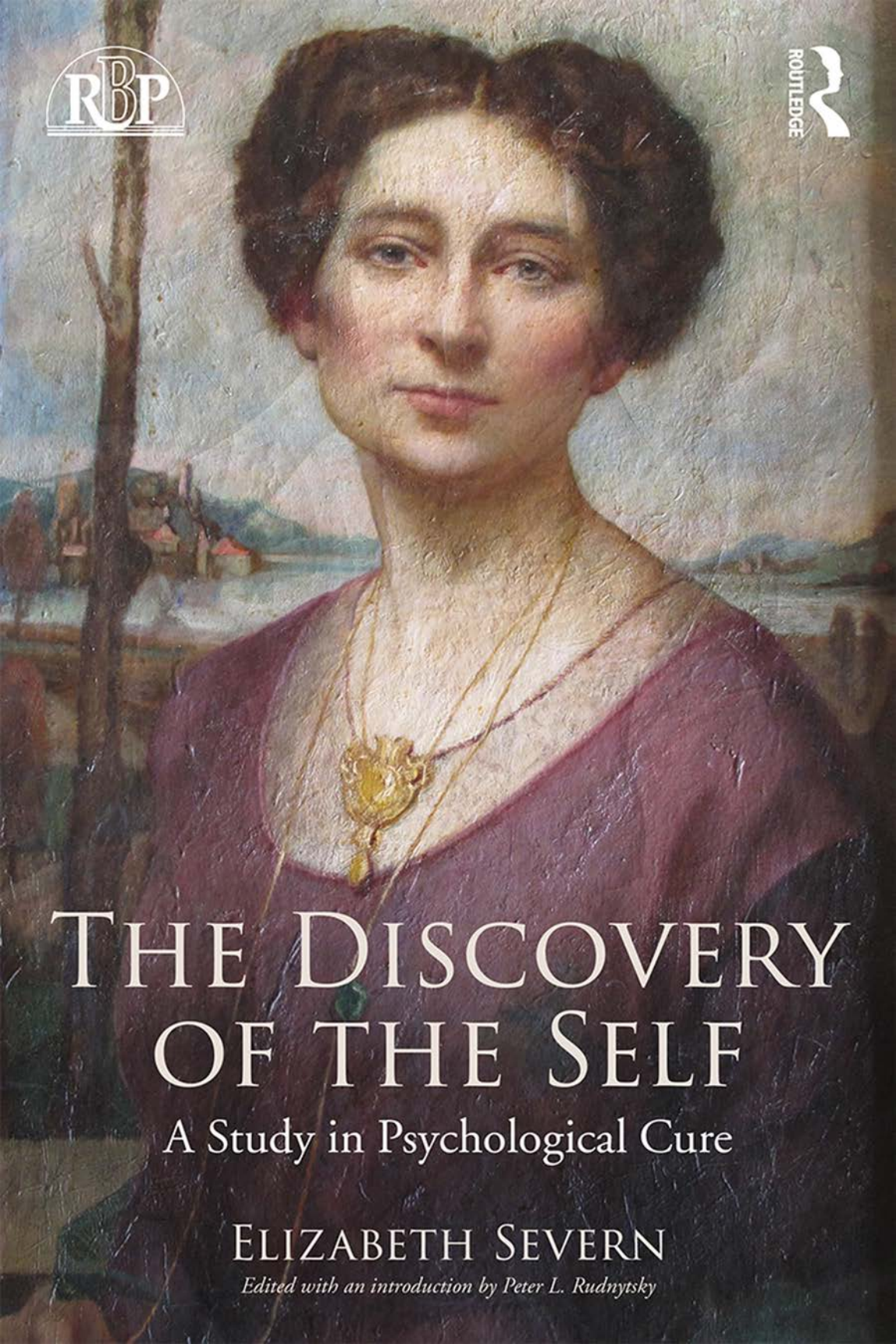
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THE DISCOVERY OF THE SELF
A Study in Psychological Cure
ELIZABETH SEVERN
Edited with an introduction by Peter L. Rudnytsky

The Discovery of the Self

Elizabeth Severn, known as "R.N." in Sándor Ferenczi's *Clinical Diary*, was Ferenczi's analysand for eight years, the patient with whom he conducted his controversial experiment in mutual analysis, and a psychoanalyst in her own right who had a transformative influence on his work. *The Discovery of the Self* is the distillation of that experience and allows us to hear the voice of one of the most important patients in the history of psychoanalysis. However, Freud branded Severn Ferenczi's "evil genius" and her name does not appear in Ernest Jones's biography, so she has remained largely unknown until now. This book is a reissue of Severn's landmark work of 1933, together with an introduction by Peter L. Rudnytsky that sets out the unrecognized importance of her thinking both for the development of psychoanalysis and for contemporary theory.

Inspired by the realization that Severn has embedded disguised case histories both of herself and of Ferenczi, as well as of her daughter Margaret, Rudnytsky shows how *The Discovery of the Self* contains "the other side of the story" of mutual analysis and is thus an indispensable companion volume to the *Clinical Diary*. A full partner in Ferenczi's rehabilitation of trauma theory and champion of the view that the analyst must participate in the patient's reliving of past experiences, Severn emerges as the most profound conduit for Ferenczi's legacy in the United States, if not in the entire world.

Lacking any institutional credentials and once completely marginalized, Elizabeth Severn can at long last be given her due as a formidable psychoanalyst. Newly available for the first time in more than eighty years, *The Discovery of the Self* is simultaneously an engaging introduction to psychotherapy that will appeal to general readers as well as a sophisticated text to be savored by psychoanalytic scholars and clinicians as a "prequel" to the works of Heinz Kohut and a neglected classic of relational psychoanalysis.

Peter L. Rudnytsky is Professor of English at the University of Florida and Head of the Department of Academic and Professional Affairs of the American Psychoanalytic Association. From 2001 to 2011 he was editor of *American Imago* and he currently coedits the History of Psychoanalysis series with Karnac and the Psychoanalytic Horizons series with Bloomsbury.

Relational Perspectives Book Series

The Relational Perspectives Book Series (RPBS) publishes books that grow out of or contribute to the relational tradition in contemporary psychoanalysis. The term *relational psychoanalysis* was first used by Greenberg and Mitchell[1] to bridge the traditions of interpersonal thinking, as developed within American psychoanalysis, and object relations, as developed within British theory. But, through the seminal work of the late Stephen A. Mitchell, the term *relational psychoanalysis* grew and began to accrue to itself many other influences and developments. Various tributaries—interpersonal psychoanalysis, object relations theory, self psychology, empirical infancy research, and elements of contemporary Freudian and Kleinian thought—flow into this tradition, which understands relational configurations between self and others, both real and fantasied, as the primary subject of psychoanalytic investigation.

We refer to the relational tradition, rather than to a relational school, to highlight that we are identifying a trend, a tendency within contemporary psychoanalysis, not a more formally organized or coherent school or system of beliefs. Our use of the term *relational* signifies a dimension of theory and practice that has become salient across the wide spectrum of contemporary psychoanalysis. Now under the editorial supervision of Lewis Aron and Adrienne Harris, with the assistance of Associate Editors Steven Kuchuck and Eyal Rozmarin, the Relational Perspectives Book Series originated in 1990 under the editorial eye of Stephen Mitchell. Mitchell was the most prolific and influential of the originators of the relational tradition. Committed to dialogue among psychoanalysts, he abhorred the authoritarianism that dictated adherence to a rigid set of beliefs or technical restrictions. He championed open discussion, comparative and integrative approaches, and promoted new voices across the generations.

Included in the Relational Perspectives Book Series are authors and works that come from within the relational tradition and extend and develop that tradition, as well as works that critique relational approaches or compare and contrast it with alternative points of view. The series includes our most distinguished senior psychoanalysts, along with younger contributors who bring fresh vision. A full list of titles in this series is available at https://www.routledge.com/series/LEARPBS.

1 Greenberg, J. & Mitchell, S. (1983). *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The Discovery of the Self

A Study in Psychological Cure

Elizabeth Severn
Edited with an introduction by Peter L. Rudnytsky
and an essay by Adrienne Harris and Lewis Aron

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Preface

Of the three books Elizabeth Severn published during her lifetime, *The Discovery of the Self* is the only one never to have been reprinted since it first saw the light of day in London in 1933 with Rider & Co. and in Philadelphia the following year with David McKay Company. This is a curious state of affairs because it is not only Severn's last book but also incomparably the most important, reflecting as it does her deep and prolonged therapeutic relationship with Sándor Ferenczi, culminating in their undertaking of a mutual analysis, about which we have hitherto known only from his *Clinical Diary*, where Severn is given the code initials "R.N." I am delighted and honored to have been afforded this opportunity to grant Severn's book a new lease on life by presenting it to a contemporary audience in the Routledge Relational Perspectives Series.[1]

As I detail in the Introduction, my own interest in *The Discovery of the Self* was sparked when another scholar magnanimously shared her realization of something that had gone unremarked by all previous commentators—namely, that the book contains thinly disguised case histories not only of Severn herself but also of Ferenczi, thus giving us the "other side of the story" on their controversial experiment of mutual analysis. (My subsequent research disclosed that the book also contains a case history of Severn's daughter Margaret.) This fact alone, as I argue in what follows, is enough to make *The Discovery of the Self*, like the *Clinical Diary*, one of the most important texts in the history of psychoanalysis and obligatory reading for anyone seriously interested in Ferenczi.

1 In my editorial capacity, I have taken the liberty of touching up the spelling and punctuation to conform to standard American usage. All page references in the Introduction are to the present edition of the work.

In addition to gaining an enhanced appreciation of Ferenczi, my hope is that others who now encounter Severn for the first time through this book will join me in becoming curious about her as a person and as a thinker who deserves to be taken seriously in her own right and will want to draw on her ideas and insights in their own work. Severn's mystical leanings, mocked by Freud and Jones, have made it easy to dismiss her as a lightweight. But however skeptical we may be about the occult, it is possible to explain a preternatural sensitivity to unconscious communication as a response to traumatic experience and thereby to comprehend it within a psychoanalytic framework. I have become more impressed with Severn every day, and I now believe that, despite her lack of formal education or institutional affiliations, she can lay claim to being the most profound transmitter of Ferenczi's legacy, certainly in the United States and perhaps anywhere in the world.

In a companion volume, *Mutual Analysis: Ferenczi, Severn, and the Origins of Trauma Theory*, I delve into many topics for which there is no space here, including Severn's life, her previous books, the case of Margaret, how Severn succeeded Groddeck as a counterweight to Freud in Ferenczi's mind, her role as Ferenczi's collaborator in promulgating a radically transformed version of Freud's discarded "seduction theory," and the irreconcilable differences on both the personal and theoretical planes between Freud and Ferenczi. Eagerly awaited is the biography *Elizabeth Severn: The Evil Genius of Psychoanalysis*, by Arnold W. Rachman, who has established the Severn Archives in the Library of Congress.

The study of the history of psychoanalysis is a perennial work in progress in which perspectives change as new knowledge and fresh interpretations alter the existing landscape. Just as the publication of the *Clinical Diary* more than thirty years ago catalyzed the "Ferenczi renaissance," so, too, this rediscovery of *The Discovery of the Self* once again invites us to rewrite our received narratives of the past. Who could have imagined that Elizabeth Severn, once the most marginal of figures, would have turned out to be so central to our understanding of Ferenczi and a voice in the wilderness preparing the way for many of the most exciting recent developments in our field?

The Work of Elizabeth Severn: An Appreciation

In the first collection of papers on Ferenczi's contributions, *The Legacy of Sándor Ferenczi* (Aron and Harris, 1993), a groundbreaking chapter illuminated the background of "R.N.," Ferenczi's code name in the *Clinical Diary* (1932) for his historically crucial patient, Elizabeth Severn. Just five years earlier, in 1988, the English-language publication of the *Diary* had revealed the radical importance of her case for Ferenczi's developing ideas and practice. As Fortune (1993) has suggested, "Severn may have been the first sexually abused analysand whose actual childhood trauma was the focus of psychoanalytic treatment since Freud abandoned his seduction theory in the late 1890s" (p. 102).

Subsequently, the brilliant detective work of Brennan (2015) has succeeded in identifying virtually all of the patients to whom Ferenczi refers in his *Clinical Diary*. They were Americans or had lived in America, all knew each other, and most were wealthy. Brennan summarizes the biographical facts about Severn: "Elizabeth Severn (1879–1959), born Leota Loretta Brown, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She took classes at the Armour Institute, Chicago. In 1898, she married Charles K. H[e]ywood, and her daughter Margaret was born in 1901. Severn's name change occurred in San Antonio, circa 1909, establishing a new identity for herself as a metaphysician and healer. Severn authored several books on psychology and pursued analysis with Smith Ely Jelliffe, M.D., Joseph Jefferson Asch, M.D., and Otto Rank, before coming to Ferenczi in 1925. After her analysis she published *The Discovery of the Self* (1933)" (p. 16).

Peter L. Rudnytsky has been on a fascinating quest. He has stayed steadily focused on getting beyond rumor, gossip, and the strange frissons circulating around Elizabeth Severn's relationship with her analyst Sándor Ferenczi. This quest has led him into two related projects. First, he has

here edited and reclaimed Severn's last published work, which has been out of print for more than eighty years. In conjunction with this project, he has written a book on Ferenczi's mutual analysis with Severn, certainly his most controversial "technical" innovation, and their joint rehabilitation of Freud's original "seduction" or trauma theory.

Slowly and with much credit to his efforts and (as Rudnytsky gracefully acknowledges in both his books) building now on decades of devotion and reparative scholarship from an international group of analysts and historians, we can get through innuendo, bad faith, understandable confusions, uncertainty, and even judgments made in good faith to engage in an actual encounter with Severn's work and thus to some extent with her person, and perhaps by extension with Ferenczi's. Most astonishingly and compellingly, Rudnytsky has found in two of Severn's case histories what surely seems to be her version of what she and Ferenczi did in their experiment of mutual analysis, one a disguised account of her analysis of Ferenczi and the other a disguised account of Ferenczi's analysis of Severn herself.

There are many astute, critical, wary, and tentative judgments about mutual analysis. Balint (1968), who clearly revered Ferenczi and felt deeply protective of his reputation and personhood, has complex and important questions and reservations about mutual analysis in general and about the particular mutual analysis Severn and Ferenczi were conducting: "I still remember, when we discussed his experiments—the case mentioned was the grandest but by no means the only one—Ferenczi accepted that, in a way, he failed, but added that he himself learned an immense amount, and perhaps even others might benefit from his failure if they realized that this task, in the way he tried to solve it, was insoluble" (p. 113).

Since the time of Severn and Ferenczi's engagement with mutual analysis, we have been privy to a rapidly and radically evolving theorizing of countertransference. As Gabbard (1995) argued, our recent understanding of countertransference has become an emerging area of common ground among psychoanalysts of diverse theoretical perspectives. Following the elaboration and popularization of such conceptualizations as projective identification, enactment, and role-responsiveness, we now tend to view countertransference as a "joint creation" (p. 475) or co-construction with contributions made by both analyst and patient. Across the range of many analytic theories and geographic boundaries, we now consider countertransference to be a tool for understanding. Field theorists help us to see the

dyad as a bi-personal unconscious and conscious circuit. All these developments have led to some shifting contexts for thinking about the experiment Ferenczi and Severn undertook. Bass (2015) might be seen as being in the lineage of this kind of approach where the analysand's judgment and construction of the analyst can be part of an evolving understanding the analysand may come to of his or her own process. An argument can be made for utilizing mutual analysis in the service of expanding mental freedom in the patient. Movement, breaking of impasse, shifting analytic sensibility and meaning in the analyst may open a process of growth and self-mastery in the patient. Reverie and the use of dreaming and embodiment in the analyst are now more recognizable and potentially fruitful parts of useful analytic technique (Ogden, 1999). Criticism and reservations about Ferenczi's clinical excess remain pertinent, and Aron (1996) has argued that what Ferenczi understood as mutuality may have at times crashed into symmetry. Thus, contemporary analysts may be inspired by Ferenczi's clinical innovations even while having doubts about the precise techniques and methods that he employed in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

These developments make the appearance of this new edition of *The Discovery of the Self* all the more welcome as it arrives in a less explosive and solely negative intellectual/theoretical environment. The recovery of Ferenczi's work and reputation is already in its fourth decade, though we should note that in Balint's (1949) obituary for Ferenczi he was protective, questioning and contesting Jones's and others' determination to render Ferenczi disturbed and psychotic. The project of reparation in Rudnytsky's work has a long history of devotion and determination.

Added to the change of intellectual and theoretical environments and a widening scope for psychoanalysis as gateways to new understandings of Ferenczi, Severn, and mutual analysis, there is the particular quality and content of Severn's book itself. Perhaps mercifully, certainly usefully, Severn appears less exotic and disrupted, more settled in a particular stream of thought and work.

In looking at the accounts of Severn as a person, we have not been well served. First of all, Ferenczi's transference/countertransference to Severn was complex, compounded of admiration and hostility and fear. It is finally a mix of transference and judgment, as all analysts' assessments of a patient must be. Second, the extant accounts of Severn (especially Thompson's interview with Eissler) may not be entirely free of rivalry,

hostility, envy, and disdain. This, of course, may have been particularly true of Freud's reactions to Severn as he blamed her for turning Ferenczi against him. As Jones reported (1957, p. 407), Freud had called her Ferenczi's "evil genius." It is a relief to have her voice, even as we recognize that a personal voice is never just that. She produces a text that is of its time and milieu. The Severn who writes may have many differences as well as overlaps with the Severn who worked with Ferenczi, interacted within the professional ambience of Budapest from 1925 to 1933, and lived on into the 1950s practicing therapy in both Britain and the United States.

In this connection, we would like to highlight the many significant women patients who have throughout psychoanalytic history made invaluable contributions to the field. This clearly begins with Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O.) and includes Ida Bauer (Dora), and so often throughout our history the women's voices are only heard as they are filtered through their mostly male analyst's writings. Here we have an opportunity to capture and reclaim the voice of a female patient who clearly had a momentous influence on one of our psychoanalytic pioneers. Consider how different the history and development of psychoanalysis might be if all along we had solicited accounts of the patients' memories and experiences to complement the clinical case histories written from the point of view of their analysts. Only when there are two subjective accounts can we consider our methodology consistent with that of what we often call a relational, intersubjective, or two-person psychology. How can we have a two-person psychology with a literature of case histories reflecting only the psychology of one? Here, Rudnytsky has uncovered the second side of a famous and influential case. Taken together with Ferenczi's account, we can reconstitute a truly two-person psychology.

At a conference held at the Sándor Ferenczi Center in New York City in 2015, Severn's life and work were carefully examined. Jim Righter, an analysand who saw her three times per week as an adolescent, came to talk about his memories of the work and to display the many drawings he made in his sessions with Severn. The Severn summoned by his account (we speak now as members of the audience at that event) seemed quite different from the Severn we knew in other contexts. Mostly remembered by Righter as silent, she supported his drawing, talked to him about his art, wrote briefly on the drawings to give them a title or note the date. It sounds conventional. It is, of course, a former analysand's distant recollection. He felt himself to be a troubled young man, and certainly, subsequent to the

treatment of a year and a half, he was able to complete college and professional training, to marry and have a family and a distinguished career as an architect. From his point of view, the only eccentric detail of his experience with Severn was her outfit—a long dress with purple fringe. Now in his eighties, Jim Righter remembers Severn suggesting to him the emotional registration of certain colors: passion, freedom.

To turn to *The Discovery of the Self* will help to bring about a loosening of the speculative, rumor-laden picture of an odd or disturbed or even eccentric person. The book reads easily and thoughtfully. Severn sets her clinical work in an intellectual framework that draws on philosophy and theory. Different perspectives on the mind, on healing, on psychological work are laid out quite straightforwardly. The prose is serious and quietly thoughtful. There is a clear backdrop of scholarship and clinical experience. Who is this Elizabeth Severn?

It struck us more and more forcefully that encountering this long-lost text requires accustoming oneself to a new voice. It says a lot about context and setting that we may always hear a "patient's" voice in an already categorized way. Severn we met first as a patient and indeed a most difficult one. Mutual analysis, by Ferenczi's own account, emerged from transactions of a quite intense, one might say virulent, nature between himself and Severn. She maintained that she could not get better until he did. He, apparently and interestingly, did not disagree. One of us (Harris, 2009) views impasse as always in part a blocked mourning in the analyst. The other (Aron, 2013) similarly speaks about the power of mutual enactments and their role in the generation and perpetuation of therapeutic stalemates and deadlocks. Impasses are understood as often being a reaction to the analyst's unconscious perception of something about the patient, some characteristic, trait, conflict, attitude, or behavior with which the analyst deeply, but unconsciously, identifies but wishes to repudiate. All of these processes may be studied in relation to Ferenczi and Severn's original experiments as co-participants in mutual analysis (Fiscalini, 2004).

Among Ferenczi's immense contributions to psychoanalysis, although certainly wildly controversial, was his continuing experimentation with technique. Haynal (1988) has argued that this is in fact the central thorn in Freud's side and in their fracturing relationship. To take counsel with Balint, this move to mutual analysis may have been, like so many moves in psychoanalysis, both brave and reckless. But *The Discovery of the Self* sets in motion a set of images and concepts in which we must see Severn as an