

From bug killing to soul seeking: Georg Groddeck's "analytic delirium"

FERENC ERŐS*

In my presentation I am going to talk about three real characters, and two fictive ones. I do not need to introduce the real characters, one Austrian, one German, and one Hungarian gentleman: Sigmund Freud, Georg Groddeck and Sándor Ferenczi. The first fictive character's name is *Thomas Weltlein*. He is a middle aged guy, a foolish person, a sort of modern Don Quixote, who travels through the imperial Germany before the first world war; while the second is called simply *Miranda*, a severely near sighted young lady from Vienna in the 1960s. Weltlein is the main protagonist of Groddeck's novel *Der Seelensucher* (The Seeker of Soul), and Miranda, the only woman among these five characters, is the main figure of a short story, "Eyes to wonder" written by Ingeborg Bachmann, one of the most eminent writers of the post second world war Austrian literature. What are the connections between these real and imagined characters?

Beside Freud, Ferenczi and Groddeck had been truly important figures of the early psychoanalytic movement. Ferenczi was a member – along with Ernest Jones, Hanns Sachs, Otto Rank, Karl Abraham, and Max Eitingon – of Freud's so called "secret committee"; he was one of the knights of the "secret ring"¹. Groddeck, the "father of psychosomatic medicine", as he is often mentioned, was, on the other hand, an outsider, a more or less marginal figure, a so called "wild analyst", who never followed the official "party line". Nevertheless, he had immense influence on both Freud and Ferenczi. Freud borrowed the concept of *Es* (the *It*), from Groddeck (a concept which derives genealogically in Nietzsche), although Freud used this concept in a very different meaning in his meta-psychology. Groddeck was Ferenczi's physician in his Baden-Baden sanatorium, or as he used to call it jokingly, "Satanarium" in the 1920s. He did not only treat his patient's physical and mental symptoms based on his medical principle called NASAMECU (*natura sanat, medicus curat*, that is, nature heals, the doctor cures), but he contributed largely to the development of the late Ferenczi's ideas on mutual analysis and on the phylogenetic origins of the soul².

The three men had had complicated and sometimes very troubled relations with each other. Ferenczi was in close personal contact with both Freud and Groddeck; however, the three men met simultaneously very rarely, first at the international congress of psychoanalysis held in The Hague in 1920. The primary source of studying their mutual relations are their already published

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¹ Phyllis Grosskurth: *The Secret Ring. Freud's Inner Circle and the Politics of Psychoanalysis*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, New York 1991.

² Sándor Ferenczi: *Thalassa. A Theory of Genitality*. Maresfield Library, Karnac Books, London 1989.

correspondences. First of all, the multi-voluminous correspondence between Freud and Ferenczi, which started in 1908, and lasted until Ferenczi's death in 1933³. In the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence Groddeck's name and works turn up quite a few times. The letters exchanged between Freud and Groddeck, and between Ferenczi and Groddeck, although smaller in quantity and more limited in time, are no less significant from the aspects of history. Beside private correspondences, the circular letters (*Rundbriefe*) of the "secret committee" are the most important sources⁴. Groddeck's novel, *The Seeker of Soul* published in 1921 by the International Psychoanalytic Publishing House (with the subtitle "Ein psychoanalytischer Roman") resulted in a very heated and intriguing debate within the "secret committee"⁵. (Bos, 1994). The debate on Groddeck's novel had preceded the even more tense and bitter debates on Rank's and Ferenczi's attempts at reformulating the developmental aims of psychoanalysis (1924), and later on Georg Wilhelm Pabst's psychoanalytic film *Secrets of a Soul* (1926).

The story of the publication of Groddeck's novel would deserve another novel that might be even more interesting than the original one, and illuminates not only the personal role played by each participant in the story, but the power relations within the Committee, the group of the early psychoanalysts as well. It is not by chance that Erich Fromm, who had been in close contact with Groddeck in the early thirties, and who never denied Groddeck's fundamental impact on his critical views on orthodox psychoanalysis, in the 1950s compared the "secret committee" to a Central Committee of a Communist party – exemplified by Rank's exclusion and Ferenczi's stigmatization by Ernest Jones as "mentally ill"⁶.

Let's see now the main title of the novel *The Soul Seekers* or *The Soul Searcher*⁷. "Soul seeking" is a reference to the famous lines in Goethe's poetic drama *Iphigenia in Tauris*:

Denn ach mich trennt das Meer von den Geliebten,
Und an dem Ufer steh' ich lange Tage,
Das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchend

In English translation:

*For the sea
Doth sever me, alas! from those I love,
And day by day upon the shore I stand,
My soul still seeking for the land of Greece*⁸

On the title page of the book a silhouette, drawn also by Goethe, can be seen. The silhouette, a rather sexist picture, shows a man sitting on the "navel of the earth", on Omphalos, a stone in Apollo's sanctuary in Delphi. The man holds a small naked female figure (a "Frauenzimmer", literally "woman's chamber") in his open palm, while he carefully investigates the "middle part" of the woman figure with a magnifying glass. Groddeck's hero, as we can read in the novel, liked the silhouette very much, called it "Seelensucher", framed the picture and hanged it over his desk. The tiny

³ Freud, Sigmund and Sándor Ferenczi. *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi*. Vol. 1. 1908-1914; vol. 2. 1914-1919; vol. 3. 1920-1933. Ed. by Ernst Falzeder and Eva Brabant. Tr. Peter T.: Hofer. The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1993-2002.

⁴ G. Wittenberger and Ch. Tögel, (Eds). *Rundbriefe des "Geheimen Komitees"*, Vols. I-IV. Edition diskord, Tübingen 1999-2006.

⁵ See Jaap C. Bos: Die Seelensucher-Diskussion in den Rundbriefen des Geheimen Komitees. *Psyche* 48, 5. 1994. 396-324.

⁶ See: Erich Fromm: *Sigmund Freud's Mission: An Analysis of his Personality and Influence*, Harper and Row, New York, 1959.

⁷ Georg Groddeck: *Der Seelensucher. Ein psychoanalytischer Roman*. Internationale Psychoanalytische Verlag. 1921. New edition: Stroemfeld Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, Basel, 1988. English translation (typescript): *The Soul-Searcher*. Translated by Christian Darnton.

⁸ Goethe: *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Act I. Scene 1. Translated by Anna Swanwick.

“Frauenzimmer”, and especially her “middle part” signifies, therefore, the place where the “secret of the soul” can be seen and sought “scientifically”, that is, with a magnifying glass. Goethe, with Groddeck’s words

showed science a new approach, namely the approach of seeing the part in the whole, of taking the apparent whole as a symbol of the universe, of seeing the whole world symbolised in a flower, an animal, a pebble, the human eye, the sun; and to construct the world from this flower, this pebble, that is to create it anew and to investigate things not by analysing but by placing them in the context of the whole⁹.

The allegory of “soul seeking” perfectly expresses the Groddeckian theory of the symbolic nature of body parts, organs and body functions, like *seeing* or *sexuality* that is the core idea of the novel as well as of his other works. The *It*, as Groddeck puts in an 1917 article,

[this] unconscious, into whose territory we are only now beginning to penetrate, again and again creates human beings with eyes, ears, legs, hands, and necks from semen and ovum; why should it be difficult or even impossible for it to shape the character of its creation in all its mental and its physical aspects? If it shapes the body, shouldn’t it be able to endow it with certain dispositions for certain reasons or make these disappear again as it makes breasts grow and wither, or hair or skin? In fact, it does create these dispositions, and will make a change to the heart perhaps or the lungs. And if we listen to its voice instead of switching ourselves off through the prejudice that we are fond of calling knowledge, then we may find out quite a few secrets”¹⁰.

The romantic-sounding title, *The Soul Seeker* was, however, not the original one which Groddeck had given to his novel. The first title was anything but romantic; it is rather whimsical or even worse, evokes disgust or abjection. Romanticism unveils, however, through the word “soul” which appears in it, too: *Der Wanzenötter oder die entschleierte Seele Thomas Weltleins* (“The bug killer or the unveiled soul of Thomas Weltlein”). The manuscript, under the original title, was sent to Freud on October 19, 1919. As Groddeck wrote to him¹¹:

I am sending you a manuscript which I called a psychoanalytical novel in a fit of whimsy. The book made its obligatory round of the publishers and was in turn sent back to me with polite rejections and thanks. I have now given up hope of finding somebody who might publish it, yet I would like you to have a look at it before it disappears for good. Maybe Ferenczi, too, might be interested, and have a glance at it.

Freud’s reaction was quite favorable to Groddeck’s manuscript, though he notes (in his letter on February 7, 1920): “As for your novel, may I make the suggestion that the choice of a less whimsical title might help its publication?” A day later he wrote to Groddeck:

I shall have your novel returned in the next few days by our publishing house. But you are wrong: I liked it. In parts I was most amused. The characters of old English humorists are well-drawn. In one respect it seems to us to resemble that model of all humorous novels, Don Quixote. The hero turns in the author’s hands into something more serious than was originally planned. I admired your talent for graphic description, which is unusual, particularly in the railway scenes.

⁹ Georg Groddeck: Von der Sprache, In: *Hin zu Gottnatur*, Leipzig, 3rd ed. 1912.

¹⁰ Georg Groddeck: Psychische Bedingtheit und psychoanalytische Behandlung organischer Leiden, 1917. Reprinted in *Psychoanalytische Schriften zur Psychosomatik*, Wiesbaden, 1970.

¹¹ The Freud-Groddeck letters are quoted after Groddeck, G. (1977). The Meaning of Illness. *Int. Psycho-Anal. Lib.*, 105: 1-266. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, pp. 31-103.

Now I do believe with you that the book will not be to everybody's taste. So many clever, frank, and playful ideas are not easy to digest. And yet you should try and have it published. Worse products have been published in the name of analysis.

On April 4, 1920 Groddeck answers to Freud:

As for the novel, I have to report that it has been rejected once again. Rejections are not accompanied by detailed reasons, they start with high praise of the first part and end with the verdict that the analytical part breaks up the artistic form and therefore destroys the whole. The latest publisher even maintained that I am losing myself in crass materialism. I shall continue to shop around. The fact that you mentioned the work in your last letter gave me back my courage. The question of a title is always difficult. I will cast around for something else. But I am not very hopeful. Everybody who reads it is somehow brought up against his own repressions and then resistance starts.

In the meanwhile Freud and Rank persuades the International Psychoanalytic Publishing House (the *Verlag*) to publish Groddeck's novel – on the author's own costs. Freud suggests that “for the title you should simply use the name of the hero and underneath put: a psychoanalytic novel.” (May 9, 1920)

Otto Rank made, however, a different suggestion:

Did Rank tell you the title he has found for the novel? *Der Seelensucher* I like it, but I do not want to change anything without your approval. By way of explanation I must add that I introduced a story about a silhouette into the first chapter where Thomas Weltlein is called a seeker of souls which dominates the novel; the whole of the silhouette is printed on the title page. (Groddeck to Freud, October 17, 1920)

On December 31, 1920 Groddeck gratefully thanks Freud for his intervention to publish the book. He adds that the “cover and title page are marvellous and the whole lay-out is dignified. I am very glad to see the fool run around in such good clothes. Now we have to wait and see what the world has got to say about it.”

The metamorphosis of title from bug killing to soul seeking (or to dress the fool in good clothes) is in complete concordance with the spirit of the book which is also about *metamorphosis*. Bedbugs, like the monstrous vermin in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, are symbolic creatures which signify shame and trauma. In Kafka's novel Gregor Samsa is transformed into an insect; in Groddeck's book a man called August Miller awakens, after a night struggle with bedbugs, as new person, Thomas Weltlein, the “laughing martyr”, as Ferenczi called him. His rebirth was a kind of catharsis, an act of purifying the abject¹². To summarize the novel's content I quote Ferenczi's review published in *Imago* in 1921¹³.

The hero is a middle-aged bachelor whose ordered solitude, spent in contemplative reading, is distributed by the sudden emergence of a widowed sister and her nubile young daughter. What really happened between the hero and the daughter we are never explicitly told; we can hardly even guess from the vague hints given us. In the beds of the house vermin – bedbugs – made their home and in their extermination the master of the house eagerly helps. In the chase after these bloodthirsty parasites the hero becomes ‘crazy’, that is to say, he frees himself of all the shackles imposed by tradition, inheritance and education. He becomes ‘changed’, even changes his name and becomes a vagrant. At the same time, however, his money and his old connections secure him the entry into the highest of the high strata of society; wherever he

¹² See Julia Kristeva: *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

¹³ Sándor Ferenczi: Review on ‘*Der Seelensucher*’. Ein psychoanalytischer Roman by Georg Groddeck. [1921] In: *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis*. Michael Balint (Eds.), Eric Mosbacher (translator). Karnac Books, London; 1994; 2000. pp. 344-348.

arrives, he makes good use of his fool's privilege to cast the truth into people's faces, and in his way the reader comes to hear truths which even Groddeck would not dare utter except with the fool's cap on his head. We see and hear our Müller-Weltlein in the police cell, in a low-class skittle alley, in the general ward of a hospital, in a picture gallery, at the zoo, in a fourth-class railway compartment, at a street-corner meeting, at a feminist congress, among hard-boiled prostitutes, tricksters, and blackmailers, and even at a drinking bout with a Prussian royal prince. Everywhere he speaks and behaves as a real *enfant terrible*, notices and comments on everything, admits consciously and openly to the unavoidably childish basic quality of the adults, and ridicules all the boastful and swaggering hypocrites.

The scandal broke out immediately after the publication of Groddeck's novel. As we can follow from the *Rundbriefe*, Hanns Sachs and Karl Abraham protested sharply against the publication of *The Soul Seeker* at the *Verlag*, for two reasons. They judged the novel's literary quality and style rather weak (being too long, verbose and boring, too didactic, etc.), and reproached Freud's and Rank's voluntary decision to give the prestigious name of the *Verlag* to such a mediocre work. The real outcry came from the Swiss Psychoanalytic Association whose members refused the novel's "obscene", "pornographic" and "rebellious" content, and demanded an immediate ban on it in Switzerland. Ernest Jones expressed his opinion as follows:

I also would have preferred to see this sort of book, and especially this sort of man, appearing in another Verlag than our own. Ps-A has so many attractions for the popular entertainer that it seems to me better that we official representatives should lay stress on the dignified and scientific aspect, just those which our opponents deny in our work¹⁴.

The "Groddeck affair" had already anticipated the later, deeper, more traumatic schisms within the psychoanalytic movement along the division line between "lay" or "wild" and "scientific" or "professional" psychoanalysis. The opponents of Groddeck had some reason to believe that *The Seeker of Soul* may be dangerous for the Cause (*die Sache*), since it can be (mis)understood by the public as a caricature of psychoanalysis, which speaks all the time about sexuality. For example, Thomas Weltlein thinks that a church tower is nothing else than a penis in the lap of the Holy Mother Church. It may be tempting also to project Weltlein's figure onto Freud himself who can be identified as a modern Don Quixote, fighting hopelessly with the "specters of modernity".

As for Groddeck, he had admitted to Freud in a letter on April 27, 1920, explaining the background of a case study to be published in the *Internationale Zeitschrift* that the model for Weltlein's figure was his own stepson.

The analysis really happened as I wrote it down, yet it could only turn out the way it did because the patient is my stepson who has been living in my house ever since he was in his eighth year. He is gifted with a highly imitative, lyrical talent which might perhaps turn creative one day. During the war he broke down with a grave neurosis and has been in treatment with me for the last two years with many interruptions. That he expresses himself like the hero of my novel is because he is jealous and embodies Thomas Weltlein in nature for me. The imitation of my person which has obviously contributed a lot to Thomas Weltlein plays a large part in the symptoms of his neurosis and probably in their causes too. Treating him has its attractions and its difficulties because of the close ties. Perhaps one day I shall have time to write down his case history: it is characterised by neurotic complexes, which produced a series of boils on the face and back, and is a typical example of the condition which originally made me learn to analyse patients suffering from so-called somatic illnesses¹⁵.

¹⁴ *Rundbriefe* 2 (1921). 67.

¹⁵ 'Eine Symptomanalyse' (A symptom analysis). *Intern. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* VI, 1920. Reprinted in *Psychoanalytische Schriften zur Psychosomatik*, Wiesbaden, 1970.

As for Freud, it is interesting to observe the changes of his attitude toward Groddeck – a sort of genuine metamorphosis, too. In the beginning, in their earlier correspondence dating back to 1917, Freud was very pleased to be approached by Groddeck who presented him his ideas about the psychological causes of illness, but at the same time Freud reminds the German doctor the lack of his originality and his basic philosophical errors.

Thus, while I would like to hold out both my hands to you to receive you as a colleague, there is only one disturbing circumstance, the fact that you have not managed to overcome the trivial ambition of claiming originality and priority. [...] Could you have absorbed the main ideas of psychoanalysis in a cryptomnestic way? In a way similar to my discoveries relating to my own originality? What's the use of struggling for priorities against an older generation? I regret this point of your information particularly since experience has shown that an untamed ambitious individual sooner or later jumps up and turns into an eccentric to the detriment of science and of his own career. [...] Why do you jump from your beautiful basis into mysticism, cancel the distinction between mental and somatic, commit yourself to philosophical theories which are not called for? Your experience does not take you any further than the realisation that the psychological factor is of an unimaginably great importance also in the origin of organic diseases? Yet does it cause these illnesses by itself, does this invalidate the distinction between mental and somatic in any way? It seems to me as wilful completely to spiritualise nature as radically to despiritualise it. (June 5, 1917)

By 1920, Freud seemed to be almost completely “seduced” by the doctor of Baden-Baden, by the “analytic delirium” offered by *The Seeker of Soul* and Groddeck's other writings. Nevertheless, he retained his original ambivalence. Commenting an analytic case study sent by Groddeck, he noted: “clever person comes to a point where he starts to turn mystical, where his most personal thinking begins. But couldn't you perhaps change a few things in these last sentences, make a sacrificio d'emozione [Italian in the original]? (November 15, 1920)

For Freud, their mutual approach contributed largely to the formulation and reformulation of his concepts, Eros and Thanatos, the place of the Id in the psychic structure, as well as his phylogenetic ideas under Lamarck's influence, originally elaborated together with Ferenczi during the first world war. It is not by chance that Freud's *The Ego and the Id* and Groddeck's *Book of the It* were published in the same year (1923). Now it was Groddeck who condemned Freud with the lack originality. He wrote to his wife on May 15, 1923¹⁶:

The Ego and the Id is pretty, but quite uninteresting for me. In reality it was written to appropriate secretly loans made by Stekel and me. And yet his Id is of only limited use for the understanding of neuroses. He ventures into the realm of organic illness only in a very sneaky way, with the help of a death instinct or destruction drive taken from Stekel and Spielrein. He disregards the constructive aspect of my It, presumably to smuggle it in next time. Some of it is quite amusing.

Three years later Freud sent the following congratulation letter to Groddeck:

On your 60th birthday our association sends you its warmest congratulations. Even your enemies in the scientific field are admirers and friends of your person. We are all grateful to you for the idiosyncratic views with which you opened up barely explored areas. Then we all want to thank you for the happy laugh into which you transformed our normally so serious investigation of the psyche, in your *Seeker of Souls*. (11 October 1926)

¹⁶ Georg Groddeck: *The Meaning of Illness*. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London 1977. 13.

While Freud finally has retained his ambivalence toward Groddeck, and he never gave up – in spite of a few severe temptations – his philosophical dualism, Ferenczi’s metamorphosis was spectacular indeed. In the beginning of their acquaintance he was completely in agreement with Freud on judging Groddeck’s therapeutic methods and his conclusions. For example, on June 14, 1918, he wrote to Freud: Groddeck “must be a very uncritical man [...] It strikes me altogether as more and more probable that Groddeck is not curing at all with analysis, but rather that with the aid of the transference he puts the plastic power of hysteria into the service of the organic tendency to heal”¹⁷.

A few years later, however, it was Ferenczi who greeted most enthusiastically Groddeck’s *The Seeker of Soul*. In his above quoted review published in *Imago* he compares him to Swift, Rabelais and Balzac. He interprets Groddeck’s novel as follows:

All the work of man is only plastic representation of the genitals and of the genital act [...] The world is dominated by a magnificent unity. The dualism of body and soul is a superstition. The whole body thinks; thoughts can find expression in the form of a moustache, a corn, even an excreta. The soul is ‘infected’ by the body, the body by the contents of the soul; and in fact it is not permissible to talk about the ‘ego’. One does not live, but one is ‘lived’ by something. The strongest ‘infections’ are the sexual ones. He who does not want to see eroticism becomes myopic; he who cannot ‘smell’ eroticism catches a cold. The preference for the erotogenic zone may manifest itself in the formation of one’s feature, in, for instance, a double chin. The priest is clerically ‘infected’ by his cassock, knitting knits the whole female sex into a pathetic pitiness.

Let’s put aside for a moment Ferenczi’s and Groddeck’s rather Weiningerian views on women, and let’s talk about seeing. “He who does not want to see eroticism becomes myopic” wrote Ferenczi, and he echoes simply Groddeck who was particularly interested in the *psychosomatics of vision*. He emphasized in one of his essays on seeing that

[j]udging by their meaning and purpose the majority of eye complaints could be considered attempts by the It to obstruct the visual perception of the outside world. There is some justification in treating every illness of the eye as a method of facilitating the repression of disturbing impressions from the external world on to the internal world. Where the turning away of the eyes, the head, and the body, or the closing of the eyelids does not suffice we get an illness, be it a mere sty or complete blindness. Diagnosis and therapy may involve the examination and illumination of the dark unconscious; one could even say that this is the most important part of the treatment by the eye doctor¹⁸.

Groddeck’s ideas about seeing our ability to combine the rational exploration and understanding of the world with a mystical experience of inner vision. In *The Seeker of Soul*

Weltlein wears glasses made from simple window glass, because, as he says, “the glasses remind me that I have a mission, and everything has to serve this mission: I must rather blind myself than to see something that contradicts to my ideas”.

In Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Eye to Wonder* (Ihr Glücklichen Augen)¹⁹ the young woman, Miranda suffers from serious myopia, she has to wear seven dioptre glasses. However, most of the time, she forgets to use them, because she finds the world around her so unbearable that she does not want to see what happens around her: e.g., how her fiancé seduces her best friend... Bachmann dedicates her

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud Sándor Ferenczi. *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi*. Volume 2, 1914-1919.

¹⁸ Vom Sehen, von der Welt des Auges und vom Sehen ohne Augen, 1932. First published in *Psychoanalytische Schriften zur Psychosomatik*, Wiesbaden, 1970.

¹⁹ Ingeborg Bachmann: *Ihr glücklichen Augen* (1971). In *Werke*. München, Piper 1978, Bd. 2. 354-373.

story to the memory of Georg Groddeck to whom she devoted a separate essay. For Groddeck, Bachmann explains, a physical symptom

“is a production, like an artistic one, and sickness means something. It wants to say something, it says it by its particular way of appearing, running its course, and disappearing or ending fatally. It says what the sick person doesn’t understand, although it’s his most particular expression. [...] The *It* is a word he uses for lack of better, it’s not a thing in itself but is supposed to mean something’s there, it’s there and stronger and much stronger than the ego, for the ego can’t even intentionally intervene in breathing, in digestion, in blood circulation, the ego is a mask, a pretension with which all of us go about – and we are ruled by the *It*, the *It* does that, and it speaks through sickness in symbols”²⁰ (W 4: 352).

Ingeborg Bachmann’s attraction to Groddeck belongs to his literary legacy which extends from the Hungarian poet Milán Füst (who was treated by him in Baden-Baden, and shaped a character after him in one of his novels) to the German novelist Alfred Döblin and the British writer Lawrence Durrell. His psychoanalytic legacy is more controversial. As Martin Grotjahn remarked:

Groddeck allowed his unconscious to erupt freely – almost as if constantly in the process of being analyzed. Only after his ideas, impressions, interpretations emerged he put them in some kind of more or less socially approved forms. He seduced his listeners into following him – he encouraged them to abandon intellectual and logical censorship. He did not convince by reasoning or by facts – his evidence was of different kind. He convinced by experience of evidence, leaving it up to his pupils to put the so gained knowledge into the framework of science. The only safeguard against the dangers of George Groddeck’s method and against running off in wild phantasies is the constant logical and rational open-eyed observation of the clinical facts²¹.

Ferenczi was in fact one of the “listeners” who was “seduced” by Groddeck into an “analytic delirium”. His gradual identification with his Baden-Baden doctor was a consequence, at least partly, of the cumulating of bitterness about and disappointment in Freud. As he wrote in his famous Christmas confession letter to Groddeck (December 25, 1921): “I could never be completely free and open with him; I felt that he expected too much of this ‘deferential respect’ from me; he was too big for me, there was too much of a father.” Ferenczi sought in Groddeck not only a doctor who can heal his somatic and psychological symptoms at the same time, but an intimate friend as well. He wrote in the same Christmas letter to Groddeck: “I notice that I’m imitating your ‘Letters to a Woman Friend’ in peppering this letter with these entertaining morsels. Are you by any chance this female friend for me, or am I using your friendship in a homosexual way to replace her?”²²

Groddeck’s growing influence on Ferenczi can be detected in the formation of his ideas in the 1920s, first of all in the monistic theory on the origins of sexuality in *Thalassa* as a “phylogenetic fantasy”, and his later “experiments” in “active technique” and “mutual analysis”. Thomas Weltlein as an “enfant terrible” served for Ferenczi a model which he himself tried to follow when he had assumed the role of an “enfant terrible” of the psychoanalytic movement, the role of the “wise baby” who casts the unpleasant truth on the face of people. In any case, it was Groddeck himself who had clearly recognized the tragedy inherent in Ferenczi’s carrier. As he wrote to Ferenczi’s widow Gizella in 1934:

²⁰ Ingeborg Bachmann: *Werke*. München, Piper 1978. Bd 4. 352.

²¹ Martin Grotjahn: Georg Groddeck and his Teachings about Man’s Innate Need for Symbolization: ... *Psychoanal. Rev.*, 1945, 32:9-24.

²² Sándor Ferenczi – Georg Groddeck: *Correspondence 1921-1933*. Ed. Christopher Fortune. Open Gate Press, London, 2002, pp. 8-11.

Even before going over to psychoanalysis one of the underlying principles of my medical thinking was the conviction that in human individuals there are – apart from the psyche which is the subject of scientific investigation – thousands and millions of more or less independently existing souls which continuously unite and separate, group and re-group, working sometimes for and sometimes against each other, and probably exist quite independently at times. Having embraced this view, I was content to leave it at that. I never tried to study this cosmos; it simply isn't in my nature to go into matters which I consider unfathomable. Being such a close friend of Sándor's, I soon realised that he viewed these matters similarly. I was thus horrified to see him proceed to investigate this human cosmos scientifically, even attempt to describe it, so that others could participate in this undoubtedly overwhelming spectacle. He became completely consumed by this endeavour. He expressed it thus to me: I atomise the soul. Such atomisation, though, if pursued seriously, can only end in the dissolution of the self, for another human being is, and always will remain hidden to us. We can only atomise our own soul, and that will destroy us. [...] However close we may have been, and however great our friendship, he had already left me far behind in his ascent to the stars, which I couldn't and wouldn't join"²³.

²³ Ibid., 113-114.

