

**FRESH OLD NEWS FROM FERENCZI ABOUT THE FUNCTION  
OF DREAMS: THE DREAM AS A KUR,  
AS A TREATMENT, AND AS A GYÓGYÁSZAT.**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article discusses a text on the function of dreams and their relation to trauma. Ferenczi intended to present this material as a talk at the 12th International Congress of Psychoanalysis, which was to take place in Interlaken, Switzerland the same year that he wrote it (1931). The entire conference, however, was postponed, and parts of this communication's content appeared in other texts in which Ferenczi rethinks the concept of trauma and its clinical significance. In the present article, the author makes use of the Freud/Ferenczi correspondence to contextualize Freud's Hungarian follower's originality regarding his theorizations about different aspects of the function of dreams. In the 1931 speech, as well as in this article, Ferenczi used a patient's dream work as a clinical example of a process in which traumatic experiences and unmastered sensory impressions can be repeated to achieve a better working-through for the dreamer. The process Ferenczi describes resembles an effort of self-treatment, of self-Kur.

**Keywords:** dreams, metapsychology, history of psychoanalysis, reconstruction.

**RESUMEN**

Este artículo analiza un texto sobre la función de los sueños y su relación con el trauma. Ferenczi pensaba presentar este material como conferencia en el 12° Congreso Internacional de Psicoanálisis, que iba a tener lugar en Interlaken, Suiza, en el mismo año en que él escribió el ensayo (1931). Sin embargo, el congreso fue pospuesto, y partes del contenido de esta presentación aparecieron en otros textos en los que Ferenczi repiensa el concepto de trauma y su importancia clínica. En el presente artículo, el autor utiliza la correspondencia Freud/Ferenczi para contextualizar la originalidad del seguidor húngaro de Freud en lo que respecta a sus teorizaciones sobre distintos aspectos de la función de los sueños. En la conferencia de 1931, así como en este ensayo, Ferenczi utilizó el trabajo del sueño de un paciente como ejemplo clínico de un proceso en el cual las experiencias traumáticas y las impresiones sensoriales no elaboradas pueden repetirse para que él o la soñante pueda elaborarlas mejor. El proceso que describe Ferenczi se parece a un intento de autotratamiento o auto-Kur.

**Palabras clave:** sueños, metapsicología, historia del psicoanálisis, reconstrucción.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

Neue alte Neuigkeiten von Ferenczi über die Funktion der Träume: Der Traum als eine Kur, als Behandlung und als Gyógyászat (Heilkunde). In diesem Aufsatz wird ein Text über die Funktion von Träumen und ihre Verbindung zum Trauma diskutiert. Ferenczi hatte die Absicht, dieses Material in einer Rede beim 12. Internationalen Kongress für Psychoanalyse vorzustellen, der in Interlaken in der Schweiz im gleichen Jahr (1931) stattfinden sollte, in dem er diesen Text geschrieben hatte. Die gesamte Konferenz wurde jedoch verschoben, und Teile des Inhalts seiner Mitteilung erschienen in anderen Texten, in denen Ferenczi das Konzept des Traumas und seiner klinischen Bedeutung überdachte. Im vorliegenden Artikel nutzt der Autor die Korrespondenz zwischen Freud und Ferenczi, um die Originalität von Freuds ungarischem

Anhänger hinsichtlich seiner Theoretisierung zu verschiedenen Aspekten der Funktion des Traums in einen Zusammenhang zu stellen. In seiner Rede von 1931 benutzt Ferenczi die Traumarbeit eines Patienten als klinisches Beispiel für einen Prozess, in dem traumatische Erfahrungen und unbewältigte Sinneseindrücke wiederholt werden können, um ein besseres Durcharbeiten für den Träumer zu erreichen. Diese Traumarbeit ist auch Gegenstand dieses Aufsatzes. Der von Ferenczi beschriebene Prozess erinnert an einen Versuch der Selbstbehandlung oder Selbst-Kur.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Träume, Metapsychologie, Geschichte der Psychoanalyse, Rekonstruktion

## RÉSUMÉ

Nouvelles perspectives sur la fonction des rêves chez Ferenczi : le rêve comme Kur, comme traitement et comme Gyógyászat. L'auteur de cet article discute d'un texte de Ferenczi sur la fonction des rêves dans leur rapport au trauma. Ferenczi avait eu l'intention de présenter ce matériel sous la forme d'une conférence lors du 12ème Congrès de psychanalyse qui devait avoir lieu à Interlaken, en Suisse, en 1931, l'année même où il écrivit son texte. Cependant, cette conférence fut reportée et certaines parties du contenu de sa communication parurent dans d'autres textes où Ferenczi reprit le concept de trauma et sa signification clinique. L'auteur du présent article se base sur la correspondance Freud/Ferenczi pour contextualiser l'originalité des conceptions théoriques du disciple hongrois de Freud en matière des différents aspects de la fonction des rêves. Dans le texte de sa conférence de 1931, comme dans celui de son article, Ferenczi utilise le rêve d'un patient comme exemple clinique d'un processus où la répétition d'expériences traumatiques et d'impressions sensorielles non maîtrisées est, chez le rêveur, mise au service d'une meilleure perlaboration. Le processus décrit par Ferenczi ressemble à une tentative d'auto-guérison, d'auto-Kur.

**Mots-clés :** rêves, métapsychologie, histoire de la psychanalyse, reconstruction.

## RIASSUNTO

Nuove notizie dal 'vecchio' Ferenczi sulla funzione dei sogni: Il sogno come Kur, come trattamento e come Gyógyászat. Questo lavoro esamina un testo sulla funzione dei sogni e del loro ruolo nel contesto del trauma. Ferenczi aveva intenzione di presentare questo materiale al dodicesimo congresso internazionale di psicoanalisi, che avrebbe dovuto aver luogo a Interlaken, in Svizzera, lo stesso anno in cui egli scrisse il testo (1931). Il congresso fu poi posticipato, e Ferenczi espose parti del suo discorso in altri testi, nei quali riconsidera il concetto di trauma e il suo significato clinico. Nel presente lavoro, l'autore ricorre al carteggio fra Freud e Ferenczi per contestualizzare l'originalità di questo seguace di Freud per quanto riguarda le sue teorizzazioni sui diversi aspetti della funzione del sogno. Nel discorso del 1931, Ferenczi presenta il lavoro del sogno di un paziente (riportato in questo articolo), come esempio clinico di un processo in cui esperienze traumatiche e impressioni sensoriali non rappresentate verrebbero ripetute dal sognatore per ottenere una migliore elaborazione. Il processo descritto da Ferenczi si accomuna al lavoro di auto-cura o auto-Kur.

**Parole chiave:** sogni, metapsicologia, storia della psicoanalisi, ricostruzione

## Letters Up and Down the Danube<sup>2</sup>

Between May 11 and 12, 1931, the Wien Kreditanstalt Bank declared bankruptcy, and a good part of the IPA's funds was lost. Other financial institutions suffered the same fate, and from July 12 to August 5, all German banks were closed. The Berlin Psychoanalytic Society and its polyclinic declared bankruptcy and threatened to close their doors. An appeal for funds was made to all members of the Psychoanalytic Association (Stanton, 1990, p. 46). Germany's political situation and the rise of National Socialism complicated the problem that had emerged at the beginning of that decade. On the strange stage that Central Europe had set in 1931, some letters sent up and down the Danube dealt with matters that were neither political nor economic —one of which was the 12th International Congress of Psychoanalysis set to take place in Interlaken, Switzerland, during September (Fortune, 2002, p. 104, n. 4).

From Budapest, Ferenczi wrote to his friend and analyst about what he planned to present at the congress. He would give two talks, both of which were to be thought of as “preliminary communications.” The second speech’s title was “A possible extension of our metapsychological world of ideas”. In it, Ferenczi suggested, in a synthetic form, that, thanks to analysts’ experience with neurotic patients, the mechanism for repression can be inferred and made universal as a psychic reality. Similarly, other mechanisms could be inferred through the experience of psychoanalysts with psychotics and trauma victims. We shall have nothing more to say about this paper even though its addressee thought highly of it. We are, instead, interested in the other speech, whose title was “Does the dream have a second function?” In a letter dated May 31, 1931, Ferenczi summed it up as follows:

Supported by experiences with deep relaxation during the analyses, whereby traumatic experiences tend to repetition, as well as by the analysis of dreams in general, one arrives at the supposition that sleep state and dream seek to unburden the psychic system also by re-experiencing traumatic day’s and life’s residues, thus revealing something about the nature of traumatic-neurotic dream processes. (Brabant and Falzeder, 2000, p. 412)

We can imagine Freud holding the letter in his hands, reading it, and then getting a piece of paper to answer it. He then writes to his *Dear friend*:

Thanks for your many interesting reports, not the least for the excerpts from your congress lecture. *The so-called second function of dreams is certainly its first (mastery, see Beyond the Pleasure Principle)!* Your second piece is of that characteristic, which is so inestimable to me, which I respect so very much, like your theory of genitality. (Brabant and Falzeder, 2000, p. 413, my italics)<sup>3</sup>

We shall soon address the text Freud mentions (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Before that, however, it is worth our while to continue considering those letters that traveled up and down the Danube. In Ferenczi’s response to Freud’s comments, we can see that his intention was rather more ambitious than what one might gather from his first letter. On June 14, he wrote back to the *Dear Professor*:

Of course, I know only too well that the function of the dream which I emphasized is the same one that you described and explained in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as being characteristic of the dreams of traumatics. But my experiences press me to emphasize this point of view more strongly than is the case in your *Interpretation of Dreams*. In other words, I would like to generalize somewhat the point of view of mastery of trauma in sleep and dream. (Brabant and Falzeder, 2000, p. 414)

Along with the letter, Ferenczi included a message for Max Eitingon, who was in charge of organizing the conference. In this message, Ferenczi also talks about the two speeches he intended to give in Interlaken, but he changed the title of the first one. Its core issue was no longer a second function of dreams (Freud himself had called it the first one). It was now called ‘*Sleep Relaxation and Traumatic Reproduction Tendency*’ (Brabant and Falzeder, 2000, p. 416).

Two questions come to the fore immediately, even before we can get a glimpse of what might have been said in the speech Ferenczi planned to give. The first question has to do with the letter Freud wrote to comment on his Hungarian disciple’s work. He says: “The so-called second function of dreams is certainly its first (mastery, see *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*)!” But are not dreams merely ‘wish fulfillment’ and nothing more? They were, and continued to be such until 1920, when Freud wrote the piece to which he refers in his letter to Ferenczi. One must look closely at the parts of the text to which Freud seems to be referring as a whole:

It is impossible to classify as wish-fulfillments the dreams we have been discussing which occur in traumatic neuroses, or the dreams during psychoanalyses which bring to memory the psychological traumas of childhood. They arise, rather, in obedience to the compulsion to repeat, though it is true that in analysis that compulsion is supported by the wish (which is encouraged by 'suggestion') to conjure up what has been forgotten and repressed. Thus it would seem that the function of dreams, which consists in setting aside any motives that might interrupt sleep, by fulfilling the wishes of the disturbing impulses, is not their *original function*. It would not be possible for them to perform that function until the whole of mental life had accepted the dominance of the pleasure principle; it is only consistent to grant that there was also a time before the purpose of dreams was the fulfillment of wishes. This would imply no denial of their later function. But if once this general rule has been broken, a further question arises. May not dreams which, with a view to the psychological binding of traumatic impressions, obey the compulsion to repeat—may not such dreams occur outside analysis as well? And the reply can only be a decided affirmative. (Freud, 1920, p. 32–33)

The first question has an answer: dreams are not merely wish fulfillment and nothing more. Beyond that, in Freud (1920) there is a 'tendency for dreams to realize wishes.' Freud readily affirms that such a tendency is not contradicted by the existence of a more primitive function in dreams. But he clearly points toward this function's importance, which would be earlier and which one can readily see in traumatic neurotic dreams. And this brings us to the second question that this exchange of letters gives rise to: what would be the 'mastery' function Freud mentions and with which Ferenczi claims to be familiar? A few pages before the excerpt we have just read, Freud answers that question. He was addressing trauma and other phenomena that would run contrary to the pleasure principle when he asserted:

Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure. At the same time, the pleasure principle is for the moment put out of action. There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead—the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychological sense, so that they can be disposed of. (Freud, 1920, p. 29–30).

That "other problem" that a traumatic event brings forth is the need to bind the quantity of the stimulus psychologically. When this task is required, another function seems to come into play. A final quote from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is worth examining since he proposes that we should:

make a sharper distinction than we have hitherto made between function and tendency. The pleasure principle, then, is a tendency operating in the service of a function whose business it is to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation or to keep the amount of excitation in it constant or to keep it as low as possible. (Freud, 1920, p. 62)

## THE LETTERS AND THE DETAILS

In Freud's and Ferenczi's letters and in our quotations from Freud (1920), the psychic apparatus seems to have the following functions: (a) to master the quantity of stimuli; to bind that quantity psychologically so that the excitation in the apparatus stays constant, and (b) whenever possible, it obeys the pleasure principle's obligatory tendency as a means to free itself from this excitation.<sup>4</sup> And based on these passages, we can suppose that, when the pleasure principle is prominent, we tend to see wish fulfillment in dreams. When this prominence must be let go of, the task is now to master these stimuli, that is, to bind them psychologically.

Since Freud was correct in his commentary on his disciple's speech ("The so-called second function is certainly ..."), we cannot ignore the details that take us to Ferenczi's last words on this subject in his letter of June 14: "I would like to generalize somewhat the point of view of mastery of trauma in sleep and dream" (Brabant and Falzeder, 2000, p. 414). Generalize? More than Freud had generalized in 1920? Yes and yes. And this is

because ultimately dreams are always wish fulfillments – except when they are not, or when they are more than that. And Ferenczi, who for some years had been seeing trauma as the “royal road” to understanding mental functioning’s several manifestations, would eventually dovetail his studies of dreams with his understanding of psychic trauma. And this is what appeared in the talk he would have given in 1931.

It would have appeared had not circumstances in Europe precluded this meeting, which was postponed to the following year. What Ferenczi failed to tell Freud was anything about what he had written toward the end of March 1931 –before he had composed any letter about what he planned to say at Interlaken. A good part of the speech on dreams had already been written.

We shall now focus on that talk Ferenczi never delivered. But before discussing it, we must establish why it is worthwhile to delve into a short text written in a few days in the spring of 1931. This sort of historical research in psychoanalysis can often uncover, out of the past, theoretical deliberations that are still fresh in our minds. These deliberations are both familiar to us and they surprise us. Their familiarity comes from the work of authors who (*directly* or *indirectly*) drank from Ferenczian wells. For Freud, at a given time (when Ferenczi was the only psychoanalyst in Hungary), those wells outweighed “a whole society” (Freud, 1914b, p. 33). Some of those authors developed and deepened Ferenczi’s ideas: Sullivan (1953), Balint (1968), and Abraham and Török (1992). Others put them into context: Frankel (1998), Haynal (2002), and Mészáros (2010). Still others broadened his ideas: Winnicott (1996 [1971]), Janin (2004), and Sklar (2011). What surprises us, on the other hand, comes from several sources. Our surprise begins with Freud’s reaction to what Ferenczi had sent him concerning his speech. We are surprised by Ferenczi’s audacity in 1931 (let us not forget) when he proposed something totally different from what up to that point had been embraced by all his colleagues. And greatly surprised too by the clinical resonance that Ferenczi’s ideas, which he outlined in very few pages, still have today. The same can be said about the work of other authors and of other texts. When we look back on our intellectual history and people’s theories, our patients and our clinical practice acquire angles that are more or less acute and more or less sensitive to the analytic experience.

According to Bollas, “Freud tolerated Ferenczi’s shocking examples and clinical inventions because he surely sensed that either Ferenczi was seeing patients he had not seen before or, more likely, that Ferenczi was seeing what Freud could not allow himself to experience and therefore to see” (2011, p. xv). Today perhaps it may no longer be necessary to tolerate all this; on the contrary, we can experience, along with Ferenczi, a fresh reading of an 80-year-old text.

When we re-examine Freud’s and Ferenczi’s correspondence and the latter’s text as new material, as old novelties, New’s words in his introduction to Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* are telling, from the point of view I have adopted in this article: “an awareness that one is building on the work of others, named or unnamed, is paramount” (New, 2003, p. xxxvi). Let us now proceed to the speech.

## FERENCZI’S DREAM SPEECH

### 1.-

Ferenczi died in 1933, and his speech on dreams was delivered posthumously the year after, at the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Association. It was first published in *Gyógyászat*, a Hungarian medical journal, as ‘Trauma in psychoanalysis’. It first appeared in English in the *Indian Journal of Psychology* as ‘On the revision of *The Interpretation of Dreams*’ (Rachman, 1997, p. 231, n. 1, p. 348), and it was included among the ‘Notes and Fragments’ in Balint’s translation and edition of Ferenczi’s works (Ferenczi, 2002 [1931], p. 238–43).

This is a short text that begins by affirming that the recurrence of day residue in dreams is, in itself, one of dreams’ functions. That is, day residue is not just transformed and used by the function of wish fulfillment in dreams. Had this conference in Switzerland taken place, Ferenczi would have defended the notion that ‘day’s and life’s residues’, as a totality appearing in dreams, are repetitive symptoms of trauma. He maintains:

As is known, the repetition tendency fulfills in itself a useful function in the traumatic neuroses; it endeavors to bring about a better (and if possible a final) solution than was possible at the time of the

original shock. This tendency is to be assumed even where no solution results, i.e. where the repetition does not lead to a better result than in the original trauma. (Ferenczi, 2002 [1931], p. 238)

Freud (1920) argues that children, for example, repeat unpleasant experiences in their play because “they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively.” He adds: “Each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of” (p. 35). We can, thus, find similarities between Freud (1920) and Ferenczi’s 1931 would-be speech. In the latter case, Ferenczi addresses the compulsion to repeat usefulness in traumatic neuroses. In the former, Freud discusses how the repetition of unpleasant impressions seeks to control the original situation better –it is an attempt to go beyond passivity. What people seek in repetition comes out in what both Freud and Ferenczi wrote, that is, a ‘better solution’ for the traumatic experience these people endured passively. But Ferenczi provided a curious bit of information, that is, that repetition in search of a more favorable solution should be assumed even in cases in which the result of such repetition is no better than the original experience. That is, if we take children’s play as an example, even when one attempts to deal with a particularly strong impression in play, one can have another unpleasant experience – even though one is striving for a different outcome. What needs to be emphasized is that there is a tendency toward finding a better solution, even in the reliving of situations that cause unpleasure again. Said another way, what both authors are making explicit to a greater or lesser extent is what Freud called the “synthetic activity of the ego” (Brabant and Falzeder, 2000, p. 399), or “the never resting tendency to unification in mental life” as Ferenczi called it (Brabant and Falzeder, 2000, p. 400).

Ferenczi (2002 [1931]) goes on to say:

Thus instead of ‘the dream is a wish-fulfillment’ a more complete definition of the dream function would be: every dream, even an unpleasurable one, is an attempt at a better mastery and settling of traumatic experiences, so to speak, in the sense of an *esprit d’escalier* which is made easier in most dreams because of the diminution of the critical faculty and the predominance of the pleasure principle. (p. 238)

That is, we are back to the earlier and more primitive function from which the pleasure principle derives –namely, ‘mastery’ that within the psychic apparatus attempts to make the excitation constant. But, as far as Freud was concerned, we can see this principle’s functioning most specifically in extreme traumas. And this function is not so strong in relation to less traumatic situations, in relation to our everyday perceptions of stimuli. On the other hand, according to Ferenczi, “Day’s and life’s residues are *accordingly mental impressions, liable to be repeated, undischarged and unmastered ...*” (2002 [1931], p. 239, my italics).

Ferenczi was theorizing on the principle that lay beyond the pleasure principle and how it appears in dreams – even in those dreams where wish fulfillment can be clearly demonstrated:

The state of unconsciousness, the state of sleep, favors not only the dominance of the pleasure principle (wish-fulfilling function of the dream), but also the return of unmastered traumatic sensory impressions which struggle for solution (traumatolytic function of the dream). In other words: the repetition tendency of the trauma is greater in sleep than in waking life; consequently in deep sleep it is more likely that deeply hidden, very urgent sensory impressions will return which in the first instance caused deep unconsciousness and thus remained permanently unsolved. (Ferenczi, 2002 [1931], p. 240)

We can consider everyday sensory impressions that have not been mastered or traumatic impressions that have not been mastered. However, the notion that non-mastered lesser everyday sensorial impressions would also emerge in one’s dreams so as to be more securely bonded is a point that Ferenczi brought up but, unfortunately, did not develop. We may conjecture that the day residue that will be chosen and used in dream formation is not done only as a function of its connection or proximity (through condensations, displacements, and plastic representability) to what one wishes for or what one is trying to master. Day residue may emerge in dreams owing to the nature of sensorial impressions that had not been completely

mastered. These conjectures, however, are ours and come from the loose thread that Ferenczi left in his text.<sup>5</sup> His argumentation followed another route: he provides an example of a ‘divided’ dream or of one dream that follows another, each of which has its own unique characteristics.

To understand Ferenczi’s argument we need a description of how he imagined people react to a traumatic shock. He believed that a powerful shock acts as a sort of anesthetic and that one’s first reaction to trauma is a sort of transitory psychosis, a flight from reality. Flights from reality and anesthetics, according to what Ferenczi says in this text, are related to an even deeper unconscious to which one has even less than normal access. In other words, forgotten trauma would be located more deeply in the unconscious, and in normal states of consciousness one rarely has access to these depths. What Ferenczi proposes here is a hypothesis that comes from the work he was doing on extreme relaxation with some of his patients.<sup>6</sup> This extreme relaxation facilitated access to unconscious material that seemed darker. But how can shock act as an anesthetic?

Apparently by inhibiting every kind of mental activity and thereby provoking a state of complete passivity devoid of any resistance. The absolute paralysis of motility includes also the inhibition of perception and (with it) of thinking. The shutting off of perception results in the complete defenselessness of the ego. (Ferenczi, 2002 [1931], p. 239–40)

Up to this point what we have seen is not much different from what we can read in Freud (1920), in his discussion of trauma’s consequences. In addition to its triggering a disturbance in energetic functioning, trauma can override the pleasure principle. And: “There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead – the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can then be disposed of” (Freud, 1920, p. 29–30).

However, Ferenczi would go on to add that, since the overloading of the apparatus creates paralysis and anesthesia, “[a]n impression which is not perceived cannot be warded off” (2002 [1931], p. 240). These are two complementary points of view. According to Freud, trauma causes a disturbance in energy’s function in the apparatus, on top of which it inundates the psyche and overrides the pleasure principle. All that still works is the mastery principle. For Ferenczi, the problem goes beyond this: a flood of excitation paralyzes the receiver apparatus itself, and it can no longer filter anything so as to take in only small quantities of the stimuli:

The results of this complete paralysis are: (1) The course of sensory paralysis becomes and remains permanently interrupted; (2) while the sensory paralysis lasts every mechanical and mental impression is taken up without any resistance; (3) no memory traces of such impressions remain, even in the unconscious, and thus the causes of the trauma cannot be recalled from memory traces. If, in spite of it, one wants to reach them, which logically appears to be almost impossible, then one must repeat the trauma itself and under more favorable conditions one must bring it *for the first time* to perception and motor discharge. (2002 [1931], p. 240)

This means that some traumatic experiences leave no memory traces, they only leave behind traumatic sensory impressions. The therapeutic work that Ferenczi would go on to deem almost impossible entails the event’s piano, pianissimo reconstitution by repeating it in better circumstances so that it can be perceived for the first time, then it can become a memory that can be worked on. We can now try to understand the two dream hypothesis.

## 2.-

Ferenczi saw two sequential dreams in certain patients. These dreams, each in its own way, reproduced the traumatic experience. The first dream, which occurs in ‘almost comatose’ sleeping states, is pure repetition of traumatic sensorial impressions, but with no representation. Ferenczi gives the following example:

[A p]atient to whom the father made advances on several occasions in childhood and also when she reached adult age, for many months brings material that indicates a sexual trauma in her fifth year; yet despite innumerable repetitions in fantasy and in half-dream, this trauma could not be recollected, nor could it be raised to the level of conviction. Many times she wakes up from the first deep sleep ‘as if crushed’ with violent pains in her abdomen, feeling of congestion in her head, and all ‘muscle-wrenched as if after a violent struggle’, with paralyzing exhaustion, etc. (2002 [1931], p. 241)

It is now worthwhile asking: who would take this violent waking up for a dream or for a repetition of some trauma? If we remember the second title Ferenczi indicated for his speech (‘Sleep relaxation and traumatic reproduction tendency’), it will be clear to us that these theoretical considerations would, along with relaxation during sleep, allow more leeway for a ‘repetition tendency’. Ferenczi calls this sort of awakening a “primary dream” and sees it as a “traumatic–neurotic repetition” (p. 241) based on the material that this patient had been bringing into her analysis. Indeed, this material indicates she had suffered some sexual trauma when she was 5 years old, but she had no memory of that episode. During her analytic treatment she addressed this matter, but with little conviction that the event actually occurred. The primary dream, the first part of the divided dream, for that dreamer brought out physical sensations that had no representation to support them, but these physical sensations pointed toward something: the gear wheels were turning during her sleep. Her sensations did not come from nowhere, and Ferenczi’s patient went back to sleep and the gears started turning again.

The second dream, which we shall soon examine, must have contained “an attempt at settling it [the trauma] somehow by oneself, i.e. with the help of attenuations and distortions, consequently in a counterfeited form. Under the condition of an optimistic counterfeit the trauma may be admitted to consciousness” (Ferenczi, 2002 [1931], p. 240–1).

Ferenczi speculates that the dream’s need for censorship is the fruit of a narcissistic division, but in this text he does not call it the super-ego nor does he situate it between the unconscious and preconscious systems, as Freud had done in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900, p. 553). Ferenczi, on the other hand, took this to be a capacity to calculate the ego’s ability to bear the damage caused by the trauma and to take in only those perceptions or parts of the trauma itself that could be tolerated and that could be diminished when necessary through wish fulfillment. To put it another way, the psyche has its own ways of absorbing only those impressions that it knows the apparatus can work on.

But for the time being we must step back. From the very beginning, when we first spoke of the 1931 would-be communication, we have been confronted with a very unusual way of understanding dream work. Ferenczi refers to a ‘repetition tendency of the trauma’ in dreams. This tendency’s objective is to master the impressions inherent in this type of experience, to bind them psychically so the dreamer could try to resolve them in a satisfactory manner. When he introduces what he believes the second dream manages to do, Ferenczi refers to an attempt to resolve the first dream, which is a pure sensorial repetition of the trauma itself, by distortions and attenuations made by the dream work exactly as Freud described in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. And, as we have seen, beyond all this Ferenczi credits the need for censorship with the ability to gauge and protect one’s psychic capacity.

Before getting back to the speaker and his speech, it is necessary for us to outline in a summary fashion what we have been discussing. The first dream would be a repetition of sensations or perceptions that have not been completely mastered, that cannot be represented. The second dream distorts and attenuates the first one and allows something to become conscious; it is an attempt at remembering but with falsification. After the first dream, the second dream entails, then, a sort of working-through or, better yet, dream work.

Thus, the tendency to repeat trauma would use various, albeit minimal, forms of working-through so as to discover a form of ‘recollection’, a means of bringing into consciousness something to which the patient has no access. Patients’ own dreams would function as a sort of self-applied treatment whose objective is to master and resolve traumatic experiences as in an *esprit d’escalier*. Every dream would tend to add something, to facilitate in the mastery of impressions, and, finally, when possible, dreams would somehow bring events experienced as traumatic into consciousness. Rachman (1997, p. 349) maintains that: “[b]y allowing for repetition of the trauma, the dream serves a working-through function.”



Freud, in 1914, used the word *Kur* to mean ‘treatment’. For example, in *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* he says: “The patient will begin his treatment [*Kur*] with a repetition of this kind” (Freud, 1914a, p. 150). Repetition occurs, according to Freud, in place of remembering: “The greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering” (p. 151). Do not the repetitions that Ferenczi refers to follow that pattern? Are they not sensorial repetitions that, in dreams, take the place of remembering the trauma? They do conform to that pattern, but Ferenczi’s hypothesis is that the movement from the first to the second dream is a sort of self-applied *Kur*.<sup>7</sup> This movement is an attempt to work through some sensations and transform them into something more elaborate and with a more definite form.

At any rate, from the first to the second dream we are dealing with an attempt to master impressions, to work them through, to give them some representation and to bring them one way or another into consciousness. And the objective of psychoanalytic technique, according to Freud, is “descriptively speaking: to fill in gaps in memory” (Freud, 1914a, p. 148). Thus, Ferenczi shows us that dreams themselves can work as treatments, as a *Kur* and as a *gyógyászat*.

### 3.-

We should now return to Ferenczi and his text. His example of a ‘secondary dream’ comes from the same patient who would wake up with ‘paralyzing exhaustion’. In broad strokes her dream contained the following:

a small cart is pulled uphill by a long row of horses along a ridge so to speak playfully. To the right and left are precipices; the horses are driven in a certain kind of rhythm. The strength of the horses is not in proportion to the easiness of the task. Strong feelings of pleasure. Sudden change of the scene: a young girl (child?) lies at the bottom of a boat white and almost dead. Above her a huge man oppressing her with his face. Behind them in the boat a second man is standing, somebody well known to her, and the girl is ashamed that this man witnesses the event. The boat is surrounded by enormously high, steep mountains so that nobody can see them from any direction except perhaps from an airplane at an enormous distance. (Ferenczi, 2002 [1931], p. 241–2)

Ferenczi interprets the dream:

The first part of the secondary dream corresponds to a scene partly well known to us, partly reconstructed from other dream material, in which the patient as a child slides upwards astride the body of her father and with childish curiosity makes all sorts of discovery trips in search of the hidden parts of his body, during which both of them enjoy themselves immensely. The scene on the deep lake reproduces the sight of the man unable to control himself, and the thought of what people would say if they knew; finally the feeling of utter helplessness and of being dead. (p. 242)

Thus, we have a scene constructed from what is known about the patient through her associations and from the material in her other dreams: the child explores her father’s body and both father and daughter enjoy the game. Then we have the second scene in which the man is too close for comfort and out of control. The patient projects herself into an extremely helpless, and dead, child –which is how she had felt. There is also present a third unexplained element. Ferenczi gives us no more information about this third element. He says nothing concerning whether or not this element more closely repeats the feelings the patient had had when the trauma occurred, or concerning her later feelings (such as shame) about the trauma.<sup>8</sup>

We should clarify this way of observing dream work somewhat. Ferenczi went on to say that: “The therapeutic aim of the dream analysis is the restoration of direct accessibility to the sensory impressions with the help of a deep trance which regresses, as it were, behind the secondary dream, and brings about the reliving of the events of the trauma in the analysis” (2002 [1931], p. 242). That is, the trance to which

Ferenczi refers became possible owing to the greater liberty he offered his patients. When it was necessary, he let them regress to primitive infantile states of functioning.

In a paragraph Freud added to the 1914 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he discusses three forms of regression: the topographic, the temporal, and the formal. All three would be “one at bottom and occur together as a rule; for what is older in time is more primitive in form and in psychical topography lies nearer to the perceptual end” (1900, p. 548). The patient’s regression during her trance, similar to what happened in her dream(s), must have allowed her a closer view of what was, to use the very term, at the point of perception in her psychic topography. Or, as Ferenczi put it, this was a “re-living of the events of the trauma in the analysis” (2002 [1931], p. 242).

Whereas it was not our original intent to refer to articles Ferenczi wrote after 1931, we will make one exception. This piece (Ferenczi, 2002 [1932/1933]) addresses the notion of trance that interests us exactly, as well as its implications for psychoanalytic technique. For that reason, our quote will be descriptive and, owing to this article’s subject, we shall not discuss it. Concerning regression and what an analyst’s attitude should be when a patient regresses, Ferenczi said the following:

We talk a good deal in analysis of regressions into the infantile, but we do not really believe to what great extent we are right; we talk a lot about the splitting of the personality, but do not seem sufficiently to appreciate the depth of these splits. If we keep up our cool, educational attitude even vis-à-vis an opisthotonic patient, we tear to shreds the last thread that connects him to us. The patient gone off into his trance is a *child indeed* who no longer reacts to intellectual explanations, only perhaps to maternal friendliness; without it, he feels lonely and abandoned in his greatest need, i.e. in the same unbearable situation which at one time led to a splitting of his mind and eventually to his illness; thus it is no wonder that the patient cannot but repeat now the symptom-formation exactly as he did at the time when his illness started. (Ferenczi, 2002 [1932/1933], p. 160)

For regression, he recommends a posture and technique different from what Freud had proposed. But let us return to the posthumous presentation of Ferenczi’s text at the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Association where, by that time, something must have been said about analytic work with dream(s) like those Ferenczi described. Ferenczi maintained that the dream required two analyses: the first one would be done with the patient being awake, the second one during the patient’s trance. The analyst’s activity and contact during this deep trance were of particular importance for Ferenczi (Haynal, 2002). During a patient’s trance, Ferenczi recommended that analysts employ extreme tact so as to keep in contact with their patient:

If the expectations of the patients are not satisfied completely they awake cross or explain to us what we ought to have said or done. The analyst must swallow a good deal and he must learn to renounce his authority as an omniscient being. This second analysis frequently makes use of some images of the dream in order to proceed through them, as it were, into the dimension of depth, i.e. into reality. (2002 [1931], p. 242)

In the speech’s conclusion, we have seen that Ferenczi had effected a change in technique as far as handling and setting are concerned. This had been going on for some time, and it continued, as we have seen in the excerpt from Ferenczi (2002 [1932/1933]). We shall not discuss further on Ferenczi’s changes beyond clarifying the passage above. But a large part of the change in technique will become clearer thanks to the material we have quoted. This material describes the regression and the attitude a psychoanalyst should have when it happens. It was written after Ferenczi wrote his speech on dreams. In order to achieve better therapeutic outcomes, Ferenczi experimented with psychoanalytic technique. Some of the attitudes he criticized most severely in his later writing turned out to be his colleagues’ authoritarianism and coldness *vis-à-vis* their patients. This authoritarianism and coldness were probably the fruit of their reading Freud’s papers on technique without their being aware that these papers had been written to convey ‘recommendations’ and not laws (Ferenczi, 2002 [1928], p. 99; Brabant and Falzeder, 2000, p. 332). Balint summed up Ferenczi’s

(his friend and analyst) clinical practice by claiming that Ferenczi never forgot that psychoanalysis was, in fact, invented by a patient and that a doctor's worth lies precisely in accepting a patient's directions and in wanting to acquire new curative techniques from their patients (cf. Haynal, 2002, p. 49).

Our last quoted section of Ferenczi's speech contains the final problem we must discuss: the deepest dimension is what Ferenczi refers to as reality. This is not a matter of reality in its strictly objective sense. It is, rather, what we call psychic reality, which is largely the fruit of our contact with the outside world. Ferenczi (2002 [1930]) had written that "the first impetus towards abnormal lines of development has always been thought to originate from real psychic traumas and conflicts with the environment" (p. 120). These are real psychic traumata. They are conflicts with the environment, and often they have not been mastered. They are not psychically bound at that point and for that reason cannot always appear in dreams as wish-fulfillment by way of the pleasure principle. They can appear as wish-fulfillment only after dream work that is broader than what Freud describes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In this case, the dream work is, in itself, an attempt at working-through the trauma. It is an attempted *Kur* or, if we were listening to Ferenczi's presentation, it is an attempted *gyógyászat*. The inevitable impression one gets from Ferenczi's theoretic deliberations on trauma and dreams is that he has outlined another psychic movement. In that speech, Ferenczi's issue becomes: repeating, working-through, remembering, working-through. With this, analytic work would entail sustaining and validating that working-through. Later on, the analyst would encourage patients "to feel and to think the traumatically interrupted mental experiences to their very end" (2002 [1931], p. 243).

"To conclude", one can read from Katz's presentation at the 1st Sándor Ferenczi Symposium, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1993, "one last comment" (Katz, 1996, p. 139). A part of Katz's comment is befitting at the end of the present article. The comment considers Freud's *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, which he wrote in 1932 but which came out in 1933. Freud, after briefly discussing dreams in traumatic neuroses, writes that: "a dream is an *attempt* at the fulfillment of a wish" (1933, p. 29). Based on the dialogue between Freud and Ferenczi, Katz asks: "What is the function of dreams?" His answer is the same one we have tried to point to here: "The function of a dream is to cure that trauma. But how?" (1996, p. 140). If we can picture Ferenczi answering that last question, we can hear him saying: repeating, repeating, and repeating one more time until the sensations can acquire traces, until the traces can acquire form, until the forms can be filled with color and then, perhaps, with a few distortions, the trauma itself emerges, discreetly – like the girl hidden in the bottom of a boat.

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*Volver a Artículos sobre Ferenczi*  
*Volver a Newsletter 27-ALSF*

## Notas al final

1.- Traducido al inglés por Arthur Brakel

2.- I would like to thank Isabella Borghesi, Mauro Meiches, Renata Cromberg, Decio Gurfinkel, Nelson Coelho Jr., the colleagues from USP and from the D'Artagnan study group for reading and enriching this paper with their comments

3.- Ferenczi developed his theory of genitality in Thalassa

4.- Owing to this article's restrictions and objectives, this discussion cannot be deeper or broader. At any rate, I have introduced the economic matter because that is the basis for Ferenczi's and Freud's correspondence and for the speech Ferenczi planned to give in 1931.

5.- Cf. Ferraz FC (2011) where the author makes an interesting attempt in establishing a metapsychology of day residue

6.- We shall not delve into this point even though it is worthwhile citing it. In Oxford, at the 11th International Congress of Psychoanalysis, Ferenczi had defended the notion that some modifications in technique would give patients greater liberty. With this liberty his patients achieved deep relaxation similar to hypnotic states. In these instances of extreme regression, fragments of traumatic memories surfaced and could be analytically dealt with (Ferenczi, 2002 [1930]).

7.- When Ferenczi's talk was given in Budapest in 1934, it may not have evoked the German word Kur, but it could have suggested its Hungarian counterpart *gygyszat*, which the attentive reader will remember as the title of the journal in which this text was first published. Kur, in German, means 'treatment', 'cure', and therapy. Freud uses this word, but at other times (e.g. in 'Zur Einteilung der Behandlung' [On beginning of treatment]) Freud uses the word *Behandlung*, which translates as 'treatment' or 'therapy'. In German, as indeed in most languages, it is common to find more than one word with similar meanings. Some are more learned and come from classical languages, in the German case Kur comes from Latin. Other words are more everyday, which is the case with *Behandlung*. *Gyógyászat*, on the other hand, is the Hungarian word for 'therapeutics' (Brabant-Gerç, 1993, p. 41), 'treatment', and 'doctor' (Magay and Kiss, 2008, p. 226). Albeit not being perfect synonyms, these words have similar meaning.

8.- Schneider (1988, p. 217–24) points out that in that masculine duo we see the patient expressing the absence of anyone who could help or save the dreamer from the experience and its irremediable nature.