Psychoanalysis in Representative Organs of the Hungarian Press between 1913 and 1939

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Freud never wanted psychoanalysis to play any political role. However, politics has never been neutral to psychoanalysis. This becomes obvious if we look at the relationship of Hungarian newspapers to psychoanalysis from the latter’s beginnings to its full institutionalization between 1913 and 1939. Supposedly, any newspaper from Berlin, Vienna, or Prague would be suitable for this purpose, as continental European journalism was known for its subjective style. Facts and events, social and cultural phenomena were not simply reported. They were commented and reflected on. Judgments were often formed according to the political philosophy of the given newspaper, even if censors restricted possibilities for the open expression of any organs’ political aims. This suggests, furthermore, that the relation of newspapers to psychoanalysis can reveal how different segments of society related to psychoanalysis.

I have chosen a few Budapest newspapers: Pesti Hírlap, Pesti Napló, Népszava, and Budapesti Hírlap, and one journal, Színházi Élet, to investigate the presence of psychoanalysis in them. I hope to gain a picture of the position psychoanalysis occupied in pre-World War II Hungary by discussing the following questions:

(1) Which cases and which “extraordinary events” needed the opinion of a psychoanalytic expert?
(2) Which examples illustrate the distinct approaches of the different newspapers to the same case?
(3) Who is a psychoanalyst in the different journals in Budapest before World War II? An expert? A charlatan? A doctor for everyone and every case? Or all these?

According to estimated circulation figures, one of the most read daily papers (besides *Az Est* [The Evening]) in the 1910s and in the 1920s was *Pesti Hírlap* (Pest Newspaper), which can be regarded as a moderately conservative organ. The second largest paper by circulation among the examined papers was *Pesti Napló* (Pest Daily), an old and influential daily paper, which was transformed into a left and literary journal by Lajos Hatvany in 1917.\(^1\) According to circulation data, *Pesti Napló* is followed by the conservative *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest Newspaper) and the social-democratic daily paper *Népszava* (People’s Voice), which was the official organ of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary. *Színházi Élet* (Theater Life) was a major weekly journal of the arts and theater (1912–1938) and a politically neutral, illustrated journal.

Psychoanalysis was present in all of these press organs, though most actively in *Pesti Napló*, which had both political and private reasons for its inclusion. The significantly higher number of mentions of psychoanalysis in *Pesti Napló* and *Népszava* also contributes to the fact that these papers were used by psychoanalytic circles as primary forums where information related to psychoanalysis was shared (e.g., psychoanalytic events and lectures were announced and discussed, and the consultation hours and addresses of psychoanalysts were publicized). It is obvious that certain newspapers had a more significant role in keeping psychoanalysis alive than others.

Psychoanalysts on “Extraordinary Events”

**PESTI NAPLÓ**

In 1924, Ferenczi reported to the presidents of the branch societies of the I.P.A. about the growing influence of the psychoanalytic movement and the public’s rising interest in psychoanalysis in Hungary: “The interest in psychoanalysis among the educated classes is on the rise. . . . In extraordinary

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\(^1\) On *Pesti Napló* in the possession of Lajos Hatvany, see Lengyel 2006.
events, e.g., criminal cases, the public (and the newspapers) are interested in
the opinion of psychoanalysts” (Freud and Ferenczi 2000, 198).

It was, in most cases, *Pesti Napló* which turned to psychoanalysts for
expert advice on various matters. In a letter to Freud written on January 5,
1930, Ferenczi referred to *Pesti Napló* as “one of the better Hungarian daily
newspapers” and spoke of its editor as someone “who is not inimically dis-
posed toward psychoanalysis and has already been of some service to us”
(Freud and Ferenczi 2000, 379). Relatively regular contact between Ferenczi
and the editor of *Pesti Napló* can be assumed, as Ferenczi also mentions
a phone call by the editor in regard to the publication of Freud’s new book.

Zsófia Dénes once described the different natures of Freud and Ferenczi
as follows: “Freud is a serious, strict character, always a bit rigid and distant.
Sándor Ferenczi is full of affability, a warm heart, and a wonderfully pre-
served, puerile spirit” (Dénes 1979, 52). This difference in their character be-
comes apparent in their respective relationship to the press: while Freud’s atti-
tude toward the press can be characterized by rejection and distance, Ferenczi
was, unlike Freud, part of public life; he was present in the daily press and
gave interviews to daily papers. *Pesti Napló* repeatedly invited him to give
his expert opinion on questions concerning psychoanalysis: e.g., the charge
of quackery in 1926 (Raskay. L. 1926, 4); the present and future of psycho-
analysis (Csánk 1928, 38); Freud’s Goethe Prize in 1930 (“A legnagyobb német
irodalmi díjat,” 6); and on various social, cultural, and psychic phenomena
from a psychoanalytic angle such as: “the new man of the world turned upside
down after the war” (“A háború után” 1922, 6); the nervousness of Budapest

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2 Psychoanalysts have always shown an interest in articles about psychoanalysis. Whatever was written about psychoanalysis was important, and they often sent each other newspaper clippings. One of the many examples for this we can find is in a letter from Ferenczi to Jones: “Here in Budapest, a nonsensical, confused, and malicious article, against Freud and for Adler, appeared in *Pester Lloyd*. . . . It would be nice, and maybe effective, if you were to write a few lines to your friend J Vészi, editor-in-chief of P[ester] Ll[oyd], in connection with this [and kindly ask him not to just print any old nonsense sent to him about ps[ycho]an[alysis]” (Ferenczi and Jones 2013, 17).

3 Sándor Mester (1875–1958) was the chief editor of *Pesti Napló* at the time.

4 It is worth mentioning here that Ferenczi had several journalists/writers among his friends (e.g., Sándor Bródy, Ignotus, Frigyes Karinthy, Dezső Kosztolányi, Gyula Krúdy) and one among his relatives (the niece of Ferenczi’s wife, Zsófia Dénes, who worked for the radical *Világ* [World], and for a short period of time, *Pesti Napló*).
The most popular psychoanalyst to be interviewed was Ferenczi. In case he was not available, Pesti Napló turned to his opponent, the Stekelian Sándor Feldmann. Feldmann was often interviewed about criminal cases, e.g., on the Düsseldorf monster\(^6\) together with another active analyst, Imre Décsi (“A düsseldorfi rém” 1929, 6) or on the case of the female poisoners of Tiszazug, who were all examined by Feldmann in their cells (“A méregkeverőnők lelke” 1930, 5). Psychoanalysts who were guests in Budapest, like Georg Groddeck (“A lélek árnyékában” 1925, 4), August Aichhorn (“Léleknevelés – gyermekenvelés” 1925, 13), and Rudolf von Urbantschitsch (R[áskay]. L. 1925, 6) were also interviewed by Pesti Napló.

For Pesti Napló, psychoanalysts often gave their views on political topics. For example, Pesti Napló asked Ferenczi about the causes of the European depression and the influence of the political and financial situation on mental life, the indirect cause of which Ferenczi saw in the exaggerated idealism of the German volk (“Veszélyes ideálok” 1925, 9). During his stay in Budapest in 1934, Wilhelm Stekel was asked about the psychological background of dictatorships (“Az egyéni apa helyébe” 1934, 8).

The above articles show the variety of topics that required the opinion of a psychoanalytic expert and outline the domains psychoanalysis was able to cover at that time.

NÉPSZAVA

As for Népszava, it did not publish as many articles dealing with psychoanalysis as Pesti Napló. The work of Michael Bálint on the development of psychoanalysis (Bálint 1937, 39–40) is worth mentioning. Népszava interviewed Ferenczi in one case, when he expressed his views on clever horses (“A tudomány világából” 1912, 9). Visits, lectures, birthdays, and deaths of psychoanalysts were also covered by Népszava.

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5 Ferenczi was sceptical about the use of psychoanalysis in this field, saying that “[p]sycho-analytic criminology has not evolved at all.” According to him, “a real psychoanalyst does not speak about assumptions” (Szirmai 1930, 13). He obviously saw the limits of psychoanalysis.

6 The German serial killer Peter Kürten, charged with and tried for nine murders, was known as the Düsseldorf monster or the “Düsseldorf Vampire.”
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BUDAPESTI HÍRLAP

Budapesti Hírlap asked for a psychoanalyst’s expert opinion in one single case, when Ferenczi gave his views on sleeping and insomnia, a relatively neutral topic (Büky 1930, 10). The presentation of psychoanalysis as a form of charlatanism, a fashionable, invasive movement, a widespread humbug in Budapesti Hírlap shows the dominance of a negative attitude towards psychoanalysis (e.g., “Interjú alvó emberekkel” 1934, 19). However, articles that acknowledged the merits of psychoanalysis can also be found (e.g., Sebestyén 1931; Kellner 1933).

PESTI HÍRLAP

The presentation of psychoanalysis by Pesti Hírlap provides, on the whole, a balanced picture. One can read articles representing different opinions on psychoanalysis, and the titles speak for themselves: “Budapest—the Psychoanalytic Capital of Europe” from 1923 (6) and “Dangerous Psychoanalysis” from 1926 (“Veszedelmes lélekelemzés” 1926, 8). In the latter article, psychoanalysis was attacked, described as “a typical product of the twentieth century,” and accused of (and associated with) immorality. The article denied the scientific status of psychoanalysis, claiming that “[p]sychoanalysis is—a kind of scientific expressionism. And as for the so-called artistic movement, human beauty is not sacred, so for this ‘scientific’ movement, the human soul is no longer sacred and inaccessible” (“Veszedelmes lélekelemzés” 1926, 8). The paper did not publish any interviews with psychoanalysts with the exception of a short conversation with Ferenczi. In it, he spoke with a journalist from Pesti Hírlap in the hall of Hotel Hungaria about the goals of the visit of Marie Bonaparte, who spent a few days in Budapest in October 1927 (“Napóleon dédunokája” 1927, 4).

SZÍNHÁZI ÉLET

Psychoanalysts were present in Színházi Élet not as experts per se, but rather as advisors in everyday matters. They were, in most cases, representatives of the Hungarian Stekelian group. Sándor Feldmann, the founder and leader of the Association of Independent Medical Analysts, gave his opinion on the truth-telling machine (“Orvosok, írók, színészek” 1933, 27) and examined furniture and colors for the home from a psychoanalytic perspective (“Színek, lakások, emberek” 1932, 203). Famous literary figures of the time like Thomas
Mann, Gerhart Hauptmann, Vicki Baum, Sinclair Lewis, and Stefan Zweig, were analyzed by Stekel (Szinetár 1933, 18–19). Among other prominent people of the age, the daily routine of Sándor Ferenczi was described (“Nagy emberek” 1929, 22). At the end of 1932, Színházi Élet launched a “Psychoanalytic school,” which became very popular among the readers of the magazine (“Pszichoanalisitikus iskola” 1932, 137). A remarkable member of the Steklian group, Ernő Szinetár, led the school. He was an expert readers could turn to with any private problem. Additionally, there are many other psychoanalysis-related articles published in Színházi Élet: the writings “Freudism on the Stage” (Szász 1919, 1–2); “What Is in the Depth of the Female Soul?” by writer Zoltán Szász (1920, 6–7); “Send Your Dream to Színházi Élet—Krúdy Gyula Is Going to Interpret It” (“Látogatás az Álomfejtőnél” 1921, 13–14); “Miss Margaret Severn, a Famous Dancer from New York is Looking for a Partner in Budapest” (1926, 28–29); and “Fantastic Drawings on Manuscripts of Famous Writers: Hollós on the Psychology of Manuscripts” (1927, 36–37), just to mention a few. The titles suggest the presentation of psychoanalysis in a more popular format.

Concrete Examples

THE ROLE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS IN REPORTS ON THE KORNIS CASE

In 1927, the criminal case of a pseudo-psychoanalyst named Ignác Kornis was eagerly discussed in Hungarian newspapers. He was called the “Kolumbus Street Blackmailer.” He lured a rich merchant to an abandoned villa on Kolumbus Street, where he tied him up and demanded his money. As the merchant was not able to meet his demand, the doctor drove him to a bank. In the car, the doctor threatened the merchant with a revolver. At the entrance of the bank, he finally let the scared man go.

A few months later, the doctor turned up in the editorial office of Die Rote Fahne in Vienna, where he introduced himself and came forward with

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7 Margaret Severn was the daughter of Ferenczi’s patient, and later a psychoanalyst in her own right, Elizabeth Severn.

8 István Hollós, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, was a founding member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Association.
the proposal to organize rebellions in Hungary and—if he got some assistance—to blow up the Weisz Manfréd factory in Budapest. He aroused the suspicion of the Viennese police and was immediately identified and caught by the Hungarian police. After a ten-minute medical examination he was declared mentally ill and was taken to the Angyalföld mental hospital and later to the Lipótmező facility. The doctor said he had been conducting a psychological experiment on himself and wanted to examine people on psychoanalytic grounds. The events of the Kornis case were reported in detail by all Hungarian newspapers. Below is a representative sample of the role of psychoanalysis in reports on the Kornis case:

“Quackery or psychoanalysis? Ignác Kornis, the fantastic quack, fake communist, blackmailer, criminal shrink, Kolumbus street blackmailer, and neurologist made a confession” (“Szélhámosság vagy pszichoanalízis” 1927, 9).

“The psychoanalytic field trip of Kornis” (“Összeomlott az óriási kommunista összeesküvés” 1927, 4).

“Blackmailing on the basis of Freud’s theory” (“Nagyszabású kommunista szervezkedést” 1927, 12).

“As a follower of Freud’s theory, he wanted to investigate the excitement evoked in his soul by such a crime” (“Megvizsgálják a Kolumbusz-utcai” 1927, 10).

“The ambulance left for the mental hospital in Angyalföld with Ignás Kornis, who seems to have got off lightly for psychoanalytic blackmailing” (“Elmegyógyintézetbe vitték” 1927, 9).

“The Kolumbus street ‘psychoanalytic’ blackmailer”; “the psychoanalyst under arrest” (“Dr. Kornis Ignácot” 1927, 6).

“The psychoanalytic offender of the Kolumbus street outrage” (“Kalandorregény vagy epilepszia” 1929, 11).

It is striking how often Freud’s name and the words “psychoanalysis” and “psychoanalyst” were used in connection with the case of Kornis, primarily
by *Pesti Hírlap* and *Budapesti Hírlap*. Dr. Kornis himself had repeatedly been defined as a psychoanalyst. Only the readers of *Pesti Napló* had the possibility of learning about the professional identity of Dr. Kornis by an authentic psychoanalyst. It was the Stekelian Sándor Feldmann, formerly expelled from the Freudian society, who clarified the role of psychoanalysis in the case and called attention to the importance of maintaining a united organization of highly trained psychoanalysts: “It is impossible and annoying that today each and everyone calls himself a psychoanalyst. A huge camp of wild analysts, pirate-analysts, and quack analysts has started to overrun the sick society, thus discrediting honorable, trained medical and lay analysts, who formed themselves into moral organizations” (“Mit mondanak az idegorvosok” 1927, 12). Feldmann pointed out that there were two associations which provided a kind of legitimation of the work of a psychoanalyst: the International Psycho-Analytical Association under Freud’s leadership and the Association of Independent Medical Analysts helmed by Stekel. These were morally responsible for the activity of their members. Feldmann concluded that “Dr. Kornis belonged to none of these associations, his case is, therefore, only the case of the police, not that of psychoanalysis” (“Mit mondanak az idegorvosok” 1927, 12).

The question “Quackery or Psychoanalysis?” raised by *Pesti Napló*, did not arise in *Pesti Hírlap* and *Budapesti Hírlap* at all. But by their identification of Kornis as a psychoanalyst, and through their overemphasis on the role of analysis in the case, the unfriendly attitude of conservative organs towards psychoanalysis became visible.

“Fool, Agent Provocateur, or Psychoanalyst?” was the title of a report on Kornis in an Austrian paper (“Narr, Lockspitzel” 1927, 1). I suspect the same conclusions can be drawn if we take a look at the presentation of the Kornis case by newspapers in another European capital, Vienna, where the case also created a sensation. Kornis was declared “a ‘psychoanalytic’ specialist of the communists” by *Reichspost* (“Kommunistenrazzia in Ungarn” 1927, 1); “an agent provocateur of Horthy” by *Rote Fahne* (“Der Horthy-Agent” 1927, 3); and “a communist plotter” by *Das kleine Blatt*, which published its report on the Kornis case with the title “Psychoanalysis” (“Psychoanalyse” 1927, 4). The role of psychoanalysis in the case was cleared up by some (but not all) of the papers. In the end, the Social Democratic *Arbeiter-Zeitung*’s headline,

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9 On Feldmann’s exclusion from the Freudian Society and the relation of Ferenczi to him see Hárs 2007.
“Only Swindler, without Psychoanalysis” sums up the case (“Nur Schwindler” 1927, 3). Unlike the Hungarian press, no psychoanalyst was asked by Austrian newspapers to clarify the professional identity of Kornis.

All the above examples suggest that the political direction of the reporting newspaper was a determining factor in the presentation of this case.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AT THE CONGRESS OF HUNGARIAN PSYCHIATRISTS

The contrast between the different perspectives of newspapers can also be observed in three different reports on the same event, the 1926 Congress of Hungarian Psychiatrists.

The report of Budapesti Hírlap put emphasis on the facts of the debate: in the subheading we can read: “Dispute about the Acknowledgement of Psychoanalysis” (“Az elmeorvosok értekezeletének záróülése” 1926, 7). Pesti Hírlap commented on the event more favorably in its article “The Congress of Hungarian Psychiatrists Finished,” underlining the significance of “the first appearance of psychoanalysts at the podium of the psychiatrists’ congress” (“Befejezték” 1926, 7). Support of psychoanalysis was evident already in the title of the Pesti Napló article: “Psychoanalysis Made Its Debut at the Congress of Hungarian Psychiatrists.” The event was celebrated by Pesti Napló as the passage of psychoanalysis into the ranks of official medicine (“Nagy viharok között” 1926, 7).

“IN BERLIN YOU CAN BE ANALYZED FOR ONE MARK”

The image of psychoanalysis in Berlin can also serve as an example of the contrast between the perspectives of the liberal and the conservative press.

Pesti Napló reported the success of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, which moved to a large building at 10 Wichmanstrasse in the autumn of 1928. Eitingon was asked about the relocated Poliklinik, and the flourishing of psychoanalysis in Berlin was described: “Every German citizen, whether he/she has money or not, can make use of the help of the institute on Wichmannstrasse, and the figures serve as a proof that there are more and more people who hope to be healed with this help” (“Megnyilt Berlinben” 1928, 8). The article, “Berlin, the Mecca for Charlatans and Fortune-Tellers” in Budapesti Hírlap from 1932 suggested that a psychoanalyst was something like an astrologist or a fortune-teller on the street. With the statement “[t]he psycho-
analyst took up the role of Shaman of primitive peoples” (“Berlin” 1930, 7), readers were warned against psychoanalysis, which was presented as a form of charlatanism, and as an illegitimate and dangerous form of therapy.

The Image of the Psychoanalyst in the Various Press Organs

In *Pesti Napló* and *Népszava*, the emphasis was placed on the professional attributes of the psychoanalyst: he/she appears in these newspapers as an expert (mostly a scientist or a doctor) and a competent person whose judgment matters and whose professional opinion is trustworthy.

In the conservative press (primarily *Budapesti Hírlap*), the psychoanalyst was generally presented as an unreliable charlatan apart from a few exceptions. Articles mentioning psychoanalysis often included warnings against its theory and practice.

In *Színházi Élet*, we see psychoanalysis in its popular form, dominated by representatives of the Hungarian Stekelian group. Any reader of the journal must have been interested in the psychoanalysis of famous writers by Stekel and could potentially turn to Ernő Szinetár’s Psychoanalytic School. *Színházi Élet* made psychoanalysis easily accessible to everyone.

*Pesti Napló*, *Népszava*, and *Színházi Élet* provided psychoanalysis with moderate support, while *Pesti Hírlap* showed reservations about the Freudian science, and *Budapesti Hírlap* was openly malicious towards it in several cases. However, this hostile attitude toward psychoanalysis was not as harmful as silence might have been. In his work on the social representations of psychoanalysis in France, Moscovici underlined the importance of any presence of psychoanalysis in the press: “[Psychoanalysis] fills space, attracts attention and offers a new terminology, but this does not mean that it is discussed seriously or on its own terms. Psychoanalysis, like ‘blood on the front page,’ ‘horoscopes’ and ‘gossip,’ is something that sells newspapers. Whether it is discussed in sympathetic or unsympathetic terms does not matter: all that matters is getting people to talk about it” (Moscovici 2008, 241).

The heterogeneous portrait of psychoanalysis that we encounter in various press organs may help us imagine what psychoanalysis was and what being a psychoanalyst meant in pre-World War II Budapest. After all, Ferenczi was right when he wrote to Freud in 1914: “They are talking about us a lot . . . in Hungary” (Freud and Ferenczi 1993, 541).
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