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Carl Jung's relationship with Sabina Spielrein: A reassessment

Abstract: The aim of this article is to give an accurate account of the relationship between Sabina Spielrein and Carl Gustav Jung, based on a close reading of the available documentary evidence. I challenge many of the commonly held assumptions about their relationship. These include the belief that Spielrein was Jung's first analytic patient, that they had a long and mutually passionate affair, and that Spielrein was the inspiration behind Jung's conception of the 'anima'. I argue that there is little evidence for these and a number of other beliefs that have been passed down through successive cultural iterations without careful documentary analysis.

Key words: Bleuler, Freud, Jung, psychoanalysis, Spielrein

Introduction

This article offers a document-based account of the relationship between Carl Jung and Sabina Spielrein. It draws on research carried out while preparing my recent biography of her (Launer, 2015). I was fortunate in being the first biographer to obtain permission from the Spielrein Literary Estate for unlimited quotations from Spielrein's diaries and letters, as well as from the medical records of her admission to the Burghölzli Hospital as a teenager. This enabled me to reconstruct a coherent and consecutive narrative of her entire life, based on the available documentary evidence. I am not the first person to have questioned many of the myths about Spielrein and her relationship with Jung. However, it is worth stating that I published earlier accounts where I repeated uncritically much of the popular version of her story (Launer, 2007, 2012), which largely derives from the early work of Carotenuto and Kerr (Carotenuto, 1982; Kerr 1993). It was only when I was commissioned to write a scholarly and fully referenced history of Spielrein's life that I examined more recent research together with the documentation, and came to the different conclusions set out here. My re-assessment has drawn particularly on work by Alexander Etkind (1994, 1997), Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester (1992), Angela Graf-Nold (2001), Magnus Ljunggren (2001, 2011), Zvi (Henry) Lothane (1999, 2007, 2013) Bernard Minder (2001a, 2001b), and Sabine Richebächer (2003, 2008). Most of all, it has depended on repeated close readings of the documents, set out in chronological order, with re-translation where necessary, and trying to set aside all pre-conceptions about what did or did not happen between Spielrein and Jung.

Spielrein's interactions with Jung are by no means the most important aspect of her life story. She was a highly gifted theoretician and practitioner throughout her career, making innovative contributions in fields as varied as schizophrenic speech, child development, child psychotherapy and play therapy, the development of language and evolutionary psychology. Apart from her connections with Jung, Freud and Karl Abraham, she worked with Jean Piaget and was his analyst, before returning to her native Russia to work alongside Lev Vygotsky and Alexander Luria. She was a leading figure in the Soviet movement to integrate child psychology, educational psychology and paediatrics, before Stalin's Terror put an end to this work. She may have been the last person to defend psychoanalysis publicly in the Soviet Union. The Nazi invasion of Russia then led to her murder along with her two daughters in the Holocaust. Any narrative of her interactions with Jung – in person for seven years, and then only through correspondence for a further six years – must be seen in the perspective of a life lived over nearly six decades, and in many of the intellectual centres of the western world including Vienna, Berlin, Geneva and Moscow, as well as Zurich and her own home town of Rostov-on-Don.

The value of Carl Jung's ideas does not stand or fall by whether or not he psychoanalysed Sabina Spielrein, gave her therapy, had a lengthy or exclusive love affair with her, reciprocated the same passion that she felt, or was inspired by her to conceive the 'anima'. It matters not one jot for the value of his contribution to psychological thought that these facts are questionable and probably all untrue. What does matter is that we should base any account of Sabina Spielrein on an accurate reading of the sources, recognise her as a major innovator in her own right, and honour her memory for who she was, rather than imagining her as a sideshow or sex object in the lives of two men she was acquainted with for around one eighth of her remarkable life.

Obstacles to history

Anyone attempting to write a measured and well-evidenced history of the period when Spielrein was connected with Jung and Freud, faces several obstacles. Published accounts of her life have generally cast her in the role of a walk-on actress in the lives of these two men. Many of those motivated to read about her are likely to be strong supporters of one or the other of the male protagonists, and may instinctively seek evidence in support of their own hero, while discounting anything else. It takes a cognitive effort on the part of both biographer and reader to imagine how her life story might appear if men like Jung, Freud or indeed Piaget and the other great psychologists she worked with, were seen as people who played passing roles in her own life, rather than vice versa.

The trend for seeing her life as a sideshow was set by the two first books about her. Both books were significantly flawed. 'A Secret Symmetry', edited by Aldo Carotenuto, was the first volume to include extracts from Spielrein's diaries and correspondence, but these were highly selective, and there was no explanation of why this was the case (Carotenuto, 1982). The editor's commentary was slanted towards exculpating Jung. John Kerr's book 'A Most Dangerous Method' was about the early history of psychoanalysis, and Spielrein was not mentioned in long stretches of it (Kerr, 1993). Both Carotenuto and Kerr were writing before Spielrein's hospital records and other key documents were available. Each used a great deal of speculation that later turned out to be wrong.

Through a variety of cultural iterations – including plays and movies, as well as popular articles and websites – the Kerr and Carotenuto versions have become amplified and distorted, so that the Spielrein of the popular imagination has become a caricature. Popular accounts of Spielrein are generally based on the same 'sound bites,' passed down from one secondary source to another. When she is not being remembered as a phantom voice whispering to Jung about the anima, or instructing Freud about the death instinct, she has become a mere naked body. The Sabina Spielrein that almost everyone remembers is as the actress Keira Knightley, being deflowered and spanked in Cronenberg's movie 'A Dangerous Method.' She is not the precocious young doctor who presented 'Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being' to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1911, nor the mature observational scientist who published 'The Origins of the words *Papa* and *Mama*' in 'Imago' in 1923, nor the author of around 35 other publications in three languages, covering a vast range of topics from mothers-in-law to clinical supervision. Neither is she the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, art historian, surgeon, wife, mother, pianist, composer, researcher, writer, linguist, psychologist, paediatrician, teacher, administrator, lecturer and feminist she actually was in real life. To encounter Spielrein anew, one must set the myths aside and start afresh.

Was Spielrein Jung's 'first analytic case'?

Sabina Spielrein was born into a wealthy Russian Jewish family in 1885. Her parents' marriage was turbulent, and she suffered physical assaults from them, as well as likely sexual abuse. She was

intellectually gifted from an early age, but also had psychosomatic symptoms, disturbing sexual fantasies and other psychological problems. In August 1904, she was taken for treatment to the Burghölzli Hospital, a department of Zurich University, suffering from a classic hysterical disorder involving tics, grimaces and physical complaints. This appears to have been triggered by a bereavement reaction following the sudden death the previous year of her younger sister Emilia. At the time she was admitted, the director of the hospital was Eugen Bleuler, an enlightened psychiatrist who had pioneered the idea that a mental asylum should be a therapeutic community. Jung was an assistant physician in the hospital, although shortly afterwards he was promoted to deputy director. He was working at the time as a general psychiatrist with a special interest in schizophrenia, developing his own diagnostic technique of word association, and beginning to apply this therapeutically. He had begun to read Freud and was interested in his approach, although with reservations (Jung, 1901). He had not yet made contact with Freud. The belief that Jung psychoanalysed Spielrein during this admission, and that she was therefore his first analytic patient, rests chiefly on claims he made later in two letters to Freud. Both these letters were written in equivocal circumstances, as detailed below. The claims therefore need to be triangulated with other sources: Jung's professional writings, and the hospital records. I will examine each of these in turn.

The first account Jung gave of his use of psychoanalytic techniques was in his 'Diagnostic Association Studies', published in 1906, two years after Spielrein's admission. In that collection of essays, he described how he had started to supplement his own word association technique with Freud's approach of free association (Jung, 1906a). There are no case reports resembling Spielrein in the book, and Jung explicitly identified another patient there as his 'first analysis'. This was a governess whose obsessional ideas disappeared after three sessions of such treatment over three weeks (Jung, 1906b). Later the same year, in a lecture in Amsterdam, Jung gave a further account of his approach, claiming that when a chain of mental associations was clear through word tests, it was unnecessary to do any special form of interpretation; these could function as a form of psychoanalysis in their own right (Jung, 1906c). On that occasion, he described Spielrein's symptoms from a couple of years previously, but he did so in the context of illustrating Freud's idea of the Oedipus complex. He did not include details of her treatment.

There are two other narratives in Jung's published writings relating to Spielrein. They are both well known, although each displays significant inconsistencies with Jung's contemporaneous hospital records (Launer 2015, pp.60, 186). The first account was his well-known story of beating the dust out of her cloak, together with her agitated reaction. He published this in an essay on recovered memory, shortly after her discharge, but again without any details of treatment (Jung, 1905, p.98). The other account appeared nearly fifty years later in 'Memories, Dreams, Reflections' (Jung, 1963, pp. 137-8). It was the story of a highly intelligent and wealthy Jewish woman who was the granddaughter of a visionary rabbi, as Spielrein was. The only treatment he described there consisted of two meetings when he helped her to rediscover her religious faith. In the same book, he spoke again about a 'first analytic case', although this time it was neither Spielrein nor the governess he had previously described. It was a woman who had suffered paralysis for seventeen years. Thus, there are no claims in any of Jung's published works that he regarded Spielrein as his first analytic patient, nor that he psychoanalysed anyone whose details resemble hers.

Did Jung psychoanalyse Spielrein during her hospital admission?

Spielrein's hospital notes make it clear that her admission to the Burghölzli fell into three phases. During August and September 1904 she improved rapidly, so that by early October she had decided to enrol at medical school in Zurich the following year, with the support of Eugen Bleuler as hospital director. She had also begun to assist Jung with his word association tests in the hospital laboratory. From October onwards, she continued to have intermittent periods of agitation and some hysterical symptoms, including pains in her feet, but these had all resolved by the end of January. From then

until her discharge in early June, she was resident at the hospital by her own choice, in order to work as a research assistant to Jung, and intern to Bleuler. She became part of a large contingent of Russian medical students and psychiatrists including Max Eitingon, and other expatriate followers of Bleuler including Karl Abraham. Some became her university friends and later her psychoanalytic colleagues.

The notes of Spielrein's admission have been published widely and readers may be familiar with them (Minder, 1994, 2006; Steffens & Wharton, 2001; Wharton, 2003). By modern standards, they are sparse, consisting of only thirteen pages including a standard cover sheet and another sheet with family details. This sparseness creates a problem for interpreting her treatment. If you take as a starting point Jung's two claims to have analysed Spielrein during her admission, it is possible to read into certain encounters that this is what happened. However, if you examine the entries carefully, taking into account that Jung at the time based his therapeutic technique on word association, never reported analysing Spielrein in his publications, and may have had circumstantial reasons for making his claims to Freud, the evidence is not persuasive. For example, there is no indication anywhere that Jung invited free association, offered dream interpretation, or used a couch. Nor did he mention using 'Freud's method', although from 1905 he did so explicitly in the notes of other Burghölzli patients. The psychiatrist Bernard Minder, who first edited and published Spielrein's hospital notes, has observed that they give 'hardly any indication' of a clinical method (Minder, 2001a, p.53).

There are around twenty handwritten and typed entries in Spielrein's hospital notes – by Jung, Bleuler and another, unnamed doctor. Seven were in the first week, all by Jung. These record his initial history-taking, first from Spielrein's uncle (himself a doctor), then from Sabina herself and her mother Eva. On the day after her admission, Spielrein explained that her tics and grimaces were connected with sexual thoughts. Jung recorded: 'Could never watch someone being humiliated without falling into a pathological fit in which she finally had to masturbate' (Minder, 2006, p.236). In addition, Spielrein disclosed that her father had 'hit her several times on her bare buttocks ... from time to time in front of her siblings'. Jung explained that this confession was elicited by persuasion: 'It takes a powerful battle to entice [her] to make this confession'. The following day, Spielrein explained that her sense of shame, present since childhood, arose from the sexual arousal brought on with her father's beatings: 'During punishment, the peak experience was that her father was a *man*' (2006, p.237). Jung did not pursue this further, but wrote a new heading, 'Mother' and proceeded to record her relationship with Eva. Four days later, Spielrein recalled that she had once had a 'big fright' when she felt that something (or someone) was crawling in her bed. Jung evidently did not explore this either, but moved on to asking about the death of her sister, which left 'a terrible mark on her.' He then wrote about her religious beliefs (2006, p.239).

Two things are noticeable about these entries. The first is that Jung appears to be following a conventional style of psychiatric history-taking, evidently moving from one question of his own to another, rather than inviting her to elaborate on the topics that appear to carry most emotional significance for her (Aaslestad, 2009). The other is Jung's inattention to the suggestions of sexual abuse. In his commentary on the notes, Bernard Minder remarked: 'It seems highly astonishing to me that incest was never brought into the discussion' (Minder, 2001a, p.55). This inattention continued throughout the admission. Jung only made two further notes referring to punishments causing sexual arousal – in October and in January. On another occasion he noted that a drawing by Spielrein of a doctor sitting astride a woman patient and electrocuting her was 'remarkably sexual' but did not record ever discussing this with her (Minder, 2006, p.243).

Between the end of his history-taking and Spielrein's transition from being a patient at the end of January, Jung made around nine further entries in the notes. He was away from the hospital for several periods of military service and for other reasons including the birth of his first daughter.

Much of Spielrein's treatment consisted of nursing care, involvement in the social and cultural activities of the hospital, as well as separation from her family. Sometimes there are gaps of two or three weeks between entries. Several of Jung's notes record episodes of agitation, or note her increasing improvement. Other entries appear to summarise longer conversations but these did not start until mid-October, when Spielrein was already much improved, had resolved to go to medical school, and was assisting Jung in his laboratory work. A few of these entries imply they are reporting more than one conversation. However, since Jung was now senior physician responsible for 400 in-patients, with all the associated administration and correspondence, it is unlikely there were many more than the ones he wrote down. There is also (with one exception) no record of how long each encounter lasted. A reference in September to the fact that Jung's presence could calm Spielrein 'for hours' has been taken to mean that he literally sat by her for that period of time. However, the German is ambiguous and more likely to mean that a single visit from him would lead to her remaining calm for hours afterwards (Minder 2006, p.241).

There are three entries where Jung used the word 'analysing' or 'analysis', indicating the possibility that he might have been using techniques he had acquired from reading Freud. The first occasion was in mid-October. Spielrein had developed some pains in her feet while out for a walk with Jung in the hospital grounds. 'Analysing' this, Jung elicited that she had experienced these for the first time after a violent row with her father. The following month, the pains returned. Again, Jung described how, by 'analysing' these, he discovered they had been brought on by meeting a woman in a nearby village who reminded her of her mother. In both these instances, the associations were with relatively recent incidents. It is unclear if Jung's 'analysis' elicited any connections of which Spielrein was previously unaware, or if he simply persuaded her to disclose when and how these symptoms had previously been triggered.

The most significant use of the word was in Jung's entry on 8 January, when Jung described a 'three hour analysis', when Spielrein spoke once again of her beatings and how they aroused her. Although some people have assumed that three hours was representative of the time Jung spent with his patient, there are reasons to believe this was not the case. It was one of Jung's longest entries and the only time he recorded the length of a session. It is likely that Jung began the session with word association tests, in keeping with his own published accounts of his technique at that time. There is an independent report of Spielrein's treatment by a Russian medical student working in the hospital at the time, Feiga Berg, describing how Jung carried out word association tests, before 'persuading' Spielrein to talk about the associations these revealed (Berg, 1909). There is also a record of a word association test on Spielrein in the archive in Geneva where her papers are still stored (Richebächer, 2008, p.87).

There are some puzzling aspects to Jung's account as well. Spielrein did not disclose anything that she had not explained to Jung in her first few days in hospital five months earlier, and that he had largely ignored until then: namely 'she has experienced sexual arousal in connection with the beatings' (Minder, 2006, p.247). There are features of the record that strongly recall details from Freud's account of how his mentor Josef Breuer treated 'Anna O,' in their *Studies on Hysteria* (Freud and Breuer, 1895). This includes Spielrein's recollection of troubling events at home involving her father on New Year's Day exactly one year previously – a close re-enactment of the 'Anna O' case. This may have been a coincidence. However, Jung had certainly read this paper, and it is quite likely Spielrein had too. The conversation may therefore represent an early Freudian experiment on Jung's part, or a piece of innocent psychoanalytic theatre. Jung regarded this session as an 'abreaction' of the 'central and most important part of her complex' (Minder, 2006, p.248).

Jung did not record that Bleuler had written to Spielrein's father in the days just before or after this encounter, insisting that he should have no contact with her whatsoever, even by letter. Bleuler's

letter, together with his other correspondence with the Spielrein family, suggest that he understood the probable nature of her abuse, and was determined to prevent its recurrence. His interventions included a request that measurements for a new dress should be taken by a seamstress and not her father, and his insistence that her brothers as well as her father should stay away from Zurich. Taken overall, there are strong indications in the notes that Spielrein's recovery was the result of Eugen Bleuler's firm ban on contact with her family, as well as the wider measures he had put in place to make the Burghölzli a therapeutic community (Graf-Nold, 2001). Bleuler did not refer anywhere to treatment by Jung. As the Swiss historian Angela Graf-Nold has written 'What was unusual in Spielrein's case was how unreservedly Bleuler stood up for her ... Although Spielrein made it clear to him that she had been traumatised since her early childhood, it remains unclear whether and how Jung comprehended her traumatisation' (2001, p.101).

If there is such slim evidence for Jung having psychoanalysed Spielrein as his 'first analysis', what should we make of Jung's two later claims to this effect in letters to Freud? In fact, both letters were written in highly unusual circumstances. His first claim was in October 1905, some months after Spielrein's discharge. By that time, Spielrein had developed a crush on him and was 'raving' about this to her mother (Minder, 2001b). The crush may not have been solely due to his treatment, as is generally assumed. She had three previous crushes: on one of her schoolteachers, a paternal uncle and the assistant doctor at a sanatorium. On this occasion, Eva Spielrein travelled to Zurich to ask Jung to refer her to a new physician to cure this latest infatuation. In her presence, Jung wrote a letter to Freud (whom he still had not met) and gave it her to deliver by hand. It was marked: 'For use if the occasion arises'. It ascribed hysteria to Mrs Spielrein herself and other family members, as well as her daughter. It disclosed many intimate details of Sabina's symptoms, including her technique of masturbation by rubbing her thighs together, her sexual arousal on seeing her father's hands, and her fantasies of being publically whipped.

Jung's motives for handing over a letter of this kind to Eva Spielrein are inexplicable. As Minder commented: 'It is unusual to say the least to produce a report for use if the occasion arises, which contains detailed information on the patient's pathology' (Minder 2001b, p. 64). It was in this unorthodox context that Jung wrote 'By using your method I have analysed the clinical condition fairly thoroughly and with considerable success from the outset.' It is likely that he wished to impress Freud or Mrs Spielrein, or both. Eva Spielrein, perhaps unsurprisingly, did not deliver the letter. It was to be another four years before Jung made his other claim – that Spielrein was his 'test case', implying she was his first analytic patient. This happened in even more equivocal circumstances: the details appear below in their chronological place.

What was their relationship like prior to their affair?

From Spielrein's diaries, her infatuation seems to have become less 'raving' during her first three years at medical school. She performed extremely well academically, and formed many close friendships. She attended Jung's lectures and ward rounds, and probably still assisted him in his laboratory. They developed a friendship, although it is unclear how often they met during this time. When they did so, according to Spielrein, they 'were very good at reading each other's minds' (Carotenuto, 1986, p.104). They talked of their shared love of Wagner, and Spielrein formed the idea that they would one day conceive a son named Siegfried who would be 'the greatest genius.' Her diaries display much wishful thinking about the possibility of relationship with him, but she also had concerns that he regarded her as an annoyance and possibly a stalker. She wrote him long letters, sometimes adoring and sometimes highly intellectual. He seems to have responded, although the replies do not exist, so we do not know of his own feelings during this period. In the normal course of events, it is possible that her crush might have resolved in the same way as her previous ones, especially as Jung was taken up with his wife Emma and growing family, his successful career, his

burgeoning collaboration with Freud, and (as he later admitted to Spielrein) his first extra-marital affairs.

Despite a common belief that Jung continued to see Spielrein as a patient after she was discharged from hospital, this was not the case. The belief arose partly because Jung's different accounts of Spielrein's 'case' are contradictory. In the referral letter he gave to Eva Spielrein and in the two publications where he described Spielrein's symptoms, he made it sound as if her treatment was over. However, he also mentioned her symptoms in letters to Freud in 1906 and 1907, and in these instances he wrote as if she was a current patient. Once his relationship with Spielrein had got into difficulty, he took pains to emphasise to Freud that he had simply offered her 'friendship' (see below). Spielrein also stated clearly that she had been his friend and not his patient once she left the hospital (1986, p.21). John Kerr's account of Spielrein's outpatient treatment (Kerr 1993, pp. 169, 177) and claims by Jung's biographer Deidre Bair that Jung offered 'confidential talks several times a week' (Bair, 2003, pp. 93-97), were based on mis-readings of her diaries, and receipts found in the Burghölzli records that were misconstrued as being for therapy, but were not (Lothane, 1990, p.1193).

In early 1906, Jung did finally make contact with Freud, by sending his recent book on association studies. Their friendship and professional collaboration took off rapidly. There is little evidence in their early correspondence that Jung gave much thought to Spielrein. Between his first letter to Freud and the crisis with Spielrein in 1909, Jung wrote 65 letters to Freud and there are allusions to Spielrein in only two or possibly three of these. He did not make it clear that he was referring to the same person in each instance. In October 1906, he described the symptoms of a 'Russian student' he was 'currently treating' and who was clearly Spielrein (McGuire, 1974, p.7). Later, as we will see, he corrected this by insisting to Freud and her mother that she had been his friend and not a patient. The following July, he gave a jocular account of a 'hysterical young Russian woman,' again clearly Spielrein, who wanted to have a child with him (1974, p.71-72). Three months later, Jung wrote to ask Freud's advice about a lady who had been 'cured of an obsessional neurosis' but had now made him the object of her sexual fantasies (1974, p.93). Jung wanted to know whether to continue treating her. Freud's response is no longer extant, but he must have offered some advice, because Jung wrote back to thank him for it. It is likely that the lady in question was Spielrein, once more disguised as a current patient.

If so, this would fit with Spielrein's own account in her diaries and letters. These describe how Jung had started to try and analyse her wish for his child. Her description makes it clear that he was now trying out Freudian interpretations in earnest, although in social and educational encounters, rather than in any formal therapeutic context (Carotenuto, 1986, p.139). Jung may have been following the missing advice from Freud, although Freud would have believed she was an analytic patient and not just a friend. At least one of Spielrein's fellow students cautioned her that Jung was using her as an 'experiment' (1986, p.90). Spielrein herself wrote to Jung protesting vehemently against his behaviour, warning him that it might induce the same infatuation in him that she herself was trying to overcome. That is indeed exactly what happened. Spielrein later described to Freud how their relationship became physical:

'I begged him many times not to provoke my "ambitia" [proud hopes] with various probings, because otherwise I would be compelled to uncover similar complexes in him, In the end the unavoidable happened...it reached the point where he could no longer stand it and wanted "poetry". I could not and did not want to resist, for many reasons' (1986, p.95).

How long was their affair?

This reversal of polarities – from Jung analysing her infatuation to conceiving his own passion for her – happened very suddenly, in the last week of June 1908. The week before, he had written to reproach her for a ‘biting letter’ in which she probably criticised him for his intrusiveness. A few days later, he had fallen in love with her. He wrote:

‘My dear friend, I have to let you know what a lovely impression you made on me. Your image has completely changed... You cannot believe how much it means to me to hope that I can love a person that I don’t have to condemn, and who does not condemn herself, to suffocate in the banality of habit.’ (Carotenuto, 1986, p.189-90).

Over the next few months, Jung and Spielrein had a tumultuous emotional and physical relationship. She wrote to her mother: ‘You can do to him and get from him anything you want with love and tenderness. Twice in a row he became so emotional in my presence that tears just rolled down his face!’ (Lothane, 1999, p.1196). She confided to Eva Spielrein that they were having sexual relations, although these remained at a level that was ‘not dangerous’ (presumably meaning penetration). It is unclear whether or not they ever crossed that line, but the danger of pregnancy in an age before effective contraception may have inhibited them from doing so. From the beginning, Jung expressed concerns over the risks of the affair to both of them. Spielrein’s mother, who saw one of his letters, wrote: ‘He is probably in the throes of a conflict, and his counsel to you and to himself is not to let the feeling of love grow but to suppress it, though not to kill it completely’ (1999, p.1196). On 1 December, three days after his first son Franz was born, Jung wrote to confess that there was another side to the vision of passionate promiscuity he had offered her in the summer:

‘My dear, I regret so much, I regret my weakness and curse the fate that is threatening me. I am fearful for my work, for my life’s mission, for all the tremendous perspectives that this new philosophy is revealing to me ... My misfortune is that I cannot do without the joy of love – tempestuous, ever-changing love in my life ... When love for a lady awakens, my first feeling is of regret, of pity for the poor woman who dreams of eternal faithfulness and other impossibilities, and is destined for a painful awakening from all these dreams’ (Carotenuto, 1986, p.195-6).

Spielrein’s awakening was to become even more painful. So was Jung’s. Shortly after recovering from childbirth, Jung’s wife Emma wrote to Eva Spielrein to expose the affair. Eva wrote to Jung imploring him not to ruin his daughter. In a panic, Jung refused to see Spielrein, except in booked meetings at the Burghölzli. She attended these three times, before losing control and assaulting him with a letter knife. Jung then sent a series of insulting letters to Eva Spielrein. At first he admitted having an affair, claiming he had every right to do so, since he had never asked the Spielreins for any fees for befriending their daughter, and telling her she should start to pay fees if she wanted the relationship to be only a professional one. He then denied the affair altogether. Mrs Spielrein came to Zurich to confront him, threatening to expose him to Bleuler. Jung resigned from his university post and started to fire off letters to Freud to defend himself against the possibility of disgrace.

The correspondence between Freud and Jung over the Spielrein affair in 1909 is well known. Jung initially reported to Freud that a former patient was trying to slander him, denying that any affair had taken place. He soon realised this deceit was no longer possible, since Spielrein had started to write to Freud herself. It was in this context that Jung made his implicit claim that she was his first analytic patient, although in guarded terms: ‘She was, so to speak, my test case, for which reason I remembered her with special affection and gratitude’ (McGuire, 1974, p. 228). He explained how he had felt obliged as a result to become her friend, and it had taken him a while to realise she was ruthlessly planning to seduce him. Jung told Freud that he had been encouraged to try out ‘polygamy’ by his maverick colleague Otto Gross, just before his affair with Spielrein started,

although it is clear from his earlier confession to Spielrein that his other affairs predated this. It is fairly easy to understand why it suited Jung to describe her as his 'test case' at this juncture.

Freud responded by explaining to Jung about 'counter-transference', reassuring him that 'In view of the kind of matter we work with, it will never be possible to avoid little laboratory explosions' (McGuire, 1974, p. 235). Over the next few weeks, Freud received further letters from Spielrein, with some of Jung's love letters enclosed, and pressing him for a personal meeting. He responded by declining her request, and disingenuously covering up for his colleague. Spielrein's German biographer, Sabine Richebächer, describes the episode as follows:

'a shabby game unfolds in which, out of calculating power politics, and in an endeavour to avoid any public scandal around psychoanalysis, Freud and Jung together draw up a design to checkmate the queen ... She is led up the garden path, pathologised, appeased.' (Richebächer, 2003, p. 242).

Freud hid from Spielrein how much he knew from Jung about the affair, but he also hid from Jung how much Spielrein had revealed. It was only years later that he confessed to Spielrein that her disclosures had been a turning point in his appraisal of his 'crown prince': 'His behaviour was too bad. My opinion changed a great deal from the time I received that first letter from you.' (Carotenuto, 1986, p.122).

In the end, Freud's double dealing made little difference. Eva Spielrein did not go and expose Jung to Bleuler, having probably been talked out of this by her daughter. Emma Jung also seems to have come to terms with the revelation of Jung's infidelity – not for the last time. Following some weeks of self-analysis, Spielrein resolved the crisis herself. She confronted Jung with his 'horrible behaviour' (Carotenuto, 1986, p.48). She accepted his apology for having panicked and cut her off. She then wrote to Freud to tease him about his duplicity:

'You are cunning too, Professor ... But you would rather spare yourself an unpleasant moment. Isn't that correct? Even the great "Freud" cannot always ignore his own weaknesses' (1986, p.103).

Later that year, she and Jung resumed erotic relations once more, although Jung was now cycling between passionate declarations of love and alienating coldness. Spielrein described this as follows:

'If you don't take his vanity into account, you have to atone for it horribly; he takes on a very cold, official tone, and who then suffers badly as a result of that? Not him, obviously. He can get rid of any slight vexation by working, love for one woman can be replaced by another; you can also be sure that this next one will finally be humiliated, and she will be the one to have agonising days and sleepless nights, the silly little girl.' (Carotenuto, 1986, p.54).

Over the course of the following year, Spielrein became increasingly put off by Jung's 'repulsive, "Don Juan" role' (Carotenuto, 1986, p.79). Their last erotic encounter took place in December 1910. The next month she graduated as a doctor. She had already resolved to leave Zurich immediately, which she did. She spent the next few months studying art history in Munich, while writing the paper that she had embarked upon as her way of transcending her relationship with Jung, and of transforming herself: 'Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being' (Spielrein, 1912, 1994). Later that year, she delivered it in Vienna before Freud and his circle, before moving on to work with other great figures in many of the leading centres in Europe over the next two decades. She only met Jung on one further occasion, of which there is no record.

What happened when their affair ended?

In Vienna, Spielrein formed a warm friendship with Freud. She married and moved to Berlin, where she had her first daughter. She took Freud's side in his split with Jung, but continued to try and bring the two men together:

'I do not despise him at all, but I deplored his behaviour towards you, Professor Freud, and his attitude towards the Society. I could forgive J's attitude to the Society even less than that that business with me ... In spite of all his wavering, I like J and would like to lead him back into our fold. You, Professor Freud, and he have not the faintest idea that you belong together far more than anyone might suspect ... Everyone knows that I declare myself an adherent to the Freudian Society, and J cannot forgive me for this' (Carotenuto, 1982, p.112).

She admitted in her letters to Freud that she continued to yearn for Jung. Freud expressed increasing impatience with this, and attempted to persuade her to 'uncover the hatred' that lay behind her longings (Carotenuto, 1986, p.124). He also appealed to her sense of identity: 'Jews we are and Jews we remain. The others will only exploit us, and never understand or value us.' (1986, p.124). Spielrein corresponded with Freud for many years. He was aware of her work alongside Piaget and her other colleagues in Geneva, and he supported her eventual decision to return to Russia in 1923 to promote psychoanalysis. He acknowledged in print that he first acquired the idea of the death instinct from Spielrein's 'Destruction' paper, while confessing her version of it had not been entirely clear to him (Freud, 1920). In fact, the two versions were entirely different, since Spielrein's was an explicitly biological concept – a combined instinct towards reproduction and death – while Freud's was a metapsychological notion, akin to the principle of entropy in physics (Launer, 2015, p.185).

Spielrein also corresponded with Jung about his theories, and her own. In an exchange of letters with him from 1917 to 1919, she tried to persuade him to recognise Freud's greatness, and to accept that Freud's ideas, as well as his own and Adler's, could be seen as different perspectives on the same thing: the evolutionary drive to reproduce. She also sought his view about whether her destiny was to remain a doctor or become a musician and composer. There are hints in her correspondence that she still cherished some longing for him. However, Jung's responses were increasingly irritable. He advised her that there was a part of the Jewish soul she was not yet living: 'That is – "unfortunately" – the curse of the Jews ... he is the murderer of his own prophets' (Carotenuto, 1986, p.219). He told her that her dreams had 'a threatening character and show a murderous tendency'. He warned her: 'You are cursed if you speak against your own conscience. I hope it is not too late' (1986, p.222). He cautioned her that 'My mistrust is aroused by the fickleness of the female spirit and its vain and tyrannical assumption' (1986, p.222).

This final exchange of letters appears to have helped Spielrein to put her longings for Jung behind her. In her academic papers from the 1920s there is almost no mention of him or his ideas. In early 1922, she wrote a review of a play by the French writer Lenormand that may have been based on Jung and depicted a lustful psychoanalyst – 'a Don Juan in the guise of a healer' – who used the analysis to persuade a female patient to become his lover (Spielrein, 1922a). Later that year, she reported a pair of dreams attributed to a female 'colleague' who had terminated her analysis abruptly and without resolution (Spielrein, 1922b). In the first dream, she had to pay excess postage on a letter containing photos of a man representing her analyst, who was also a 'syphilitic Don Juan'. In the second dream, she could no longer recall her analyst's name, but woke up with a phrase from Nietzsche on her lips: 'Was I ill? Have I recovered?' Her last mention of Jung was in a courageous lecture she gave at a conference in Russia in 1929, defending Freud and psychoanalysis against increasingly menacing attacks from communism (Spielrein, 1929).

Was Spielrein the inspiration for Jung's 'anima'?

The claim that Spielrein was the source of Jung's conception of the 'anima' has been passed down unchallenged since Carotenuto surmised this and John Kerr then claimed to have found evidence for it. Kerr's evidence is in fact extremely tenuous (Kerr, 1993, p.502-7). He based his argument on Jung's account in 'Memories, Dreams, Reflections' of finding a separate, female personality within himself, speaking with 'the voice of a patient. He described this patient as 'a talented psychopath who had a strong transference to me' (Jung, 1963, p.178). This voice kept criticising his beliefs by saying '*It is art*'. Jung mentioned that the same 'aesthetic lady' had once expressed such a view in a letter, before their correspondence broke off in 1918-19. Kerr noted that Jung's correspondence with Spielrein ended in those years. He did not point out that Jung had never described Spielrein as a psychopath, and this description bore no resemblance to his account of Spielrein in the same book, as the 'Jewish lady who had lost her faith'. Kerr acknowledged that there was no record of Spielrein ever criticising Jung's ideas as 'art'. To address this problem, he put forward the theory that Jung was 'deliberately misreporting' what the voice had said: she must have used Spielrein's private word for erotic contact and said '*It is poetry*.' The theory is preposterous.

Spielrein may however have given Jung the idea at the centre of his philosophy: that of individuation. Throughout her childhood, adolescence and into her thirties, Spielrein was preoccupied with the idea that she had a 'higher calling', and that her life would only be fulfilled if she discovered what it was. It is an idea that appears throughout her diaries. During her years at medical school, it was connected with her hope that she and Jung might conceive a child named Siegfried. Later on, through a formidable self-analysis recorded in her diary, she transferred the idea onto her ambition to produce a world-changing theory connecting sex with death: something she attempted in her paper on 'Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being.' In her later correspondence with Jung, she repeatedly posed the question of how she could know if she had genuinely found her vocation: '*What in the end prevents a normally developed person from fulfilling their life goal?*' she asked him on one occasion in 1918 (Carotenuto, 1986, p.165). Later, she stated: '*The solution of this problem would have extraordinary importance for me.*' (1986, p.175.)

It may have been in response to this that Jung wrote one of his final letters to her. It has been much quoted:

'The love of S for J made the latter aware of something he only vaguely suspected before, namely a force in the unconscious that determines our destiny, which led him later to matters of the greatest importance. The relationship had to be 'sublimated; as otherwise it would have led to delusion and madness ... At times one needs to be unworthy in order to live' (Carotenuto, 1986, p.223)

The letter is perplexing. It was almost the first affectionate letter he had written to her for over a decade. He wrote in it of 'the love of S for J' but not – as she had so earnestly wished – of 'the love of J for S.' It is unclear whether he thought it was Spielrein or himself who might have fallen prey to 'delusion and madness' if their relationship had not been 'sublimated'. In reality, the relationship had not ended because of sublimation: he broke it off in a panic, and then resumed it until Spielrein chose to leave him. However, one phrase is particularly striking. It is the 'force in the unconscious that determines our destiny, which led [Jung] later to matters of the greatest importance.' This cannot be the male anima, since he is describing something he learned from Spielrein's feelings as a woman, and not his own as a man. It sounds far more like a description of individuation, and an acknowledgement that he developed this idea from Spielrein's conviction of a 'higher calling.'

Conclusion

There is little if any evidence that Jung undertook psychoanalysis of Spielrein during her hospital admission in 1904-5. He is most likely to have used word association tests, followed by persuasion to talk about the complexes these uncovered. It was probably Jung's director, Eugen Bleuler, who was most instrumental in her rapid improvement during her hospital admission. Bleuler appears to have recognised that Spielrein had probably been the victim of sexual abuse within her family, something that Jung either did not realise, or ignored. Jung never provided therapy for Spielrein after she was discharged from hospital, although he did become her friend. Their erotic relationship was triggered by his informal attempts to analyse her wish for his child. Jung was already other having affairs, and continued to do so.

Jung's intense affair with Spielrein was brief, lasting around five months. The relationship was always unequal. Out of forty or so letters he wrote to her, only four letters written during the summer of 1908 expressed love. Freud's intervention did not help Spielrein and Jung to end their relationship. Jung broke it off because of his fear of public exposure, but after the crisis they had intermittent erotic encounters for a while longer. However, she became tired of his mood swings and his promiscuity. When she qualified as a doctor in early 1911, Spielrein left Jung and Zurich on her own initiative. She only met Jung once more. She had distanced herself from him completely by 1920. The evidence that Jung based his conception of the 'anima' on her is entirely unconvincing, while Freud took the name of her death instinct but applied it to something quite different. However she probably taught Jung the idea of individuation. We should mainly remember her for the very wide range of innovative contributions she made to psychoanalytic theory, and for her work in integrating psychoanalytic thinking with studies of child development, linguistics and educational psychology.

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