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THE FREUD-FERENCZI RELATIONSHIP AND ITS BEARING ON CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYSIS

It is true that whenever a crisis broke out Freud invariably showed himself what he really was, a truly great man, who was always accessible and tolerant to new ideas, who was always willing to stop, think, anew, even if it meant re-examining even his most basic concepts, in order to find a possibility for understanding what might be valuable in any new idea. It has never been asked whether something in Freud has or has not contributed to a critical increase of tension during the period preceding a crisis. Still less has any analyst bothered to find out what happened in the minds of those who came into conflict with Freud and what in their relationship to him and to psychoanalysis led to the exacerbation. We have been content to describe them as the villains of the piece. . . . Maybe Rank’s case is less suitable for this examination but I am quite certain in Ferenczi’s case one could follow the development which, prompted by the characters of the two protagonists, led to the tragic conflict. . . .

Michael Balint to Ernest Jones,
May 31, 1957. (Balint Archives, Geneva)

Friendship and Conflict . . .

Right up to the present day the relationship between Freud and Ferenczi has been a difficult one for psychoanalysis. On the one hand this is understandable since they themselves had difficulty in coming to an agreement over important theoretical and practical questions. On the other hand, reluctance to investigate this relationship and these questions without prejudice has disturbed further developments in theory and practice.

In the past it has been a tendency to make a complete split between Freud’s and Ferenczi’s positions, to identify with one and declare the other wrong, dangerous or even mad. How far from the truth the proposition of such a division is, can be seen from the fact that the two protagonists themselves never took up such clearly defined positions as are often attributed to them. Even today, the problems they discussed open up important, in fact basic questions of psychoanalytic practice and theory. As it is well known there were conflicts between Freud and Ferenczi that were deep-
rooted and tragic enough. Hence it is more fruitful not to try to reconcile
their attitudes prematurely — and doing so justice to the controversial char-
acter of this dialogue.

It was a dialogue, it was friendship, more, it was an "intimate sharing of
life, feelings and interests."¹ In the scientific field they constantly reported
their ideas and projects. Their mutual influence continued beyond estrange-
ment and death. Ferenczi’s Clinical Diary,² the product of "immersion in a
kind of scientific fantasy and truth," may be read as a letter to Freud. A
quarter of a century after Ferenczi’s fragments of analysis with him, Freud
was still concerned with the question of whether he, Freud, had behaved
correctly.³

Psychoanalysis Interwoven . . .

In the relationship between Freud and Ferenczi — one of friendship and
of controversy — psychoanalysis was always interwoven: psychoanalysis
as theory, technique and movement, but also as personal experience.

Let us keep in mind that Freud had in analysis his own daughter Anna,⁴
his friend and disciple Sándor Ferenczi, the latter analysed his mistress Giz-
ella, the daughter of Gizella: Elma, Michael Balint and offered, as we al-
ready mentioned, to analyse Sigmund . . . That is what Balint called "the
intricacy of the couches" . . . We know about the complex relationship be-
tween Carl Gustav Jung, Sabina Spielrein and Freud.⁵ Freud had given
many of his disciples a short analysis, often for example while out walking
(as with Eitingon).⁶ On the other hand Freud refused to analyse certain
people, such as Tausk,⁷ Federn,⁸ Reich⁹ or Otto Gross, against whose

¹ Freud to Ferenczi, Jan. 11, 1933. The (hitherto unpublished) letters from Freud to
Ferenczi are designated by "Fr.,” those from Ferenczi to Freud by "Fer.” and identied
by month, day and year.
² The Clinical Diary of Sándor Ferenczi. ed. Judith Dupont (Cambridge, MA: Har-
vard Univ. Press, 1988), entry for May 1, 1932.
³ Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable," The Standard Edition of the Com-
plete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols. (Lon-
⁴ “Annerl’s analysis will be fine, other cases are not interesting” (Fr., Oct. 20, 1918).
⁵ Diario di una segreta simmetria. Sabina Spielrein tra Jung e Freud. eds. Aldo
Caro-tenuuto and Carlo Trombetta (Roma: Astrolabio, 1980; English trans. A Secret
⁶ Ernst Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, 3 vols. (New York: Basic
⁷ Paul Roazen, Brother Animal: The Story of Freud and Tausk (New York: Vintage
⁹ ibid. p. 493.