The Classical Psychoanalytic Technique Revisited

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The decisive part of the work is achieved by creating in the patient’s relation to the doctor— in ‘the transference’— new editions of old conflicts. (Freud, 1916-1917, 454).

The psychoanalyst as an individual must be unknown to the patient... Insofar as is humanly possible, he remains a peg on which the patient can hang conscious and unconscious fantasies. [By maintaining throughout his "analytic incognito"], the psychoanalyst makes of himself a neutral sample of all humanity in the patient’s emotional life. This is what gives value to the study of the origins of the patient’s feelings. Toward the shadowy image of the psychoanalyst, the patient experiences anxiety, anger, hate, affection, jealousy, and the like... By unearthing the original sources of these feelings in early childhood, the analysis [of the transference] makes it possible to eliminate them, or at least to lessen their intensity and their influence....(Kubie, 1975, 100-1)

In his 1905 Postscript to “Fragments of a Case of Hysteria,” Freud states: ...it is only after the transference has been resolved that a patient arrives at a sense of conviction of the validity of the connections which have been constructed during the analysis. (Freud, 1901, [05], 116-7).

This is Freud’s first mention of the importance of the transference in analytic therapy. He never reveals when he discerned that the transference, rather than
being an impediment to analytic therapy, is its “most powerful ally” (ibid. 117), nor does he divulge when—in order to isolate this key instrument of the classical psychoanalytic technique—he had arrived at the analytic incognito:

The doctor should be opaque to his patients and, like a mirror, show them nothing but what is shown to him.” (Freud, “1912, 118.)

According to my reading (Lippman, 2009), in September 1901, four years prior to the publication of the above Postscript, Freud had transferred on to Michelangelo’s Moses his early childhood feelings and attitudes towards his grey-haired father, Jacob (d. October 23, 1896). If correct, this reading raises the question: Did the father of psychoanalysis—in order to isolate the transference and, thereby, make conscious what is repressed—appropriate for psychoanalytic therapy the stance of his impenetrable, stone-faced [co-]therapist stationed in the Church of St. Peter in Chains, the Moses of Michelangelo?

Consider the following from his letter to Sandor Ferenczi dated October 27, 1912:

The English book about Moses has arrived; I am now seeking admittance to the museum of the Academy of Fine Arts, where there is a large plaster cast of him [Michelangelo’s Moses]. I am enclosing for you today the uncorrected paper on technique* and I seek your comments. . . . (Freud, 1993, 419)

According to the “contiguity” rule of psychoanalysis, the proximity of “paper on technique” to “large plaster cast of [Michelangelo’s Moses]” signifies that there is an intimate relationship between Freud’s ‘sessions’ with the world’s greatest representation of Moses and the (subsequent) creation of the classical psychoanalytic technique with its key instrument, the transference.
---* “On Beginning the Treatment,” published in two installments in January and March 1913; that Christmas Freud will begin writing “The Moses of Michelangelo” (1914). The essay, according to Jones (1955), was finished on New Year’s Day, but [Freud] still did not want to publish it. Finally he did so, but anonymously. The three of us protested at this….But he was adamant… The reasons he gave for his decision seem rather thin. (366)

REFERENCES


