense work with a female patient-identified here as Elizabeth Severn-as a "grand experiment" (p. 112). In 1968, as Ferenczi's executor, Bálint had in his possession the then unpublished diary (and Freud-Ferenczi letters) containing the details of Severn's and Ferenczi's work together, including their unknown and unprecedented mutual analysis. He wrote, "[It was] an experiment ... on a really grand scale -perhaps the first of its kind in analytic history. . . . The patient got as much time from [Ferenczi] as she asked for" (p. 112). Of Ferenczi and others, including himself, Bálint comments: "Some types of analyst cannot resist this kind of *temptation*, especially if it emanates from a 'worth-while' patient" (italics added)[16]. Bálint concludes of Ferenczi's "grandest" experiment: "The patient, a talented but profoundly disturbed woman, improved considerably . . . but could not be considered as cured" (pp. 112-113).

Jeffrey Masson was the first person to bring Elizabeth Severn out of the shadows. In his 1984 indictment of Freud and psychoanalysis, he names Severn and highlights her "major role in Ferenczi's developing ideas" (p. 161)-his return to the trauma theory. Masson argues that it was Ferenczi's self-disclosures and mutual analysis that may have "enabled his patients to begin talking about the real traumas of their childhood (p. 161) . . . It appears possible that Mrs. Severn was the first person to spark Ferenczi's interest in real traumas" (p. 163). Masson adds that she may have "helped Ferenczi face the full reality of these traumas" (p. 164)[17]. Masson (1988) also draws heavily on excerpts from Ferenczi's diary that mention Severn (he uses her code-name RN) to marshal evidence for his case against psychotherapy.

References to Severn also appear in Sabourin (1985), Haynal (1988, 1989), and Schoenwolf (1990).

The most extensive treatment of Elizabeth Severn to date is by psychoanalyst Martin Stanton (1991). Stanton examines aspects of Severn's case and her critical relationship with Ferenczi and mentions her prominently in his chronology of Ferenczi's life. He correctly credits her part in Ferenczi's emphasis on trauma and his development of the relaxation principle: "It was a mutual influence, rather than a one-way process from Ferenczi to Severn" (p. 162). Furthermore, referring to her *1913 Psychotherapy: Its Doctrine and Practice*, he suggests that "Severn certainly had intimations of 'active therapy' long before she encountered Ferenczi" (p. 162). Stanton acknowledges that Severn helped Ferenczi gain insights into countertransference.

New York analyst Benjamín Wolstein (1989, 1990) takes the implications of Severn's role in countertransference even further. He believes that when Severn, in her attempt to overcome her analytical impasse, confronted Ferenczi and subsequently demanded that she be able to analyze him, she forced him to recognize the clinical importance of countertransference. Wolstein (1990) writes: "[In] Ferenczi's case of RN ... the therapeutic study of the psychoanalyst's countertransference as a functional correlate of the patient's resistance was first carried out in vivo" (p. 568). Wolstein (1989) argues that Elizabeth Severn's case has an important place in psychoanalytic history:

> The case of R. N. is, in my view, a landmark case, a major turning point in the evolution of

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to Jones, in Masson, 1984, pp. 180-181), which Jones appears to have misread. That Ferenczi may have "believed that [Severn] could influence him through vibrations sent across the ocean" (Freud) can be read as separate from Freud's next sentence, that "she analyzed him and thereby saved him." This sentence would simply seem to refer to their mutual analysis (probably unknown to Jones), not telepathic, but conducted in Budapest. In his diary, Ferenczi (1932) wrote that Severn believed in telepathic healing (p. 47), but there is no evidence that he did.

16.- Bálint does not define what he means by the term "worthwhile" patient. Essentially, he seems to imply an analyst's subjective view of a highly regarded patient. As well, Bálint's comments are personally suggestive, and one is left to wonder about Bálint's own "grand experiments.

17.- It should be noted that Masson twice confuses Elizabeth Severn with her daughter Margaret. In one case, he reproduces an elegant portrait of an attractive, reclining young woman whom he identifies as "Mrs. Elizabeth Severn" (p. 162). But the portrait is of Margaret. (The portrait is later misidentified in Sabourin, 1985.) And, in the second confusion, Masson describes Elizabeth Severn as a dancer (p. 161), when it was Margaret who was an acclaimed dance artist. (This error has unknowingly been repeated in Grosskurth, 1988; Schoenwolf, 1990; and Stanton, 1991.) Masson was given the mistaken identifications by Ferenczi's literary executor, Paris analyst Dr. Judith Dupont, whose mother, Olga Dormandi (Székely-Kovács), painted the portrait of the young Severn in 1926. A 1913 portrait of Elizabeth Severn is now in the collection of the Freud Museum of London.

> psychoanalytic therapy. It takes its place alongside those two other well-known failed cases in the history of psychoanalysis, Breuer's case of Anna O. and Freud's case of Dora . . . all three therapies, though in some critical respects failures ... are landmarks for the statement of central concepts of contemporary psychoanalytic therapy: in the case of Anna O., the theory of the hypnoid state; in the case of Dora, transference; and in the case of R. N., countertransference [p. 676].

CONCLUSIÓN

The relationship between Elizabeth Severn and Sandor Ferenczi was a complex and problematic one. Severn's desperate attempt to piece together a cohesive identity from a self-shattered by her seemingly horrendous childhood experiences induced Ferenczi to risk radical technical experiments with her-and with himself- that uncovered unique clinical material probably unavailable to classical analytical technique of the time. The resulting insights were the prime source for Ferenczi's (1933) early understanding of the dynamics of sexual trauma- initial shock, denial (by adults), identification with the aggressor, fragmentation, amnesia, and body memory-which have only in recent years been recognized by the profession. In addition, through Ferenczi's diary, Elizabeth Severn's case continues to offer significant insights into current theoretical and clinical issues in sexual abuse-regression, dissociation, and multiple personality, for example, as well as the recovery of early trauma.

Through all his cases, but particularly through his treatment of Severn, Ferenczi gained new technical perspectives, many of which are currently the subject of lively debate within psychoanalysis. Ferenczi stressed reliving, not just remembering, the early trauma within the analytical relationship. As a result, he raised the critical importance of this relationship and its potential to promote therapeutic change. Ferenczi addressed the significance of the analyst's personality in treatment. As well, he highlighted the idea that patient resistance and analytical impasses could be a function of countertransference. He anticipated the current study of the role of analyst subjectivity and the benefits and risks in countertransference interpretations and disclosures.

At the Wiesbaden Congress in 1932, Ferenczi presented his revolutionary paper "Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child" (1933) containing many ideas from his groundbreaking work with Severn. He charged psychoanalysis with overemphasizing fantasy, affirmed that "sexual trauma as the pathogenic factor cannot be valued highly enough" (p. 161), and called for reforms in psychoanalytic therapy. The paper was dismissed. Nine months later Ferenczi was dead. Since he left no method, and no school, much of his radical last work was left suspended for over 50 years, only recently coming to light with the publication of his *Clinical Diary*. The diary also reveals Elizabeth Severn's importance and provides the opportunity to assess more properly her influential role in the development of Ferenczi's last ideas.

How are we to view Elizabeth Severn today? As Ferenczi himself remarked, she was a dangerous patient, a potentially destructive person whose insatiable psychological demands undoubtedly consumed him. In retrospect, Ferenczi's degree of receptivity to her unstable psychological state was probably clinically unwise, even naive. It clearly disturbed his mental and emotional balance and no doubt contributed to his final exhaustion. Paradoxically, Elizabeth Severn was also a strong, intuitive, and therapeutically experienced patient, Ferenczi's colleague and teacher, and the catalyst for a number of his revolutionary insights and innovations. Ironically, Freud's assessment of her was probably correct: She *was* "Ferenczi's evil genius."

Sixty years ago, the work of these two pioneers was branded as heretical, the product of a paranoid-even psychotic-analyst and a wicked and deranged American woman. Yet today it reflects much that is central to the domain of psychoanalytic practice. Furthermore, one of the basic premises of their work together is supported by the mounting evidence of widespread child sexual abuse.

The tragic experiences of a little girl named Leota Brown in the Midwest United States over a century ago have had far-reaching implications for psychoanalysis. Elizabeth Severn, as RN, may well be one of the most important patients in the history of psychoanalysis. Although not the first sexually abused patient to be analyzed, she was, for her time, the most extensively treated one. Her desperate search to heal her fragmented mental state-sustained by her belief in metaphysics and by her own indomitable will-took her half way around the world to the one psychoanalyst who possessed the necessary skill and patience to help

her. Sandor Ferenczi opened himself to Elizabeth Severn's "terrorism of suffering" (Ferenczi, 1932, p. 211), understood it, and ultimately saved her life (M. Severn, personal communication, 12 May 1986).

The analytic relationship between Sandor Ferenczi and Elizabeth Severn is history. Through it, Ferenczi was led to question the foundations of psychoanalysis, and to challenge his long-time mentor, Sigmund Freud. In so doing, he expanded the frontiers of psychoanalytic theory and technique. Through the relationship, Elizabeth Severn, in her dual role as both patient and analytical partner, was able to transform a psychological life of suffering and pain into a body of clinical and theoretical material that can now be recognized as an enduring contribution to psychoanalysis.

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