A Note On Freud's "Analysis Terminable and Interminable"

Written at the end of his career – as our editor's note explains, it and the subsequent "Constructions in Analysis" comprise "the last strictly psychoanalytical writings by Freud to be brought out in his lifetime" – "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" finds Freud turning – or perhaps returning – to the question of psychoanalysis' end, or ends. One finds Freud asking, often from a position of frustration both explicit and affectively palpable, what marks the end of (an) analysis, or if analysis can truly be said to have an end at all? This invites the question of the ends of analysis, so to speak – its wherefores, be they teleological or timeless – a discussion which is apparently inseparable in Freud's mind from that of whither psychoanalysis? How can psychoanalysis carry on after what Freud once called "the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life" – his "father's death"? And what will happen to Freud's legacy, and his inheritors, once he, as the primal father of the science, has left the scene?

The answers to these questions offered by "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" are, as one might suspect, as intertwined as the questions themselves, and teasing them out requires no less a labor of love – and is therefore no more innocent of phantasy – than any analysis can claim to be. Such a claim, however, seems to beg the very questions that we, along with Freud, have set ourselves to answer.

After all – and at this point in the semester, it really is more or less after all – what is psychoanalysis *for*? At first, we understood it as a talking cure – a clinical method, used to treat suffering patients in the hopes of alleviating their suffering. And yet, it is hard to deny that at some point that the vector of Freud's focus shifts from an interest in theoretical understanding as

a support for clinical insights to an interest in clinical outcomes only insofar as they support or complicate the theories of mind and consciousness the development of which has become Freud's primary focus. Psychoanalysis becomes less a way of "curing" others, and more a framework for understanding ourselves, as individuals and in collectives, in a world increasingly without stable norms. By the time of "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," Freud finds himself asking what psychoanalysis can reasonably be expected to *do*.

Ever the scientist, Freud sets about schematizing and systematizing, identifying three factors in the susceptibility of a patient to the benefits offered by psychoanalysis: the strength of their instincts and psychological defenses, the force of the trauma that has assaulted those instincts and defenses, and the extent of the alterations to the patient's ego that have resulted. Freud defines the lattermost of these, tellingly, as "a deviation from the fiction of a normal ego which would guarantee unshakeable loyalty to the work of analysis"; we might, for our own purposes, call the complex of instincts and defenses the subject's "prehistory," and the traumas which aggress those instincts and defenses the subject's "history."

We might then render Freud's response as follows: A self is formed by the world, and then comes into contact, and conflict, with the world, which causes it to question itself – does it, at the end of the day, have any real value? Does it deserve all of the time and attention that it has been given, and the further time and attention which it sometimes pleads for and sometimes demands? If nobody ever gets cured *in toto* and in perpetuity, was psychoanaysis just a fantasy? Have we wasted our lives, and the lives of others, in love with, and in pursuit of, an illusion? Freud's reply, which by now should no longer be shocking to us, is "perhaps." We should hear in that "perhaps," however, a measure of self-doubt, but also a measure of playfulness, as well as

an invitation to intimacy through the sharing of genuine vulnerability, at one of those ontologically indeterminate margins where evasiveness is itself the only form of honesty possible. This latter option, indeed, we might call an invitation to join hands with him in arriving at a more positive answer, to construct an intimacy that is no less authentic for its being constructed, and can keep the fragile self suspended in thin air, because it is supported by the invisible bridge of language – a talking cure, indeed.

We might therefore call "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" a plea to accept psychoanalysis despite its inevitable – and deeply human – failings and limitations; despite its own fears that it might not be worthy of love; a recapitulation of psychoanalysis' constant call to see not only the person behind the symptoms, but those symptoms as part of the person – indeed, constitutive of the personhood of every person – and the need for oneself and (or as) one's symptoms to be disciplined as capable of coexisting with the possibility of affirmation, the capacity to be, and find oneself, worthy of love. But it is also a reminder that this possibility depends on one's ability to overcome alterations of the ego – that is, to remain committed to psychoanalysis' essential commandment to constantly attempt honest self-disclosure.

And so we find, here, all the signs of Freud's psychic individuality that we have come to recognize over the course of this term – the way he throws his weight around with his comments on the work of Rank and Ferenczi, the central question of how later generations negotiate the legacy of a father toward whom they can only feel ambivalent (and not without justification), the tacit understanding that psychoanalysis is in certain ways fundamentally conceived of as a substitutive satisfaction for an essentially healthy relationship with one's parents that begins in one's prehistory and extends throughout one's history. Psychoanalysis is, after all, nothing other

than the process of learning to love, and to accept love, such that one can healthily love oneself and others – constructing an intimacy, decoding one's private languages and developing new ones through the transference, defining and redefining a shared set of symbols, and constructing a shared present through the active revision of one's prehistory.

Freud describes the breakdown of the analytic relationship in language that makes this identification undeniable: "The rebellious overcompensation of the male produces one of the strongest transference-resistances. He refuses to subject himself to a father-substitute, or to feel indebted to him for anything, and consequently he refuses to accept his recovery from the doctor."

We might, indeed, say that, at least for Freud, the end of psychoanalysis is to help us overcome our guilt about our ambivalent relationships toward our parents, by acknowledging that each of us at least wants to kill our father, at least once or twice, and by realizing, in an ostensibly-random example added by Freud to The Interpretation of Dreams in 1925, that "It cannot be disputed that in the course of an analysis various events may occur the responsibility for which cannot be laid upon the patient's intentions. ***His father may die without his having murdered him..." (ID 520FN1).*** Freud himself tells us, in his preface to the Third Edition of that book, that "this book has a further subjective significance for me personally—a significance which I only grasped after I had completed it. It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father's death [...] Having discovered that this was so, I felt unable to obliterate the traces of the experience." And indeed, the traces of the experience can be seen throughout the development of Freud's thought, from at least his father's death in 1896 until the end of his life and career.

But what are we to make of this? What does it mean if psychoanalysis, along with its tropes and obsessions, can be understood as being, at heart, just Freud's fantasy of systematizing the process of obtaining substitutive satisfaction for a healthy relationship with his father? It would seem unlikely that Freud would be unaware of this potential symptomatic formation, given his tenacity in identifying it wherever else it might rear its head, as well as his persistent suggestions, as in the Schreber case, that psychoanalysis may itself be a compensatory delusion.

And yet, Freud carries on, and clearly believes that we ought to, as well, even after he is gone. But why? The answer would appear to lie in Freud's beliefs about psychic reality – sometimes, if not always, a fantasy is all that we have available to us. Indeed, we live with others in a common world made up of the overlap of private fantasies – even if the Real is real, it isn't really relevant to our purposes. And so why not teach ourselves to see the world as a struggle between love and death, greater unification and greater fragmentation? If love is always a fiction, why not believe in the power of transference to combat trauma, and in our ability to learn to tell ourselves a story where some measure of healing is possible, even if that healing comes in the form of retelling the same story in a different way?

Analysis begins with loss, and is a process which may only ever truly conclude with one's death. But it is Freud's contention, to the end, that these horizons only tell half the story; that along the way, one makes life, by loving. And ultimately, analysis may be simply another name for that process of trying to see how the pieces of the broken world might be fitted back together; the lifelong process of learning to love our world and ourselves, despite their imperfections.