

Elma Laurvik, Ferenczi's Stepdaughter

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More than thirty years ago, when I first became interested in the history of psychoanalysis, analysts were a secure part of the American psychiatric profession. A number of these practitioners were unhappy with Freud's written rules recommending the analyst's neutrality, and sometimes expressed skepticism as to the desirability of offering patients a blank screen on which they were supposed to deposit their emotional transferences. Prominent professionals were rejecting this orthodox approach for years, but it still remained the dominant paradigm. Despite the disputes about technique however, throughout the 1960s psychoanalysis was highly regarded as a therapeutic procedure.

Academic departments of psychology (then as now) had virtually nothing to do with the entire Freudian tradition, although philosophers, historians and literary critics were mildly receptive to psychoanalytic thinking. Of course there was a pervasive, if often tacit, cultural impact of Freud. Relatively few books existed in those days on the story of the growth of Freud's school, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that whatever had once appeared in print was bound to be over-shadowed by the publication from 1953 to 1957 of the three-volume official biography of Freud written by Ernest Jones. Two prominent literary figures at Columbia University, Lionel Trilling and Steven Marcus, had helped popularize Jones by publishing in 1961 a one-volume edition of his Freud biography. In the mid-1960s it seemed to me that I had to meet personally the surviving early analysts in order to discover what the beginnings of analysis had been all about. An analyst in London mentioned in passing that he had, under his supervision at the British Psychoanalytic Society, Jones's collection of papers¹. Supposedly there was nothing special to be found there, but, I was told,

1. Paul Roazen, "Book Review of Cooper, *Speak of Me As I Am: The Life and Work of Masud Khan*," *Psychoanalytic Books*, Spring 1995.



something of interest might be uncovered. Everything was informal, I signed nothing before looking at Jones's material, but I was so excited by what I had come upon that I told practically no one about what I had stumbled on.

One intriguing tale, which I intended back then to follow up, bore on the career of Sandor Ferenczi. Jones had been rough on Ferenczi, Jones's own analyst: although one of Freud's relatives, in the course of an interview with me, had referred to Ferenczi as "the milk of human kindness", Jones had characterized Ferenczi in his last days as having suffered from a psychosis. This illness, Jones maintained, accounted for Ferenczi's final difficulties with Freud. And Jones was, by this sort of *ad hominem* attack on Ferenczi, able to argue that these personal difficulties of Ferenczi explained why he undertook such a different therapeutic approach than the so-called classical one, which found expression in Freud's published recommendations. The fact that Ferenczi had been suffering from pernicious anemia at the time of his death, mentioned in Freud's obituary of Ferenczi, did not appear in Jones's account.

In our own time, when there is even an International Sandor Ferenczi Society, it may not be remembered just how low Ferenczi's reputation had once sunk. Since almost at the outset of my interviewing I was in London, among others, I also met Dr. Michael Balint, Ferenczi's literary executor. When I first saw him he was wearing the ring that Freud had bestowed on Ferenczi as a member of the small committee that had been set up after the departure of Jung: this group was supposed to defend the purity of psychoanalytic teachings.

Balint was a distinguished figure, tactful enough so that Jones had allowed him during the Nazi period to emigrate to England. By the time I saw him, Balint had published numerous books, and was also known for his interest in teaching general practitioners about psychotherapeutic issues. In going through Jones's files, I came across correspondence between Jones and Balint, intended first as background material for Jones's biography, and then instigated because of Balint's protest at Jones's account of Ferenczi's last days. While Jones was writing his third volume, his physical state declined; he sent some pre-publication galleys to Balint, who wrote back eloquently that he saw things differently. But it was only after the publication of Vol. III that Balint decided that he really had to do something to correct the public record.

Balint submitted a letter to Dr. Willi Hoffer as editor of *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. At the same time that Balint sent his draft to Hoffer, he also forwarded a copy to Jones. From Balint's point of view there were two central points of disagreement between himself and Jones: first the value of Ferenczi's last writings, and secondly as regards exactly what sort of deterioration



there had been in Ferenczi towards the end. Balint raised the point of the pernicious anemia, and how the damage to the spinal cord had meant that during Ferenczi's last months he was bedridden.

Since at the time of Ferenczi's death (1933) Balint had been present in Budapest, he was in a position to be able to refute Jones's version, which claimed that Ferenczi had been paranoid. Balint inserted one sentence in his letter which Jones crossed out. Balint had written: "As both of us were—at some time—analyzed by Ferenczi, it is possible that both Dr. Jones's interpretations and mine are biased". Although Balint gave in to Jones's objections to this point, letters from both Balint and Jones on the subject of Ferenczi did ultimately appear in print². Erich Fromm, as early as 1958, had notably objected in public to what Jones had done to Ferenczi (and also to Otto Rank) in the biography, but Fromm's protest only made it into hard-cover in a 1963 collection of essays³.

In looking through Jones's files, however, I found some fascinating exchanges between Jones and Balint, at least as revealing as what appeared by them both in publications. Jones had written to Balint on Dec. 16, 1957 in an apparent attempt to mollify Ferenczi's defenders; Jones alluded to Ferenczi's two stepdaughters, and the memory of their mother, Gizella: "Perhaps you might tell Elma and Magda that I was extremely careful to avoid dealing with Ferenczi's personal life, e. g., the way he treated Gisela (*sic.*), his intimacy with her daughter, etc., but kept strictly to his relations with Freud". As if Jones had not tactlessly gone far enough, he added a further coal to the flame: "Freud himself was in no doubt at all that the change of views as well as his (Ferenczi's) personal estrangement were due to personal mental changes".

Balint fired back a letter to Jones on Dec. 19th which challenged Jones's account of Ferenczi's last days, and Balint provided the evidence of others who knew Ferenczi then and agreed with Balint's version. Balint not surprisingly wanted to know the name of the so-called witness Jones claimed to be relying on. But Balint sounded especially hot-under-the-collar about what he might have taken to be the implied threat on Jones's part to be willing to go even further in invading Ferenczi's privacy. Balint insisted: "when I handed over the whole correspondence to you... I made the stipulation that as long as Elma and Magda are alive nothing from it may be disclosed to anybody concerning Ferenczi's private life, especially his relation to Gisela and Elma."

2 . *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 34 (1958), p. 68.

3 . Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalysis—Science or Party Line?" in *The Dogma of Christ* (N.Y.: Holt, Rineheart and Winston, 1963), pp. 131-44.



I had read these exchanges between Jones and Balint before I succeeded in seeing Balint, so I had some preparation as to what I might want to inquire about. Balint said that he had only cooperated with Jones, in supplying him with copies of the huge Freud-Ferenczi correspondence, at the suggestion of Anna Freud, who had authorized Jones's biography of her father. Balint at one point insisted that he had withheld from Jones some letters of Ferenczi which described Jones unflatteringly, and at another moment in our two interviews Balint expressed regret that he had helped Jones at all. Balint thought he knew who Jones's alleged witness of Ferenczi's supposed mental deterioration had been, and it turned out that Balint blamed Lajos Levy, Ferenczi's physician, as the only possible source. (Levy's widow, however, repudiated to me Jones's version of Ferenczi's death. Balint evidently did not imagine that Jones could have cooked up the whole idea of a witness. In a 1933 letter to Jones, Freud had said that he thought that the pernicious anemia was a physical expression of underlying psychological forces, but that document was unavailable until recently⁴. It is possible that Jones felt licensed to publish what he did because he was implicitly relying on what was to him the highest possible authority.)

Since I had read Balint's Dec. 19th letter to Jones, as well as Jones's stunning reference to Ferenczi's "intimacy" with Gizella's daughter, that was a subject in the back of my mind as I saw Balint. He had claimed that the reason he had not protested even more strongly about Jones's account of Ferenczi's death was that Balint knew that Jones was a dying man. However, under the circumstances, it should not be surprising that I wondered whether Balint had not also been intimidated by the possibility that Jones was capable of exposing still worse scandal in Ferenczi's life.

Balint was planning on publishing all the Freud-Ferenczi letters, but felt hampered because Anna Freud had not yet agreed to the project. Balint was of course free to publish just the Ferenczi side of the correspondence, but that would have made little sense. Balint somehow never mentioned the existence of Ferenczi's *Clinical Diary*, also in his possession, which only came into print in English in 1988⁵. (Balint also had in his files the Freud-Rank letters.) Balint was looking for help with the editing and translating chores; he sought grant

4. *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones, 1908-1939*, ed. Andrew Paskauskas (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), p. 721. Cf. also Paul Roazen, "The Freud-Jones Letters" in *A Century of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Carlo Bonomi and Patrick Mahony (in press).

5. *The Clinical Diary of Sandor Ferenczi*, ed. Judith Dupont (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988). Cf. Paul Roazen, "Review of Ferenczi's *Clinical Diary*," *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Dec. 1990.



money to help defray the expenses of his editorial work. When I went back to see Balint for a second interview, in the fall of 1966, I brought him a publishing proposal from an American University press, to help get the Freud-Ferenczi letters in print. Balint was not satisfied with the terms of the offer or, perhaps, the prestige of the publishing house.

At my first interview with Balint, on the basis of what I had read in the Jones archives, I had asked Balint about the whereabouts of Ferenczi's "children". For fear of alienating Balint, I only brought the matter up at the end of the meeting. Balint blankly stated that Ferenczi had not had any children. I then corrected my question, referring instead to "stepchildren", and Balint acknowledged that they did in fact still exist.

In my second interview with Balint, I had virtually nothing to lose, and at some point brought up the allegation of "intimacy" between Ferenczi and Elma. Balint denied that there had been any sexual relationship, but acknowledged that they had been very deeply in love. Balint told me that Elma had gone to Freud for an analysis before WWI, and that she had married a man named Laurvik shortly thereafter, but the marriage had not lasted. She was, Balint told me, now living in New York City, and I made a note to myself to try to see her. Balint thought that the relationship between Freud, Elma and Ferenczi was all in the letters between Freud and Ferenczi, and made a moving personal tale. Balint thought that there were so many alleged stories "worse than the truth" that it was better to have it all out in the open through the publication of the letters themselves.

It was only in the spring of 1967 that I finally got to meet Elma at her New York apartment. She was living with her younger sister Magda, who had married one of Ferenczi's siblings, and it had to be striking how the name of Ferenczi was next to the doorbell on the building. (It was a modest place, not on the scale of some of the Park and Fifth avenue apartments where Freud's orthodox students had settled.) I remember Elma as an unusually sensitive and humanly distinguished person, a lady of eighty, and it was impossible for me under the circumstances to do more than talk around the issue of "intimacy" that Jones had raised privately with Balint.

She told me how she had married an American in 1915, and that only afterwards had her mother gone through with marrying Ferenczi. Elma's husband had been a freelance journalist, and she ruefully remarked that he had been "freelance" about everything in life. He had originally come to Budapest to write up a conference. While Elma was with him in California, as WWI had broken out, she had decided to marry him.



Most of my interviewing time was spent on Elma's memories of Freud, although I also asked as much as I could about Ferenczi. Her father's family had come from the same small Hungarian town as Ferenczi's; after her marriage her mother had lived there, and so had Elma with her sister. "Dr. Ferenczi" had been "very good with children" since he took everything they did "naturally." He had loved children and animals (such as dogs), and it was from him that Elma first heard of "Professor Freud." Earlier Ferenczi had talked with Elma's mother about Freud, but her father (Geza Palos) was not very interested. Ferenczi had been in love with her mother while Gizella was still a married woman, and he wrote poetry for her.

According to Elma, her mother would never have divorced her father while the girls were still unmarried. She described Geza as a "kind soft man" who had "bad luck in everything." Early on he grew deaf, and could not "communicate" with people; he was "sad." On the day of Gizella's wedding with Ferenczi, Elma's father had died of a heart attack. Elma denied that it was a suicide, a story I had heard from Levy's widow: her husband would have been privy to all sorts of medical secrets, and it remains conceivable that Elma was not told the truth.

It was naturally easier for me to talk with Elma about Freud, and my general interest in the history of psychoanalysis had been the basis for Elma's agreeing to see me. She reported that her analysis with Freud had taken place in Vienna and lasted three months; it had been possible through "Dr. Ferenczi's influence," although it was Elma's parents who arranged it. She dated it 1907 or perhaps 1908 (she was born in 1887), but added that it had taken place "at least" four or five years before her marriage. She recalled that at the time Freud had been "yet an unknown man in the world." He was "extremely nice," and although she was of course "very frightened in the beginning", he had been "very easy" to talk to.

Elma remembered how she had lain on the analytic couch while Freud had "nearly constantly" puffed on his cigars. He had been "low-voiced" and not "exaggerating" in his remarks. Elma thought that Freud had helped her "a lot," and that she had come back to Hungary "a different person." She remarked about herself having been an "unbalanced" girl in those days, someone whose "youth took hold" of her. Elma said she did not correspond with Freud afterwards, but she cited his parting words concerning what he had liked most about her: "as soon as you understood something you could make use of it." It seemed to me characteristic that Freud would enjoy working with someone normal enough to be able to benefit from the type of rational interpretive insight he could offer.



Elma said that she had seen Freud only once afterwards, in 1938, presumably after the German annexation of Austria. Her mother had asked her to visit him then, since she was an American citizen and could travel safely. (Elma left her husband after eight years, returning to Hungary, but was never divorced.) Elma took away an “unforgettable impression” of a man working without excitement or any “nervous” talk at all. He was like “a giant or god” as he was “peaceful and working to the last.” Elma surmised that Freud must have “probably” known he would succeed in getting “safe conduct” out of Vienna. Freud did not seem to her “much changed” from when she had known him during the analysis.

Evidently Freud had told her mother at the outset of the treatment that he would not be able to see Elma for more than three months. He had been “sure” that he could help her in that time, and “really he did.” Elma thought Freud had been “kind enough” to say that he had enjoyed the analysis too, and it had not just been Elma who had responded positively.

The analysis had been “very easy” for her, and “evidently” for Freud too. The treatment was not “a weight,” although for “some people” it can be an “upheaval.” The time she spent with him added up to “a pleasant thing”: he was so kind that it “soothed” her. Although Freud had “hardly talked about her problems,” he reacted to anything that occurred to her and he had understood everything “in terms of her problems.”

Her father had paid for the analysis, even though he was uninterested in and disapproving of psychoanalysis. Elma specified that Geza’s attitude was shaped by his having seen Ferenczi’s “approach” to her mother. Geza was “very tender and passive,” accepting of everything and without the “courage” to stand up to the romantic situation between Ferenczi and Gizella. Elma thought that Freud had been “very simply human,” and she proposed that he was especially “fond” of Elma because of her physical resemblance to her mother.

I inquired about what in Ferenczi Freud had so liked. Elma singled out Ferenczi’s “brilliance and enthusiasm.” Whether two or twenty people were together, Ferenczi was the center of attention, not because he wanted it so but he attracted others by talking in such an “interesting way.” Elma knew that towards the end of Ferenczi’s life there had been “a sort of break” with Freud, but she thought they continued to “love” one another only they could not “agree” on certain things. Ferenczi was only fifty-nine when he died, and was “very bitter.” He had “weakened and weakened” until he could no longer move. He felt his life “waning” and yet he wanted to live in the midst of his scientific work. Although he had had pernicious anemia he had not been “confused,” but could



be “very silent.” (Elma remembered his having been “jolly” with a young maid.) Levy was his physician, but he had not prepared “us” that Ferenczi would “surely die.” Despite what Jones wrote, Ferenczi had not “been a bit crazy.” Elma knew there were stories about Ferenczi’s having failed to keep “quite the distance he should have with patients,” but it was not anything she knew more about.”

Elma understood that I had learned rather more about her relation to Ferenczi than we were discussing, but she thought that when the letter between Ferenczi appeared that would be time enough to have further information come out. The day after she saw me she wrote to correct some dates, “whether or not” I wanted to make use of the interview itself. Her sister had been certain that the wedding between their mother and “Dr. Ferenczi” had been March 1, 1919, “the same day our father died.” Elma planned on asking the help of a cousin in Budapest in order to get clear the year of the analysis with Freud. Elma also asked whether Balint had known the reason for my visit with her, and she wanted me to tell her again the nature of my profession. I must have written back to her, since in July she wrote me another note: “I trust you will keep your promise. Forget the ‘Laurvik incident’ altogether.” Although I can no longer be certain, I presume Elma was concerned that I protect the privacy of the relationship between herself and Ferenczi, something we had really not touched on. But I suspected that she was aware that I was aware of more than anything I explicitly talked about.

In 1975 my *Freud and His Followers* had two chapters on Jones and Ferenczi, as I was trying to rescue Ferenczi from the reputation of having been mentally ill, and therefore someone whose ideas could be ignored⁶. I cited in passing the 1959 letters between Jones and Balint, and alluded to the triangle between Gizella, Ferenczi and Elma. But I did not know much more than that in the 1960s. Elma had died in 1970, and I never heard any protests over what I put into print about Ferenczi and her.

Only in early 1994 did the first volume of the Freud-Ferenczi letters appear in English, and it came as a shock to me. It turned out that the correct date for Elma’s analysis was 1912, and that Ferenczi had treated her both before and after she had seen Freud. Although it had been widely understood that Ferenczi had been briefly in analysis with Freud in both 1914 and 1916, that only took new meaning in the light of what else it was possible to know about Freud’s

6 . Paul Roazen, *Freud and His Followers* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1975; N.Y.: Da Capo, 1992), pp. 355-71.



, after Gizella's death in 1949 Elma had taken over her mother's part. By 1951 Elma sounds eager to see the correspondence in print, FERENCZI'S STEPDAUGHTER

involvement with Elma, Gizella, and Ferenczi.

I also learned of the behind-the-scenes correspondence in print, although aware that Anna Freud had been responsible for delaying the publication. Balint advised Elma that a few years would be necessary before the letters could succeed in getting printed.

When I had been in London in the summer of 1965, I had at least alluded with Balint to knowing about the emotional relationship between Elma and Ferenczi. By the spring of 1966, Balint had reached a tentative agreement with Anna Freud about the publication of parts of the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence. Balint was then proposing that he write a biography of Ferenczi, but he was concerned about Elma's reaction. As he wrote her:

To write a biography of Sandor, particularly in the years that immediately preceded and followed the First World War, without mentioning the role that you played in his life, would be a falsification, or at least a *suppressio veri* (suppression of truth). Moreover, as you can well imagine, a certain number of people know (by hearsay) an approximate version of that history, and if the official biography were to remain silent on this point, it would give rise to fresh gossip and new rumors. Balint was obviously trying to be as careful as possible with Elma: "I ask you to think about this very personal and delicate problem, and let me know your feelings on this matter".

The letters reveal that Ferenczi had fallen in love with Elma while analyzing her, and that it was Ferenczi who proposed that she go to Freud for an analysis, partly to find out if she shared his own feelings. (In later years Ferenczi, who wanted children of his own, expressed his resentment at how Freud had thought he should still marry Gizella, although she was eight years older than himself.) Elma had written her memories⁸ to Balint, and he replied in the spring of 1966: *You asked me how many and what sorts of people know about that episode. This is a question that is of course impossible to answer. Let me say simply that when I began my analysis in Berlin in 1921, I heard all kinds of gossip on the subject; and having begun another analysis with Sandor, I found*

7. Cf. André Haynal, "Introduction" to *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sandor Ferenczi*, Vol. 1, 1908-1914, eds., Eva Brabant, Ernest Falzeder, and Patrizia Giampieri-Deutsch, transl. by Peter T. Hoffer (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), p. xxxii. Cf. also Paul Roazen "The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sandor Ferenczi," *The American Scholar*, Spring 1994.

8. André Haynal, "Brefs aperçus sur l'histoire de la correspondance Freud-Ferenczi," *Rev. Int. Hist. Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 2 (1989), pp. 248-29.9. Haynal, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiii.



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myself in great difficulties during the first few weeks of sessions, because I felt a strong resistance to saying what I believed I knew about the matter⁹. By 1968 Balint was proposing to use a pseudonym for Elma. Balint then died in 1970, Anna Freud in 1982, and others became responsible for the appearance of the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence, which was in the end published in its entirety: it created such a literary sensation in Paris that 7,000 copies sold out within the first eight weeks.

Even before the Freud-Ferenczi letters started officially to come out, scholars had begun studying them in manuscript form. In 1990 we learned bits and pieces about Elma's depressed feelings before her analysis with Ferenczi, and that a boyfriend had committed suicide. When she had seen Ferenczi in treatment, as she wrote Balint in 1966, she felt she had been "immature, spiteful, vain, and love-starved¹⁰."

Nothing prepared me for the fact that throughout most of Vol. 1 of the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence Elma plays a central role; if only because of her relationship with Ferenczi she emerges as one of the more important female patients in Freud's career. The Elma Palos story may eventually turn out to seem like one of the more shocking stories connected with the early history of psychoanalysis, and now I understand better Anna Freud's impulse to allow only the partial publication of these letters; although it is a mystery how she thought the truth might be concealed, without that censorship calling even more attention to what had been suppressed. The full tale could be damaging to the pretensions some psychoanalysts have had that they have been working on behalf of a developed science.

Elma first comes up in the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence in January 1911, when her mother was taking her to Vienna to correct a scar which had resulted from an old tooth problem Elma had had. Ferenczi and Gizella also had in mind asking Freud's advice about "a rather difficult matter [marriage and love affair]" of Elma's. Freud did not get to see Gizella and Elma until the next month, but he alarmed Ferenczi by making a verbal diagnosis of "dementia praecox" of Elma. Ferenczi said he was both depressed and surprised by such a serious-sounding diagnosis, and Freud wrote back to explain:

Frau G.'s visit was very nice; her conversation is particularly charming.

9. Haynal, op. cit., p. xxxii.

10. Martin Stanton, *Sandor Ferenczi: Reconsidering Active Intervention*, (London: Free Association, 1990), p. 18.



Her daughter is made of coarser material, participated little, and for the most part had a blank expression on her face. Otherwise, of course, there was not the slightest abnormality noticeable in her.

Ferenczi at the time was involved with Gizella, Elma being only her elder daughter, but still Freud had startled and worried his Hungarian pupil. Freud was, like Ferenczi, not a psychiatrist, but they had both trained as neurologists: that professional background explains the ease with which such a dire psychiatric category as dementia praecox (nowadays schizophrenia) was invoked on the basis of only one meeting. In defending himself Freud explained that “the diagnosis says nothing about its practical significance¹¹.”

In July 1911, Ferenczi reported to Freud that Elma was now in treatment with him. Freud wrote back about his skepticism as to how far Ferenczi could get therapeutically with her, but Ferenczi thought things were going well and he promised to report orally to Freud. In October there was the suicide “on her account” by one of the young men in whom she was interested. Within a month Ferenczi had reacted to Elma’s distress by what he called “fantasies” of his marrying Elma. In no time at all (less than a month) after that letter Ferenczi was reporting that Elma had “won” his heart¹².

Freud advised Ferenczi to break off the treatment of Elma, and Gizella turned to Freud for advice. Freud replied to her in a letter which he wrote as if it could possibly remain “completely” between them. Freud interpreted Ferenczi’s marital preference for Elma as due to Ferenczi’s craving for children, which Freud attributed to Ferenczi’s so-called homosexual craving for offspring: “it is the case with him that his homosexuality imperiously demands a child and that he carries within him revenge against his mother from the strongest impressions of childhood.¹³” Gizella’s age, marriage, and children meant to Freud that she could be seen as a mother figure for Ferenczi.

Ferenczi had kept writing about the possibility of his marrying Elma, although her father was unwilling to bless the proposed union. Once Elma hesitated to proceed maritally with Ferenczi, he thought she needed treatment for an “illness,” and Ferenczi decided that he could not continue her analysis. Elma agreed to go to Freud instead, which Ferenczi saw as his turning her over

11 . *The Correspondence of Freud and Ferenczi*, Vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 248, 253, 254.

12 . *Ibid.*, pp. 304, 312, 318.

13 . *Ibid.*, pp. 319-20.



to him. Freud referred to Elma now as a “charming young woman,” one who was also “noble,” but Freud said he was doubtful whether the complexities of the situation would be favorable for analytic success. Ferenczi reported that Elma had wanted to continue to be treated by Ferenczi, without her suspecting that Freud had been “opposed” to their marriage¹⁴.

Freud wrote in detail to Ferenczi about the course of the analysis of Elma. She had, for example, started off “quite inhibited, obviously wants to be the good child, to please, to be treated with tenderness; fears loss of love if she admits something.” Meantime Geza Palos got into the psychoanalytic act: Elma’s father, Ferenczi told him, was supposedly “a very eccentric, self-centered person,” and he was “somewhat upset by the details of the analysis, which Elma, incomprehensibly, shared with him and which he doesn’t have a clue about, wants to write you a letter¹⁵.” So there were missives going back and forth between Freud and Ferenczi, Freud and Gizella, and Elma was writing to both her parents as well as Ferenczi.

Ferenczi was still stung by Freud’s original diagnosis of dementia praecox, and was putting the best face on it by interpreting it in the light of her supposed inability to love. Ferenczi sent quotations to Freud which were extracted from Elma’s letters to himself and to her mother. Ferenczi tried to resume his relationship with Gizella, but said that his “attempt at intimacy ended with sadness and depression on both sides¹⁶.”

By February Freud had changed his diagnosis to a far more benign one, and he wrote to Ferenczi that “the only legitimate diagnosis” would be “infantilism,” a characteristic which, according to Freud’s theories, afflicted all neurotic mankind¹⁷. It was a significant retraction on Freud’s part from an outlook which, based on my one meeting with Elma, struck me as incomprehensible. Freud could not have been toying with a diagnosis of psychosis in order to discourage Ferenczi’s infatuation with Elma, since at the time Freud first invoked that dire-sounding diagnosis Ferenczi had not yet lost his heart to her.

Ferenczi, in the same spirit as Freud had written to Gizella in confidence, wrote Freud likewise, as he continued to send portions of Elma’s correspondence, at the same time that he could visit Vienna to discuss matters with Freud although

14 . Ibid., pp. 324-26

15 . Ibid., pp. 326-327.

16 . Ibid., p. 336.

17 . Ibid., p. 340.



Elma was not to know of his trip. Ferenczi was on better terms with Gizella, although he had worries about Elma being “normal” and “healthy” as well as perhaps unable to love¹⁸.

Freud worked out some elaborate sounding hypotheses about the nature of Elma’s case, and a letter in March to Ferenczi includes a large diagram outlining Freud’s schematization of Elma’s history. Freud thought he had made “real progress¹⁹” with Elma, and he had decided to send her home for Easter despite her desire to stay on longer with him.

In April Ferenczi suggested to Elma that they resume their own analytic relationship, and she “agreed rather easily” to once again become Ferenczi’s patient. By August Ferenczi had “given up Elma’s analysis and in so doing severed the last thread of the connection between us.” Elma was “in despair,” as Ferenczi accompanied her home “and handed her over to her mother²⁰.” At this point it is hard not to at least suspect that Elma was being victimized by the medical narcissism of both Freud and Ferenczi, and the whole human impropriety of the psychoanalytically-inspired meddling in her life.

Part of the interest in the story of Elma stems from its fitting into a pattern which looks like overweening ambition in Freud’s actual clinical practices. For example, when Jones was sent by Freud for an analysis with Ferenczi, Freud was analyzing a woman who had been living with Jones for some years. Freud and Ferenczi wrote back and forth about their respective cases, and Freud also sent letters to Jones about the treatment of his lady-friend, just as Freud could be indiscreet about Jones with Freud’s own patient, Jones’s long-standing lover. (Freud’s most famous papers on technique were written in 1911-15, virtually at the time of the height of the Elma-Ferenczi tale.)

It seems to me not enough to characterize such invasions of human privacy as analytic “indiscretions,” since they seemed to be part and parcel of Freud’s chosen way of proceeding, whatever he wrote recommending that others proceed with neutrality as if analysis could be comparable to some sort of surgical procedure. Over thirty years ago, I was startled by how Freud could send a senior analyst, Victor Tausk, into analysis with a newcomer (Helen Deutsch) who was herself then in analysis with Freud; Freud had been rejecting Tausk’s entreaties to be analyzed by Freud, and a few months after Freud broke

18 . Ibid., p. 347.

19 . Ibid., pp. 351, 356.

20 . Ibid., pp. 369, 402. . Paul Roazen, *Brother Animal: The Story of Freud and Tausk* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1969; 2nd ed., with New Introduction, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1990).



up Tausk's treatment with his analyst, Tausk—who had been subject to depressions—committed suicide²¹. In those days, when I first heard about the Tausk incident, long a guarded analytic secret, I also discovered that Freud had personally analyzed his youngest daughter, Anna²²; that too had been a closely guarded secret, but in the light of the Freud-Ferenczi letters, and how they touch on Elma, such license on Freud's part seems like the tip of the iceberg, or what should have been expected.

The human consequences for Gizella, Elma and Ferenczi were not ended by Ferenczi's terminating Elma's analysis. Gizella persisted in thinking that it might be best for Sandor and Elma to get married, even after Elma had gone off to America. And it took years of vacillation on Ferenczi's part before at last he went through with marrying Gizella. At Ferenczi's request it was Freud who made the final marriage proposal in a letter to Gizella.

It seems at best ironic that Freud allowed himself to get so intimately enmeshed in the lives of patients and followers, at the same time the central reproach that orthodox analysts, following Freud, make against Ferenczi was that he went too far in proposing that analytic technique become less distant and more humane. Over time Ferenczi's name became a symbol for advising therapeutic flexibility, and the formal ideals of neutrality, abstinence, and lack of analytic activity seem more and more to have been artifacts constructed as ideals which were nonetheless at odds with Freud's own conduct.

Vol. II of the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence (which came out in 1996) is relatively undramatic, as Ferenczi has finally settled down to getting ready to marry Gizella. But the book, which carries the relationship between Freud and Ferenczi up to 1919, contains one more human tangle, this time between Freud, the Hungarian Anton von Freund, Ferenczi, von Freund's second wife, von Freund's favorite sister, and von Freund's married mistress. Von Freund was afflicted with cancer as well as marital problems, and was immensely grateful for the help of psychoanalysis.

One can only wonder whether Elma ever adequately realized how her own private world had been intruded upon. She was in 1912 only an impressionable twenty-five-year-old, and Freud, following Ferenczi, had captured her spirituality. I am not suggesting that Elma's gratitude to Freud was lacking in subjective genuineness. Detached outsiders could at least be entitled

21 . Paul Roazen, *Brother Animal: The Story of Freud and Tausk* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1969; 2nd ed., with New Introduction (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1990).

22 . Paul Roazen, "Freud and Analysis of Anna" in *The Death of Psychoanalysis: Murder, Suicide, or Rumor Greatly Exaggerated*, ed. Robert Prince (Northvale, N.J.: Aronson; in press).



to shake their heads at all these curious goings-on.

On the one hand all education, and most forms of psychotherapy, must involve the use of authority for the sake of promoting ultimate self-development. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote about the need to force people to be free. Yet it is also true that with the best of intentions do-gooders can become fanatics, threatening the very individuality they set out to promote. One can ask whether Freud was not encouraging people to go beyond the limits of intrusion which can be morally justified.

From today's perspective it appears at best as naive for Freud and his followers to allow themselves to get involved with so many human dilemmas which are apt to resemble so many cans of worms. In our own time physicians, using the most advanced psychopharmacological drugs, are fully capable of acting in a highly authoritarian fashion. The old adage that power corrupts, and that absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely, is worth remembering in the context of all psychotherapy.

Freud inspired a messianic spirit so that common sense cautions were often thrown to the winds. Freud wrote Ferenczi in 1913: "We are in possession of the truth: I am as convinced of that as I was fifteen years ago²³." Critics of Freud had all along been expressing sound and respectful reservations about his approach²⁴. But Freud's worst enemies earlier in this century cannot have imagined what went on between Freud, Elma, and Ferenczi. It is all the more striking that Freud thought of himself as primarily a scientist rather than the leader of a new political and religious cause.

As Freud wrote in 1910 to Oskar Pfister:

discretion is incompatible with a satisfactory description of an analysis; to provide the latter one would have to be unscrupulous, give away, betray, behave like an artist who buys paint with his wife's house-keeping money or uses the furniture as fire-wood to warm the studio for his model. Without a trace of that kind of unscrupulousness the job cannot be done²⁵.

If Freud erred, it was a result of his outgoingness, and it is possible to attribute to him the best of motives. But then even if it can be a relief to find out

23 . *The Correspondence of Freud and Ferenczi*, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 483.

24 . Cf. Paul Roazen, "Review of Kiell, *Freud Without Hindsight*" *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, April 1990.

25 . Sigmund Freud, *Psychoanalysis and Faith: Dialogues with the Rev. Oskar Pfister*, ed. Heinrich Meng and Ernst L. Freud (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1963), p. 38.



and the continuing literature about its development, controversies, and crises show no sign of slowing down,

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that Freud was by no means as cold and neutral as his formal recommendations to beginning analysts could imply, he could drop people arbitrarily. In Ferenczi's case the final falling out between the men came over the issue of therapeutic technique. It might seem ironic now that Freud could chastise Ferenczi in 1931 over new technical devices: "either you relate this or you conceal it. The latter, as you may well think, is dishonorable. What one does in one's technique one has to defend openly. Besides, both ways soon come together. Even if you don't say so yourself it will soon get known, just as I knew it before you told me"²⁶.

Although psychoanalysis is now over a hundred years old, it may well seem time that we once again try to evaluate in what Freud's achievement consists. A sober assessment of what he accomplished may make less acceptable the kind of shallow assaults on Freud which have become so fashionable lately. Freud can well have been wrong about many central issues, but the fact that it has taken this long to establish his errors should be a tribute to the vitality of his system of thought.

Whatever the merits of Freud's concepts may be, there was an enduringly attractive feature to these people to the extent to which they found human meaning in their mutual devotion to the "cause" of psychoanalysis. Their shared militant commitment, amounting to a religious kind of devotion, meant an immense amount of self-scrutiny and soul-searching. If despite everything Freud and his followers were still capable of self-deception, especially in the name of science, that lends support to Freud's principle that we are all inevitably caught up in the power of unconscious forces.

Any lessons that can be drawn from Elma Palos's story should include a tolerant understanding of the hearts of the various people who were involved. It should be a Freudian truism that psychoanalysis will deserve to thrive the more honestly (if? when?) we are able to confront its past. Yet Immanuel Kant long ago insisted on the key moral principle that people be used as ends, not means, a standard which psychotherapists might make more use of. It will be clear why it has been impossible for me to follow Elma's 1967 injunction that I forget the "Laurvik incident," as it appears now to be becoming a secure part of the early history of psychoanalysis²⁷.

26. Quoted in Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. III (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1957), pp. 163-64.

27. Cf. Emmanuel Berman, "Review Essay: *The Ferenczi Renaissance*," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, Vol. 6 (1996), pp. 391-411; John Forrester, *Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and Its Passions* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 44-106.

