



Frieda Fromm-Reichmann and the Heidelberg „Thorapeutikum”

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In the following remarks I will do my best to evoke the life and work of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann for you. In particular, I will be focusing on the period she spent in Heidelberg (from 1924 to 1933) during which time she was to become an important personal influence on Erich Fromm.

Naturally everybody thinks of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann as the psychoanalyst installed at Chestnut Lodge, from where she treated schizophrenic patients 20 years long. We think of her as the author of numerous articles and a full-length book where she evaluated her clinical experiences. She was also to become known to an enlarged public through Hanna Green's autobiographical novel. But though her name frequently finds mention in the relevant subject literature, one looks largely in vain for any attention to any ideas or an analytic approach of her own. Even if it is true that she did not herself develop her own theoretical position, but rather took over the neo-analytic conceptions of Erich Fromm, her life's work would in no sense reduce to taking a passive intellectual role for she developed a multitude of promising leads and insights for gaining a better understanding of a multitude of clinical problems connected with the treatment of schizophrenia.

However little attention Frieda Fromm-Reichmann's later publications in her American years were to attract, it was the fate of the many articles that flowed from her pen in the

years before 1933 to have as good as completely passé sous silence. The same applies to her Heidelberg sanatorium, which she ran along the lines of a special therapeutic concept of her own devising (though, characteristically, it was never given the benefit of an explicit theoretical formulation). An attempt was made to effect and live out an amalgamation of Orthodox Judaism and psychoanalysis an amalgamation which for both Erich Fromm and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann culminated in a personal emancipation from religious ties and a theoretical contribution to the psychoanalytic critique of religion.

When Frieda Fromm-Reichmann came to Heidelberg in 1924 she was 35 years old. It was her intention to open a sanatorium there which was no easy task, given the stiff professional qualifications required on the neurological, psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytical levels. While acquiring these qualifications she had managed to remain a practising Jewess and an ardent Zionist. Between these two poles gravitation towards psychoanalysis and adherence to her religious roots the brief history of the sanatorium was to unfold, whose story it is my purpose to tell you here.

But first we must go back a little and look at the important waystations of her professional career. Frieda Fromm-Reichmann whose 100th anniversary incidentally was last year grew up in Königsberg in an upper-middle class milieu as the eldest of three daughters of Jewish Orthodox parents.



She belonged to the pioneer generation of women at the beginning of the century who successfully fought for the right to be admitted to medical school. She completed her studies in 1914 by writing a dissertation under the supervision of Kurt Goldstein on disturbances of the pupillae in patients suffering from dementia praecox.

During the First World War Königsberg was not far from the front. Though the women and children were for the most part evacuated, Frieda Reichmann stayed on to care for the war wounded. She specialized in treating gunshot-induced lesions to the central and peripheral areas of the nervous system and their aftermath in behavioral disorders it goes without saying this kind of injury occurred on a well-nigh epidemic scale among the wounded coming from the front. She even headed a neurological ward in a Prussian military hospital, though only in an unofficial capacity. Her exceptional qualifications and the outstanding work she performed made all concerned from the grateful patients up turn a blind eye to the fact that she was a woman. The extensive experience she gained during the war in treating brain lesions was instrumental in helping her to a position as Goldstein's assistant at the Institute for the Study of Brain Damage Aftereffects that had been newly set up at the University of Frankfurt under Goldstein's direction.

Already by 1920 she had published several papers on this complex of medical problems in which she laid stress not merely on the immediate medical aspects but also on the necessity of providing full remedial and rehabilitative care and attention if a recovery from brain damage is to be made and lasting impairment avoided. In addition, she developed a plan for establishing a special military hospital for brain-damaged soldiers. Here she was especially concerned to develop a body of practical guidelines for nursing patients back to health.

All this testifies to her strong social engagement. One might be forgiven for speculating that her professional success had somewhat closed her eyes to looking at the social background of the war in a critical light or, for that matter, the existential contradictions inherent in her own position. At any event, we have no re-

corded utterances at the time of a socially critical nature. But it is safe to say that her gravitation towards psychoanalysis after 1920 and her increasing openness in later years to the social critique mounted by the Frankfurt School can only be fully understood against the background of these early professional experiences.

Until 1920 there are no signs of any personal receptivity to psychoanalysis nor of a critical coming-to-terms with its doctrines, although we know that Goldstein himself was favorably inclined to this new approach. If Goldstein stopped short of becoming an active proponent, nevertheless a few years later he belonged to the inner circle of the „General Medical Society of Psychotherapy” where the doctrines of psychoanalysis were seriously debated.

Frieda Reichmann first turned to psychotherapy whose most competent representative she considered to be I.H. Schulz. With Goldstein's help, she was able to secure a temporary position in Lahmann's sanatorium „The White Deer” in Dresden which Schultz had just taken over. Though she had originally planned to stay only for a couple of months to familiarize herself with therapeutic techniques, she was to remain in Dresden for no less than three years. It is at this time that she first turned to making a serious study of psychoanalysis; at this time she also got to know Erich Fromm through mutual friends and through their common engagement in the Zionist Youth Association.

In 1921 both Schultz and Frieda Reichmann considered the psychopathology of a large number of neuroses to be so simply structured that it was „scientifically uninteresting and useless from a practical point of view” to „approach them with the whole package of psychoanalytic methods”. However, as Hitchmann laconically observed, the wish was probably the father of the thought here.

A year later things had progressed far enough for both Frieda Reichmann and Schultz to be able to recommend psychoanalytic treatment as one possible way of treating bronchial asthma. By 1923 she was ready to read a paper before the annual conference of the German Association of Psychology in which she analyzed the sociology of neurosis. Though this paper certainly testifies to her knowledge of the litera-



ture, her final conclusions are formulated in rather general terms: „[neurosis] constitutes an extremely contagious and fashionable ailment of our times, which should be recognized as the scourge it is; it is a social menace which has the highest claim on the attention of doctors and research workers”.

During the winter semester of 1922/23 she sat in on lectures by Kraepelin in Munich; at the same time, she underwent psychoanalysis with Wittenberg who, at that time, was the only Freudian resident in Munich.

In 1923 she underwent a trainee analysis with Hans Sachs in Berlin in order to deepen her understanding of the therapist's own role. Erich Fromm, who also underwent an analysis with Sachs, was later to speak negatively of him though it is by no means easy to know what significance to attach to this in Fromm's own development, let alone in that of Frieda Reichmann. One may perhaps risk the conjecture that the topic of religion might have played some role or other in the trainee analyses of both Fromm and Frieda Reichmann and, if so, that this might have been a seed that was to bear fruit in the coming years. But this is little more than speculation.

Little is known about the religious and political development of Frieda Reichmann. We know that her father, Adolf Reichmann, belonged to the committee of the Neo-Orthodox synagogue in Königsberg; furthermore, that he was active in the „Committee for Aiding Jews in Transit through Königsberg” that had been set up by the Königsberg Jewish community to help co-religionists fleeing the Russian pogroms.

Frieda Reichmann's strict adherence to her ancestral religion was once the subject of Goldstein's amused irony when even as late as the early twenties she refused to take notes during Saturday seminars he spoke of a remarkable case of periodically recurring agraphy!

I.H. Schultz found that he had on his hands „a burningly sincere Zionist ready and willing to make sacrifices” for the cause. That her commitment to the Zionist cause found a tolerant reception at „The White Deer” may have been not unimportant in her decision to prolong her stay there longer than originally planned. In ad-

dition, she found an outlet there for her active sense of mission in the form of mobilizing social help on behalf of the poor members of the „Blue and White” movement. It is more than possible (though we do not know for sure) that she was one of those responsible for setting up a local group of the Zionist Association in Dresden in the early twenties.

Erich Fromm for his part was also a member of the Zionist Youth Association. In addition, he frequented a circle of mainly younger Jews that congregated around Rabbi Nobel, to which such notables as Kracauer, Löwenthal and Simon also belonged. Through their protestations of enthusiasm for Eastern European Jewish culture, they found a way of expressing their sense of profound alienation from their own liberal, assimilated family backgrounds.

In the face of grave difficulties brought about by the severe monetary inflation, Frieda Reichmann nonetheless succeeded in 1924 in opening her sanatorium at No. 15 Mönchhofstrasse in Heidelberg.

There was room for approx. full-time 15 patients, with some provision for temporary guests and outpatients. The intention was for all patients to be given the benefit of a full psychoanalysis. At the same time, it was planned to adhere strictly to Jewish Orthodox practice.

The stated goal of the sanatorium was reinforcing and generally raising patients' consciousness of their Jewish identity by blending together psychoanalysis and a religious lifestyle. Leo Löwenthal recalls: „The sanatorium was a kind of boarding house and hotel that was both Jewish and psychoanalytic at one and the same time. An almost cult-like atmosphere prevailed there. Each of the inmates, myself included, was analyzed by Frieda Reichmann. The sanatorium was run along Jewish lines: only kosher food was eaten and all Jewish holidays were kept, for example. The aim was to combine a religious Jewish atmosphere with a deep interest in psychoanalysis.”

The so-called „Thorapeutikum”, as it was promptly dubbed by Von Witzbolden (and which we might perhaps risk translating into English as „Torah-therapy Center”) soon came to exercise a considerable fascination on many of the intellectuals associated with the Free Jew-



ish „Lehrhaus“, one of them being Erich Fromm. However, as the Jewish religious historian G. Scholem with a touch of bitterness, it was not long before „with a single exception they had all analyzed away their Judaism“.

Frieda Reichmann was disappointed too, but for quite the opposite reason. The rabbis were attracted by the idea of a kosher lifestyle, and certainly came along. However, nothing would induce them to undergo analysis.

The sanatorium never managed to resolve the manifest conflict potential contained in remaining true to Jewish religious precepts while simultaneously attempting to incorporate psychoanalytic insights into the lives of the inmates. Not surprising, it finally foundered in 1928 after getting into financial difficulties.

For her part Frieda Reichmann along with Erich Fromm, whom she married in 1926 went through a process of inner transformation in the course of which, prompted by new psychoanalytic insights, she discarded her religious belief. The step that evidently took up the greatest amount of self-overcoming was giving up observing the ritual food laws. She noticed that this was not restricted to her alone, for several of her patients also found this step particularly hard to take.

Characteristically, she made her experiences here the object of a scientific study, the results of which were presented in a paper read before the Berlin Institute of Psychoanalysis to qualify for membership of this body.

Extending certain leads developed by Freud, Abraham and Rank in a novel new methodical and substantive direction, she proceeded to interpret the prohibition on mixing milk and meat as symbolizing the incest taboo. She backed up this foray into what she believed was previously uncharted territory by presenting two cases studies where abandoning the observance of the ritual food prohibitions had led to an eruption of sex drive activity in patients.

This paper represented a milestone in the development of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann. Though it certainly got a wide airing in analytic circles, the final verdict seems to have been that it was not as original as all that. On a substantive level, the analysis of religion as a complex of compulsive activity patterns designed to ward

off tabooed drives was certainly no novelty, though the fill of new details was doubtless of great interest. Her onesided methodological orientation to Freud's approach e.g. the assumption of a point-for-point parallel between phylogeny and ontogeny was inevitably calculated to raise more than a few critical eyebrows in the high citadels of the more Marxistically minded psychoanalysts. Who knows, she might have even found it hard to rebut charges from the likes of Karen Horney that she had, in her unreflecting critical innocence, managed to completely overlook the specifically female form of the Oedipus Complex despite the fact that one of her case studies in fact concerned a woman. It is possible that the Berlin-based psychoanalysts considered such reckoning-up with their ancestral belief on the part of Orthodox Jews as already being something of an anachronistic leftover. Whatever the exact reasons may have been, the general verdict on the „Thorapeutikum“ was that the work done there possessed little or no theoretical or practical interest.

Her analytically induced severance from traditional religious belief patterns marked for Frieda Fromm-Reichmann the beginning of a new phase characterized by new claims on her interests and energies. In the coming years, she was to find new outlets both in private practice and in her ties with the Frankfurt Institute of Psychoanalysis.

In none of her subsequent publications did Frieda Fromm-Reichmann ever refer to her time in Heidelberg. She gave her full and undivided attention to her chosen new field, the treatment of schizophrenia. The veil of silence she chose to drop over this brief attempt to forge a lived-out synthesis between Orthodox Judaism and psychoanalysis may perhaps be explained by the fact that from a later vantage point the whole episode seemed to be quite misbegotten and indeed invested with a slight touch of the ludicrous.

The path of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann's flight from the Nazis led from Alsace-Lorraine to Washington not directly though but via Palestine, where the formerly ardent Zionist found little to detain to detain her there. As with so many of the Survivors of the ensuing destruction of European Jewry, she too was pursued to the



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end of her life by strong feelings of guilt. One can only hope that her aspirations voiced during her flight found a measure of fulfillment in her new homeland: „Somewhere there will be a

sphere of activity waiting for me. Somewhere I will find the inner tranquillity out of which the longings of the heart can be given a productive outlet.”