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## THE PSYCHIC LIFE OF FRAGMENTS: SPLITTING FROM FERENCZI TO KLEIN\*

**Raluca Soreanu<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The present paper starts from the reflection that there is a curious “phenomenological gap” in psychoanalysis when it comes to processes of splitting and to describing the “life” of psychic fragments resulting from processes of splitting. In simpler terms, we are often in a position to lack a precise understanding of what is being split and how the splitting occurs. I argue that although Melanie Klein’s work is often engaged when talking of splitting (particularly through discussions on identification, projection and projective identification), there are some important phenomenological opacities in her construction. I show that by orchestrating a dialogue between Melanie Klein and Sándor Ferenczi, we arrive at a fuller and more substantive conception of psychic splitting and of the psychic life of fragments which are the result of splitting. This is even more meaningful because there are some unacknowledged genealogical connections between Ferenczian concepts and Kleinian concepts, which I here explore. While with Klein we remain in the domain of “good” and “bad” objects—polarised objects which are constantly split and projected—with Ferenczi we are able to also give an account of complicated forms of imitation producing psychic fragments and with a “dark” side of identification, which he calls “identification with the aggressor”. While attempting to take steps toward imagining a dialogue between Klein and Ferenczi, I note a certain silent “Ferenczian turn” in a late text by Melanie Klein, “On the Development of Mental Functioning”, written in 1958. In particular, I reflect on her reference to some “terrifying figures” of the psyche, which cannot be accounted for simply as the persecutory parts of the super-ego but are instead more adequately read as more enigmatic and more primitive psychic fragments, resulting from processes of splitting.

**Keywords:** Sándor Ferenczi, Melanie Klein, splitting, identification with the aggressor, Orpha, teratoma, terrifying figures.

Raluca Soreanu, Ph. D. is Wellcome Trust Fellow in Medical Humanities, Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck College, London; Psychoanalyst, Effective Member of *Círculo Psicanalítico do Rio de Janeiro*; PhD in Sociology, University College, London.

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Address correspondence to: Raluca Soreanu, Ph.D., Department of Psychosocial Studies, School of Social Science, History and Philosophy, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, Room 230, Bloomsbury; London WC1B 5DQ

## ON PSYCHIC SPLITTING

Psychic splitting is a crucial psychoanalytic theme. The present paper gives a privileged place to the Kleinian and to the Ferenczian articulations of splitting; it also attempts to structure a field of dialogue between Melanie Klein and Sándor Ferenczi, with the aim of addressing the “phenomenological gap” that exists in psychoanalysis around the problem of splitting. I understand this phenomenological gap as a deficit of *precise descriptions about what is being split in the psyche; about the process of splitting; and about the psychic life of the fragments that result from the splitting.* Not all these fragments map on to the three Freudian agencies of the psyche: id, ego and superego. There are kinds of splitting that make demands from us and that point to a need for metapsychological revisions. While not all of these revisions can be made in the space of this paper, our goal here is to demarcate a field of unanswered questions around the problem of splitting, and to show some of the resources we can discover in Klein and in Ferenczi in this field of questions. In addition, I believe that for several biographical and theoretical reasons, there is a conversation yet to be articulated between the Kleinian conception of splitting and the Ferenczian conception of splitting. I argue that Ferenczi is the one who gets closer to addressing the phenomenological gap that I mentioned above, and that he proposes a true *metapsychology of fragmented psyches.* In his work, we find a series of original formulations of processes of splitting, such as autotomy (Ferenczi, 1921, p. 160), or identification with the aggressor (Ferenczi, 1933, p. 162); and new kinds of psychic fragments, such as the Orpha fragment of the psyche (Ferenczi, 1932, p. 105), functioning, as we shall see, between the life drive and the death drive, or the teratoma (Ferenczi, 1929, p. 123), a parasitic deadened “double” of the self, living inside the psyche.

When discussing psychic splitting, it is useful to have in mind a field of questions that can guide the inquiry, even if these questions cannot be firmly or definitively answered. A central question is: what is the “stuff” that the psyche is splitting? Is it the ego? Is it the psyche on the whole (including the ego, but also other agencies)? Is it a part of the ego where a particular introjection happened? Or is it even a part of the ego that an other has successfully projected something onto? We can already see by this sequence of questions that there is an important relationship to be elucidated between splitting and identification, introjection, projection and incorporation. All these concepts are present in both Ferenczi and Klein, but they receive different formulations.

### **ON KLEIN AND FERENCZI: IMAGINING A DIALOGUE**

The present paper is invested in creating a space of dialogue between Klein and Ferenczi on the problem of psychic splitting. There are many resonances of Ferenczi in Klein’s work, but these remain unacknowledged. It is worth noting that Ferenczi was Klein’s analyst for almost four years, while she was living in Budapest, in the twenties, and it is also Ferenczi who suggested to her to work with children, which has proven to be a very productive suggestion for the development of psychoanalysis. Klein makes very few references to Ferenczi’s work, although the ideas of projection and introjection are prolifically treated in several of his writings. It is not only that Klein makes very little space for a dialogue with Ferenczi in her work, but also her most astute commentators (such as Elizabeth Bott Spillius, for instance) leave this silence almost undisturbed. The well-known 1988 volumes edited by Elizabeth Bott Spillius, *Melanie Klein Today: Developments in Theory and Practice* (Volume 1: Mainly Theory; and Volume 2: Mainly Practice) do not cite any work by Ferenczi in their final reference lists or in their name indexes. This silence can be understood in the context of a broader “forgetting” of Ferenczi

affecting the psychoanalytic field and causing a nearly total “amnesia” related to Ferenczi’s important contributions to theory and technique. Several authors (Bergmann 1996; Brabant 2003; Haynal 1997–1998; 2002; Martín-Cabré 1997; Schneider 1988) have shown that this forgetfulness was of traumatic nature, and it had to do with the split between Freud and Ferenczi, over Ferenczi’s proposition on “the confusion of tongues between the adults and the child”, in his 1933 paper, which was misread by Freud as an attempt to return to his first version of the seduction theory (favoring the external event of seduction, and thus preceding the recognition of the role of phantasy in the scene of trauma).

While it is certainly the case that this traumatic break contributed to Ferenczi’s disappearance from psychoanalytic debates for several decades, in the case of Klein and her commentators, the problem runs deeper. Even in the more recent book published in 2007, *Encounters with Melanie Klein*, Elizabeth Spillius cites only one work by Ferenczi, his *Clinical Diary* (1932a) and his co-authored book with Otto Rank, *The Development of Psychoanalysis* (1924). Ferenczi does not become part of the genealogy of any theoretical concepts (the most obvious being identification, introjection, projection and incorporation). Spillius mentions instead Ferenczi’s experiment with mutual analysis and its being unworkable (2007, p.14); and the fact the Melanie Klein had criticized Ferenczi and Rank for their co-authored book (1924), because, she argues, it stressed the principle of catharsis (Spillius, 2007, p.74).

This curious silence has started to be unpacked only very recently. Flaskay (2012) has written on Melanie Klein’s journey from a patient of Ferenczi’s in Budapest to the founder of a psychoanalytic school. Likierman (2012) has looked at the aspects of the “here-and-now” technique already present in Ferenczi, and at the form they were transmitted to Klein. Hernandez-Halton (2015) has discussed the connection between Ferenczi and Klein through Ferenczi’s

Clinical Diary (1932a). While these authors offer an important starting point, there is yet a lot to be done in terms of arriving at a genealogy of Klein's concepts and metapsychology that takes Ferenczi's influence seriously. This would not be, in my view, merely an exercise of showing Klein's "indebtedness" to Ferenczi, or the fact that all of her articulations are in some way prefigured in Ferenczi's work. Instead, reconstructing the field of resonances between Klein and Ferenczi would allow us to ask questions that are at the core of contemporary psychoanalytic thinking. One of these questions refers to the nature of psychic splitting.

Let us map out the field of connections with Ferenczi's work that Klein marks explicitly in her writings. In 1921, in her paper "The Development of a Child", while discussing the possibility of thought in relation to the tendency of repression, Klein reminds us of Ferenczi's (1912) piece, "Symbolic Representation of the Pleasure and Reality Principles in the Oedipus Myth", where Ferenczi points to the existence of a kind of chain of repression, where certain unacceptable/repressed ideas become associated to others, thus leading to the inhibition of thought. Klein (1925, pp. 120–121) also makes a few references to Ferenczi's understanding of tics as a product of primary narcissism, but she disagrees with him, arguing that they are actually a product of secondary narcissism. On a few occasions, Klein (1928, pp. 186–187; and 1948, p. 33) refers to Ferenczi's 1925 piece, "Psychoanalysis of Sexual Habits", mentioning an idea that she found useful, "sphincter-morality" (Ferenczi 1925, p. 267) as a precursor of the superego.

There is only one trace of Ferenczi's ideas on identification in Klein's work, and it appears in her 1930 paper, "The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego":

Ferenczi holds that identification, the forerunner of symbolism, arises out of the baby's endeavour to rediscover in every object his own organs and their functioning. In Jones's view the pleasure principle makes it possible for two quite different things to be equated because of a similarity marked by pleasure or interest. Some years ago, I wrote a paper, based on these concepts, in which I drew the conclusion that symbolism is the foundation

of all sublimation and of every talent, since it is by way of symbolic equation that things, activities and interests become the subject of libidinal phantasies (Klein, 1930, p. 220).

In her later work (1946–1963), Klein makes only two references to Ferenczi. One of them is directly relevant to the theme of splitting that we are discussing here, and it appears in her famous paper “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” (Klein, 1946). Out of the rich articulations of splitting that Ferenczi authored, Klein selects a rather obscure 1930 text, found in his “Notes and Fragments” (Ferenczi, 1930a). Here, Klein talks about the deflection of the death instinct, which is always unsuccessful, as some residues of the anxiety of being destroyed from within cannot ever be fully tackled. According to Klein, this internal pressure of death drive leads to splitting:

The vital need to deal with anxiety forces the early ego to develop fundamental mechanisms and defences. The destructive impulse is partly projected outwards (deflection of the death instinct) and, I think, attaches itself to the first external object, the mother's breast. As Freud has pointed out, the remaining portion of the destructive impulse is to some extent bound by the libido within the organism. However, neither of these processes entirely fulfils its purpose, and therefore the anxiety of being destroyed from within remains active. It seems to me in keeping with the lack of cohesiveness that under the pressure of this threat the ego tends to fall to pieces. This falling to pieces appears to underlie states of disintegration in schizophrenics. (Klein, 1946, p. 5)

When Klein mentions the tendency of the ego to fall to pieces, she adds a footnote containing the reference to Ferenczi:

Ferenczi in ‘Notes and Fragments’ (1930) suggests that most likely every living organism reacts to unpleasant stimuli by fragmentation, which might be an expression of the death instinct. Possibly, complicated mechanisms (living organisms) are only kept as an entity through the impact of external conditions. When these conditions become unfavourable the organism falls to pieces. (Klein 1946, p. 5, n1)

It will perhaps come as no surprise that Klein chooses to overstate the difference between her own conception of splitting and Ferenczi's. She overstates in Ferenczi's work the idea that some organisms are only sustained as an entity by the active force of the environment. This turns Ferenczi's own interest in splitting on its head: Ferenczi was much more curious about how

subjects survive, in fragments, through the action of intrapsychic forces, rather than how they are held together by the environment.

Our journey so far shows that the conversation between Ferenczi and Klein on psychic splitting is yet to be had. The consequences of thinking through this conversation are profound, as the question, “What does the psyche split?” remains central in contemporary psychoanalytic theory.

### **IDENTIFICATION: FROM FREUD TO FERENCZI TO KLEIN**

The problem of psychic splitting is indissolubly linked with that of identification. In brief, *psychic splitting occurs alongside one aspect or another of processes of identification*. The particular aspect of identification to focus on depends on the author we are discussing. I state from the onset that in Freud there is an important bias toward Oedipal and post-Oedipal identification. Although Freud (1913) refers to more primary and cannibalistic forms of identification (pre-Oedipal), there is no description that can help us make sense of the pre-Oedipal identification processually, which would mean an understanding of the psychic “moves” through which an object is cannibalized.

In 1913 Freud made the link between identification and eating the person whom one wishes to be like (Freud, 1913). The reference here was the religious practices of primitive societies. In 1915, while proposing a pregenital sexual drive organization, Freud introduced a drive derivative wish/fantasy of early life, “incorporation of the object,” as a model for identification (Freud 1915, p. 138). Most often, identification is discussed by Freud as a mental process of general importance later in development: a kind of thinking, putting oneself mentally in the place of another. The motivation for this attempt to put oneself in the place of another is either an unconscious wish or guilt. In “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego”, we see



that identification with the members of a group happens by putting the leader in the place of each of the member's ego ideal (Freud 1921). I argue that we have in Freud a "phenomenological gap" in what concerns the process of identification. There is little processual description, or a methodical study of the process of the way an object that is external gets to be taken "on the inside".

It is Ferenczi (1922) who fills this phenomenological gap. He introduces his particular conception of identification in a commentary on "Freud's Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", in 1922. Just like Freud, he has an understanding that the connection between group psychology and individual psychology is at the very foundation of psychoanalytic thought. Ferenczi assigns a precise libidinal place to identification:

There is a libidinous process which runs parallel with this stage of ego-development and henceforward must be inserted as a special phase of development between narcissism and object-love (or, more correctly, between the still narcissistic oral and sadistic-anal stages of organization and true object-love). This process is identification (Ferenczi, 1922, p. 373).

This is a much more precise libidinal placing of identification than in his earlier formulations (Ferenczi, 1912, p. 316), when the insistence was on introjection, described as a gradual extension of the original autoerotic interest to the external world. In other words, the ego takes in new objects, expanding the scope of its libido, and thus it slowly enlarges itself.

In 1912, Ferenczi establishes the distinction between incorporation and introjection. Incorporation strikes us as a primarily oral act, where the object is as if "swallowed whole", and not taken in gradually, in its various aspects. By contrast:

[in the introjection phase] objects are not really incorporated, as in the cannibalistic phase, but are 'incorporated' in an imaginary fashion, or, as we term it, introjected; that is to say, their qualities are annexed, attributed to the ego. The establishment of such an identification with an object (a person) is simultaneously the building of a bridge between the self and the outer world, and this connection subsequently permits a shifting of emphasis from the

intransitive ‘being’ to the transitive ‘having’, i.e. a further development from identification to real object-love. (Ferenczi, 1912, p. 374)

Introjection is thus an activity that pertains to Eros and to the very constitution of psychic life. We need to note that although at this point in time, in 1912, Freud’s discussion around the life drive had not yet taken place, we can understand introjection in relation to forces that prefigure the life drive, to activities of linking free psychic energy, and of assimilating more and more of what is outside the field of representation. Introjection is a particular kind of taking in of objects, where meaning is attributed at the same time of their “handling”. Fantasy and sense-making accompany this process. As introjection happens, ever more complex “psychic units” are created. In 1931, Alice Bálint, an important voice of the Budapest School of psychoanalysis, reminds us of how central identification is in the process on introjection, which she regards as a kind of “mental digestion”. After her untimely death in 1939, a chapter from her Hungarian book was published in English in 1943. She writes: “After this process of mental ‘digestion’ has been successfully achieved, the object that had been so repellent only a short time before could now be held in the child’s hands and felt as something friendly and familiar” (Bálint, 1943, p. 98). Psychic growth could thus be imagined as a “concert of introjections”, where several trails of fantasy and sense-making go on at the same time, enriching the psychic world and strengthening the ego.

What happens when this process of “mental digestion” encounters difficulties? What are the vicissitudes of introjection? A first vicissitude emerges from the contrast proposed by Ferenczi between introjection and incorporation. If incorporation remains the main way of taking the world in, we could say we meet a psychic horizon of “mental swallowing without digestion”. A second vicissitude is constituted by a relentless voracity of the introjective process. Ferenczi calls this excessive process “neurotic introjection”:

the neurotic helps himself by taking into the ego as large as possible a part of the outer world, making it the object of unconscious phantasies. This is a kind of diluting process, by means of which he tries to mitigate the poignancy of free-floating, unsatisfied, and unsatisfiable, unconscious wish-impulses. (Ferenczi, 1909, p. 47)

What we are seeing here is an excess of phantasy, which produces an appearance of an overabundance of meaning, but which covers up a psychic reality where most of the energy is untied, free-floating. As Ferenczi (1909, p. 43) adds: “The neurotic is constantly seeking for objects with whom he can identify himself, to whom he can transfer feelings, whom he can thus draw into his circle of interest, i. e., introject.”

As early as 1909, Ferenczi (pp. 48–49) articulates the ideas of “projection” and “primordial projection”, which are the point of origin of all subsequent projections/introjections:

We may suppose that to the new-born child everything perceived by the senses appears unitary, so to speak monistic. Only later does he learn to distinguish from his ego the malicious things, forming an outer world, that do not obey his will. That would be the first projection process, the primordial projection, and the later paranoiac probably makes use of the path thus traced out, in order to expel still more of his ego into the outer world.

A part of the outer world, however, greater or less, is not so easily cast off from the ego, but continually obtrudes itself again on the latter, challenging it, so to speak; “Fight with me or be my friend” (Wagner, *Gotterdammerung*, Act I). [...]

The first “object-love” and the first “object-hate” are, so to speak, the primordial transferences, the roots of every future introjection. (Ferenczi, 1909, pp. 48–49).

Melanie Klein never entered in explicit dialogue with Ferenczi’s notions of identification, projection and introjection. As Spillius (2007, p. 109) notes, for her “projective identification” was an unconscious phantasy, an intrapersonal and not an interpersonal concept. In some 1958 notes that Spillius finds in the Melanie Klein Archive, Klein distinguishes between projection and projective identification as two steps in the same process. The first step, “projection”, means that something that is very unpleasant or something that one feels one does not deserve is attributed to somebody else. The second step, “projective identification”, means that something—either good or bad—is split off from the self and deposited into the object. As Klein notes, these two steps

“need not be simultaneously experienced, though they very often are” (Klein, 1958, cited in Spillius, 2007, p. 109).<sup>2</sup>

A first confusion affecting the complicated debate around projective identification concerns the creation of a polarity which sees projective processes as mostly pathological, while introjective processes are regarded as non-pathological. Significantly, Rosenfeld (1964, pp. 170–171) has made an early intervention in this confusion, emphasizing that in the case of pathologically narcissistic patients both projective and introjective identification can be used omnipotently, so as to deny the separate identity of the object. Rosenfeld writes:

Identification is an important factor in narcissistic object relations. It may take place by introjection or by projection. When the object is omnipotently incorporated, the self becomes so identified with the incorporated object that all separate identity or any boundary between self and object is denied. In projective identification parts of the self omnipotently enter an object, for example the mother, to take over certain qualities which would be experienced as desirable, and therefore claim to be the object or part-object. Identification by introjection and by projection usually occur simultaneously. (Rosenfeld, 1964, pp. 170–171).

Working-through this confusion around the invisible polarity projection/pathological—introjection/non-pathological, Sodr  (2004) argues that introjective processes and introjective identification can be just as pathological as projective identification. The pathological element in identification is not centered on whether identification is projective or mostly introjective; instead, she sees it as decided by whether the identification is concrete or symbolic.

The second tension built into the construction of “projective identification” emerges, I argue, from the very polarity good object/bad object. The good/bad polarity functions as a proxy for a processual elucidation of psychic splitting, but it does not manage to do the phenomenological work that is needed for understanding what happens to the psyche at the time of splitting. Even if Klein anchors the good/bad polarity psychoanalytically, tying “good” in the same chain with “satisfaction” and “bad” in the same chain with “frustration”, the two function

as fundamentally moral notions. There is thus no processual elucidation, no *quality* that can be added to describe the object, the internal phantasy of the object, or the effect the object has on the subject, which can diffuse the circular and morally-coded relationship that the pair good/bad presuppose. I believe this moral duality and the circularity it inscribes (from good to bad and back again) gives a certain circularity to Klein's work, and to her conception of splitting in particular, where we move from projection to introjection and back again. There is thus a level of "mundane" splitting assumed to be going on all the time in the psyche, which does not dictate major metapsychological revisions, or arriving at a metapsychology of fragmented psyches.

Psychic life is from the onset based on *qualities*, and not on sheer polarities. We might be frustrated or satisfied, both by the object and in phantasy, but the question of remarkable significance is: in which particular way does frustration/satisfaction occur?

What we might miss if we remain faithful to the "mundane" splitting that I discussed above is a more "eventful" kind of splitting, resulting in de-libidinized stable fragments of the psyche. In other words, we could say that fragments of the psyche become depleted in an enduring manner. There are very limited grounds in Melanie Klein's work to consider the tremendously difficult libidinal operation of projecting the bad or unwanted contents of the psyche. While this tremendous libidinal endeavor is attributed to very primitive states, we are left with the open question of whether, for such a successful and constant projection, an actually less primitive state of the ego is required, capable of channeling the libido in such way that the unwanted contents can be discarded.

Yet another important difficulty with the Kleinian conception of splitting rests in the fact that splitting functions in a silent or explicit duality with integration/cohesion. The psychoanalytic process, itself, is seen as aiming at achieving a better integration of the psyche.

Working from the Ferenczian metapsychology of fragmented psyches, I argue that integration is not the polar opposite of splitting, nor is it the ultimate goal of analysis. Sometimes splitting is so profound and it results into such stable psychic fragments, that the psychoanalytic process is more accurately described as one of re-libidinization of “deadened” parts of the psyche.

Returning to the elements of Klein’s (1946) description of splitting processes, her “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” paper is of particular importance. As she writes:

From the beginning the destructive impulse is turned against the object and is first expressed in phantasied oral-sadistic attacks on the mother's breast, which soon develop into onslaughts on her body by all sadistic means. The persecutory fears arising from the infant's oral-sadistic impulses to rob the mother's body of its good contents, and from the anal-sadistic impulses to put his excrements into her (including the desire to enter her body in order to control her from within) are of great importance for the development of paranoia and schizophrenia. (Klein, 1946, p. 2)

In her 1946 piece, under the subtitle, “Some problems of the early ego”, Klein explains that although so far we know little about the structure of the early ego, she is in agreement with Winnicott’s emphasis on its unintegration, that is the early ego lacks cohesion, or that it tends to alternate in its tendency toward integration with the opposite tendency toward disintegration, a “falling into bits” (Klein, 1946, p. 4). To deal with the anxiety arising from the operation of the death drive, the psyche creates an effect of fear of annihilation, which in its turn is reversed into fear of persecution. As Klein (1946, p. 4) stresses, the fear of the destructive impulse attaches itself at once to an object, which is experienced as a bad, overpowering object.

On the theme of splitting, she writes:

The question arises whether some active splitting processes within the ego may not occur even at a very early stage. As we assume, the early ego splits the object and the relation to it in an active way, and this may imply some active splitting of the ego itself. In any case, the result of splitting is a dispersal of the destructive impulse which is felt as the source of danger. I suggest that the primary anxiety of being annihilated by a destructive force within, with the ego's specific response of falling to pieces or splitting itself, may be extremely important in all schizophrenic processes (Klein, 1946, p. 5).

Our argument here is that while Klein extensively detailed the first type of splitting—that done by the ego in relation to the object (what we referred to above as “mundane” splitting, happening within the polarity good object/bad object)—she leaves us to wonder how the more “eventful” splitting of the ego into relatively stable fragments would look. It is not sufficient to describe this type of splitting as “psychotic”, without explaining how it takes place and what movements of the libido it entails. We might want to ask how those fragments of the psyche that are not successfully projected, but instead “stick” and arrange themselves in a stable form, appear to us?

It is worth mentioning that in her paper “On Identification”, Klein (1955) opts for a curious illustration of processes of splitting of the ego, by analyzing the novel *If I Were You*, written by the French novelist Julian Green. In Green’s story, a young clerk named Fabian Especel makes a pact with the Devil, which allows him to change himself into other people. Klein accompanies Fabian’s journey through other bodies, as he literally splits himself and projects his self into a new person/identity. Each of these transformations is accompanied by a new kind of disappointment and estrangement. Fabian both exits his body and remains in it.

I believe it is of great importance that Melanie Klein takes us to a work of fiction while working-through the ideas of identification, projection and splitting. Fabian is a product of fiction, and it is this fictionality that allows him his massive projections onto others, by literally inhabiting new bodies of choice. Perhaps in search of a more “eventful” splitting of the ego (which would be encapsulated in Fabian’s misrecognition of his old self when he enters the bodies of others, populated by their own traces and marks; and his sense of loss in relation to the part of the self that he had left in his old body), Klein curiously lands again in the realm of the splitting by the ego. Fabian’s transformations remain metaphors of splitting, and no close

equivalence of his body-travels can be established with actual patients or subjects. Thus, Fabian's journey is dreamed-up, phantasized, it is ultimately a series of "mundane" projections.

Klein writes:

The processes underlying projective identification are depicted very concretely by the author. One part of Fabian literally leaves his self and enters into his victim, an event which in both parties is accompanied by strong physical sensations. We are told that the split-off part of Fabian submerges in varying degrees in his objects and loses the memories and characteristics appertaining to the original Fabian. We should conclude therefore (in keeping with the author's very concrete conception of the projective process), that Fabian's memories and other aspects of his personality are left behind in the discarded Fabian who must have retained a good deal of his ego when the split occurred. This part of Fabian, lying dormant until the split-off aspects of his personality return, represents, in my view, that component of the ego which patients unconsciously feel they have retained while other parts are projected into the external world and lost (Klein, 1955, p. 166).

While it is important not to radicalize the distinction we proposed—between splitting by the ego, and splitting of the ego (to do so would mean to mis-recognize a point that Klein rightly directs us to in the above fragment, which is that any splitting by the ego brings into action a certain amount of splitting of the ego)—the question that remains unanswered relates to the psychic "life" of the fragment that is the result of the splitting. What kind of metapsychology can allow us to talk effectively about the "part of Fabian, lying dormant until the split-off aspects of his personality return"? While this is certainly a very complicated question, I would like to reconstrue some of the conditions for answering it, starting from one of Klein's late works, "On the Development of Mental Functioning" (Klein, 1958).

### **MELANIE KLEIN'S "TERRIFYING FIGURES"**

"On the Development of Mental Functioning" brings a surprising metapsychological move on the part of Melanie Klein (1958). For the first time in her work she introduces a kind of introjection where the "terrifying figures" that used to be taken up into the persecutory part of the super-ego are now relegated to a new unconscious place, a kind of deep area of the



unconscious, which remains untouched by regular developmental processes, and which has the capacity to overwhelm the ego. This move is intriguing, although it remains underspecified and enigmatic. It also comes in contrast to earlier views (see for instance the views expressed in the paper “The Early Development of Conscience in the Child”, written in 1933), where the specificity of the normal early super-ego is precisely its extreme and terrifying nature.

We are thus talking about a novel kind of splitting, one that is stable and potentially irreversible: a splitting of the ego. The good object/bad object dyad and the moves of constant projection have only limited use for understanding this type of splitting. Melanie Klein never commented on this change of position, which we interpret here as radical. We are left to imagine the metapsychological consequences of her formulations, as well as possible forms of dialogue with other theorists (such as Ferenczi, and his understanding of the “identification with the aggressor”).

In the paper “On the Development of Mental Functioning,” Melanie Klein (1958) discusses the two metapsychological principles that she inherited from Freud: his structural theory and his theory of the life drive and death drive. She states that the life and death drives are not general principles that function to support the biological life of the organism, but rather a basis for love and hate, which are mental, not biological phenomena.

In a section which partly addresses the “phenomenological gap” of psychoanalysis on the problem of psychic splitting, she offers a description of how the super-ego is formed, through a fragmentation of the ego. She maintains that in this form of splitting both the life and the death drives find themselves predominately in a state of fusion (Klein, 1958, p. 240).<sup>3</sup>

It is here that Klein introduces a different kind of splitting, and her “terrifying figures” which in their destructiveness are not part of the super-ego. Instead, they exist in a separate area

of the mind in the deep unconscious, split off both from the ego and the super-ego. They remain mostly unintegrated. A failure to maintain these terrifying internal objects in a split area brings a state of overwhelming anxiety and puts in danger the equilibrium achieved among the other agencies of the psyche:

When at the beginning of the twenties I embarked on the new venture of analysing by play technique children from their third year onwards, one of the unexpected phenomena I came across was a very early and savage super-ego. I also found that young children introject their parents—first of all the mother and her breast—in a phantastic way, and I was led to this conclusion by observing the terrifying character of some of their internalized objects. These extremely dangerous objects give rise, in early infancy, to conflict and anxiety within the ego; but under the stress of acute anxiety they, and other terrifying figures, are *split off in a manner different from that by which the super-ego is formed and are relegated to the deeper layers of the unconscious*. (Klein, 1958, pp. 240–241) (my emphasis)

Klein's conclusion is that we are dealing with two kinds of splitting, one occurring in a state of fusion of the drives (which creates the super-ego); and one occurring in a state of diffusion of the drives (which creates the terrifying figures). While this second form of splitting remains enigmatic, it does launch a serious metapsychological challenge and it sketches possible paths for reflection on the problem of the nature and consequences of psychic splitting:

The difference in these two ways of splitting—and this may perhaps throw light on the many as yet obscure ways in which splitting processes take place—is that in the splitting-off of frightening figures defusion seems to be in the ascendant; whereas super-ego formation is carried out with a predominance of fusion of the two instincts. Therefore, the super-ego is normally established in close relation with the ego and shares different aspects of the same good object. This makes it possible for the ego to integrate and accept the super-ego to a greater or less extent. In contrast, *the extremely bad figures are not accepted by the ego in this way and are constantly rejected by it*. (Klein, 1958, p. 240) (my emphasis)

## **FERENCZI'S TERRIFYING FRAGMENTS**

I interpret Klein's surprising introduction of the "terrifying figures" as a silent "Ferenczian turn". It is a matter of certainty that Klein was familiar with Ferenczi's formulation on the "identification with the aggressor", which is one of the most phenomenologically-thick

accounts of psychic splitting that we possess in psychoanalysis to this day. The identification with the aggressor stands at the very core of Ferenczi's conception of trauma.

Ferenczi shows how the fragile ego of the child is pulverized, atomized, de-materialized in the moment of the trauma, only to take the shape, through a process of imitation, afterwards, of the closest form that she encountered at the moment of the attack: the shape of the aggressor. I would say that this is the tragic side of the identification with the aggressor: it is perhaps not best seen as a mere introjection of the aggressor into a still existing ego, but literally replicating the shape of the aggressor, at a time when the psyche has become no more than a cloud of disparate particles, in search of a form. As Ferenczi tells us in a short note "On Shock" (1932b, pp. 253–254), in the hour of the attack, the self is "unfest, unsolid" and it loses its form only to adopt an imposed form easily and without resistance, "like a sack of flour".

In his 1933 paper "The Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Children" Ferenczi writes:

These children feel physically and morally helpless, their personalities are not sufficiently consolidated in order to be able to protest, even if only in thought, for the overpowering force and authority of the adult makes them dumb and can rob them of their senses. The same anxiety, however, if it reaches a certain maximum, compels them to subordinate themselves like automata to the will of the aggressor, to divine each one of his desires and to gratify these; completely oblivious of themselves they identify themselves with the aggressor. Through the identification, or let us say, introjection of the aggressor, he disappears as part of the external reality, and becomes intra- instead of extra-psychic; the intra-psychic is then subjected, in a dream-like state as is the traumatic trance, to the primary process, i.e. according to the pleasure principle it can be modified or changed by the use of positive or negative hallucinations. In any case the attack as a rigid external reality ceases to exist and in the traumatic trance the child succeeds in maintaining the previous situation of tenderness.

The most important change, produced in the mind of the child by the anxiety-fear-ridden identification with the adult partner, is the introjection of the guilt feelings of the adult which makes hitherto harmless play appear as a punishable offence.

When the child recovers from such an attack, he feels enormously confused, in fact, split—innocent and culpable at the same time—and his confidence in the testimony of his own senses is broken. (Ferenczi, 1933, p. 162)

What we can remark in this description of the identification of the aggressor is that the scheme discussed in Klein's work—organized around the polarity between good/bad objects—loses its applicability. For Ferenczi, splitting is qualified, not driven by polarities. It is not useful to ask whether the introjection is of a good object or of a bad object—we could argue that the identification that Ferenczi talks about is a tragic one: it contains a primary element of imitation of form; and an introjection of guilt feelings. This introjection of the guilt feelings, however “dark” in itself, allows the child to continue living, after having gone through an overwhelming and potentially deadly experience.

In a further note in his Clinical Diary, in an entry dated May 10, 1932, Ferenczi further elucidates the state of the subject at the time of the identification with the aggressor. Here, the kind of splitting that Ferenczi describes appears to us again as qualified: it is not between good and bad, but instead it is between reason and emotion. The two faculties become separated from one another and gain quasi-autonomous functioning. Both become hyper-faculties—enhanced but also split:

[...] the individual gives up all expectations of outside help, and a last, desperate attempt to adapt, perhaps analogous to the feigning of death in animals, occurs. The person splits into a psychic being of pure knowledge that observes the events from the outside, and a totally insensitive body. Insofar as this psychic being is still accessible to emotions, it turns its interests toward the only feelings left over from the process, that is, the feelings of the attacker. It is as though the psyche, whose sole function is to reduce emotions, tensions, and to avoid pain, at the moment of the death of its own person automatically diverts its pain-relieving functions toward the pains, tensions, and passions of the attacker, the only person with feelings, that is, identifies itself with these (Ferenczi, 1932a, p.103).

There are two kinds of responses of the ego to the trauma, according to Ferenczi. The first, corresponding to a highly developed sense of reality, he terms “alloplastic adaptation”, which means that the ego is able to alter the environment in such way that self-destruction and self-reconstruction are not necessary, and in such way that the ego maintains its equilibrium (Ferenczi, 1930b, p. 221). The second he names “autoplastic adaptation”, (Ferenczi, 1930b, p. 221) which

means that ego does not have, or loses its capacity, to mold the external world, and instead acts on itself. Curiously enough, the fragment of the Clinical Diary cited above counts as a description of a moment when the ego is almost entirely “repressed” and, as a result, the only two psychic agencies remaining are the id and the superego.

### **AUTOTOMY: THE FRAGMENT LEFT BEHIND**

One of the most tragic forms of autoplasmic adaptation is autotomia, where the ego cuts off, dis-attaches and leaves behind a part of itself. It is here that Ferenczi relies on the image of the animal shedding a body part that has been wounded. Let us think of lizards cutting off their tail.

In “Psycho-analytical Observations on Tic”, Ferenczi writes:

Here I will touch on the analogy of the third kind of tic, i.e. the motor discharge (“turning against one’s own person”, Freud), with a method of reaction that occurs in certain lower animals, which possess the capacity for “Autotomia”. If a part of their body is painfully stimulated they let the part concerned “fall” in the true sense of the word by severing it from the rest of their body by the help of certain specialized muscular actions; others (like certain worms) even fall into several small pieces (they “burst asunder”, as it were, from fury). Even the biting off of a painful limb is said to occur. (Ferenczi, 1921, p. 160)

In one of the entries in the Clinical Diary, Ferenczi brings another vignette on animal behavior, where the adaptation to the anticipation of unbearable pain and complete submission is suicide:

As an analogy I refer to a reliable account of an Indian friend, a hunter. He saw how a falcon attacked a little bird; as it approached, the little bird started to tremble and, after a few seconds of trembling, flew straight into the falcon’s open beak and was swallowed up. The anticipation of certain death appears to be such torment that by comparison actual death is a relief. (Ferenczi, 1932, p. 179)

Ferenczi derives crucial metapsychological reflections from these images. In the first example, on autotomia, we see “an archaic prototype of the components of the masochistic instinct” (Ferenczi, 1921, p. 161). In the second, we see the limits of passivity, and a certain primacy given to activity, in that an active death is preferred to the anticipation of complete

surrender to the aggressor. In a fragment on “Trauma and Anxiety”, Ferenczi strengthens the same idea: “Self-destruction as releasing some anxiety is preferred to silent toleration” (Ferenczi 1931a, p. 249). It appears that the easiest to break apart is the conscious system, responsible with the integration of mental images into a unit. Ultimately, splitting is an act that is more readily available to the psyche than we are used to considering. Structurally, it seems that the fragment that is severed in the process of autotomy is not preserved in a modified form in the superego but is irretrievably lost.

### **ORPHA: THE FRAGMENT THAT WATCHES OVER**

Among the fragments of the psyche that result from the unbearable attack in the moment of the trauma, we find a curious fragment, which Ferenczi names “Orpha”—the feminine of Orpheus. Orpha is the form that the organizing life instincts take at the time of the trauma, precisely when the enormity of suffering has brought a renunciation of any expectation of external help. As Ferenczi notes in his Clinical Diary, on May 10 1932, “[t]he absent external help [...] is replaced by the creation of a more ancient substitute” (1932a, p. 105). Orpha is a sort of “guardian angel” (1932a, p. 105), a healing agent, and a principle of salvation: by surprising minute calculations around what it would mean to continue living (often in a basic sense of continuing breathing or maintaining a beating heart), Orpha acts in the direction of self-preservation. As stated in The Clinical Diary on January 12, 1932, Orpha also “produces wish-fulfilling hallucinations, consolation phantasies; it anaesthetizes the consciousness and sensitivity against sensations as they become unbearable” (Ferenczi, 1932a, p. 8). What is remarkable here is that with Orpha any dichotomy between reason and passion collapses. Orpha is wise, but it is a fragment, it is split-off from other faculties. Orpha is formed when death is very near, but it acts as an organizing life instinct.

As I see it, Orpha brings an account of the emergence of hyper-faculties and of over-performance. A strange product of the traumatic shock, Orpha manifests itself, Ferenczi writes, as “an unperturbed intelligence which is not restricted by any chronological or spatial resistances in its relation to the environment” (Ferenczi, 1931b, pp. 245–246). One could say that Orpha is a metapsychologically plausible account of a particular kind of clairvoyance. On the couch, Orpha appears as a fragment of the psyche that sometimes instructs, directs or guides the analyst with great precision on what to do, how to speak, how to be silent, in order to allow the re-living of the traumatic sequence of events. Structurally, we could imagine that Orpha functions as a split-off part of the ego, one that is unconscious, but one that cannot be easily relegated to the superego. Orpha is an enduring modification of the ego, that can be imagined as a new kind of psychic agency, neither (conscious) ego nor superego.

### **TERATOMA: THE BURIED FRAGMENT**

One of Ferenczi’s most powerful medical analogies—and one that I would argue is yet to reveal all its richness for understanding trauma and splitting—is that between neurotic functioning and a teratoma—the growth of a tumor. In his 1929 paper, “The Principle of Relaxation and Neocatharsis”, Ferenczi (p. 123) he notes:

For it is no mere poetic licence to compare the mind of the neurotic to a double malformation, something like the so-called teratoma which harbours in a hidden part of its body fragments of a twin-being which has never developed. No reasonable person would refuse to surrender such a teratoma to the surgeon’s knife, if the existence of the whole individual were threatened.

It is worth noting that Georg Groddeck (1923) had used a similar term in a literary context, when he spoke of “horror stories” teratoma were a particular type of monsters, either constructed from parts of different bodies, like Frankenstein, or the result of fantasy and the transformations of the body that fantasy brings (Stanton, 1990, p. 174). The implications of the Ferenczian teratoma

are, however, much broader. Ferenczi argues that in some cases of neurosis (often as a result of profound traumas in infancy), the greater part of the personality becomes a teratoma, while the task of adaptation to reality falls upon the (smaller) fragment of the personality that was spared. I believe the work of the psychoanalytic process is to deal with this very disproportion, where the deadened twin-being occupies most of the psychic space.

As early as 1908, in a text on “Psycho-analysis and Education”, Ferenczi was already noting the existence in the unconscious of a parasitic double of the conscious self, “whose natural egotism and tendency for unscrupulous wish-fulfilment represents the dark phantom, the negative of all the good and beautiful on which the higher consciousness prides itself” (Ferenczi, 1908, p. 287). This type of split psychic functioning creates “introspective blindness”, which is preserved through moralizing education. Through the “prohibiting and deterring commands of moralizing education” (Ferenczi, 1908, p. 287), the person settles into a state akin to that of hypnosis, with diminished mental energies flowing in the conscious part of the ego and with considerably impaired capacity for action. What is remarkable here is that, in contrast with the writings of Melanie Klein (1933, 1946, 1955), projection is much less readily available to the psyche. It is often the case that internal “badness” (especially that resulting from various facets of an identification with the aggressor) is retained in the psyche, and while it is retained it also generates structural modifications of the psyche which require important metapsychological revisions. This is why Ferenczi feels the need to name this psychic place, which he refers to as an internal “parasite” (1908, p. 287) at an earlier point in his works. Two decades later, this parasitic psychic place will become the “teratoma” (Ferenczi, 1929, p. 123). In a brief formulation, we can imagine that teratomae are Ferenczi’s “terrifying fragments”. They result from a splitting-off (in the form of a “doubling” of the ego (1908, p. 287) but also from a deadening of the split-off fragment. This



fragment is also susceptible of constituting a new psychic agency, which cannot be assimilated to the primary superego, but rather results from the “rendering unconscious” of a part of the ego. It is the “double” of the ego, which is “buried” in the unconscious.

Klein’s note on the “terrifying figures” in her 1958 (p. 240) paper “On the Development of Mental Functioning” curiously brings us back to Ferenczi’s rich formulations on the process of psychic splitting and on the “life” of the fragments of the psyche that result from the splitting. By giving close clinical attention to processes of identification with the aggressor, and to fragments of the psyche such as “Orpha” or the “teratoma”, we also elaborate on the questions that remain open in Klein’s 1958 paper, and which are still a point of contention in contemporary psychoanalytic theory. Among these, a crucial one seems to be arriving at a metapsychological formulation of a more “eventful” kind of splitting, which is not by the ego, but of the ego, and which does not necessarily lead us back to the superego, but to other types of stable psychic fragments. Through their particular operation in the libidinal economy, these stable fragments can even qualify as new psychic agencies.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> **Raluca Soreanu Ph. D.** is Wellcome Trust Fellow in Medical Humanities, Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck College, London; Psychoanalyst, effective member of Círculo Psicanalítico do Rio de Janeiro; PhD in Sociology, University College London; she is the author of *Working-through Collective Wounds: Trauma, Denial, Recognition in the Brazilian Uprising* (Palgrave, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> The idea of projective identification has occupied a significant place in psychoanalytic imaginaries. The spread of the idea has been described by Hinshelwood (1988), Canestri (2002), Hinz (2002) and Quinodoz (2002). Some important conceptual developments in understanding projective identification have been proposed by Rosenfeld (1947, 1964, 1971), Segal (1957), Bion (1955, 1959) and Sodr  (2004), with significant clinical contributions from Britton (1998), Segal (1964), Feldman (1997), Spillius (1991), Riesenber -Malcolm (1986) and Bell (2001).

<sup>3</sup> As Klein states: “In my view, the splitting of the ego, by which the super-ego is formed, comes about as a consequence of conflict in the ego, engendered by the polarity of the two instincts. This conflict is increased by their projection as well as by the resulting introjection of good and bad objects. The ego, supported by the internalized good object and strengthened by the identification with it, projects a portion of the death instinct into that part of itself which it has split off—a part which thus comes to be in opposition to the rest of the ego and forms the basis of the super-ego. Accompanying this deflection of a portion of the death instinct is a deflection of that portion of the life instinct which is fused with it. Along with these deflections, parts of the good and bad objects are split off from the ego into the super-ego. The super-ego thus acquires both protective and threatening qualities. As the process of integration—present from the beginning in both the ego and the super-ego—goes on, the death instinct is bound, up to a point, by the super-ego. In the process of binding, the death instinct influences the aspects of the good objects contained in the super-ego, with the result that the action of the super-ego ranges from restraint of hate and destructive impulses, protection of the good object and self-criticism, to threats, inhibitory complaints and persecution. The super-ego—being bound up with the good object and even striving for its preservation—comes close to the actual good mother who feeds the child and takes care of it, but since the super-ego is also under the influence of the death



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instinct, it partly becomes the representative of the mother who frustrates the child, and its prohibitions and accusations arouse anxiety.” (Klein, 1958, p. 240)