The impact of E. M. Jellinek’s personality and work in the Hungarian literature

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This poster aims to pay tribute to Elvin Morton Jellinek, a US native of Hungarian descent, by tracing his presence in the Hungarian substance abuse field with an eye to the latest biographical details discovered in the 21st century. At first sight maybe you did not notice: our goal with the appearance of the poster was that it would be similar to a special issue of a medical weekly.

Hungarians consume more alcohol than most other nations in Europe. This fact is well demonstrated by a graph and a table on our poster. Alcohol policy used to have a more important role in Hungarian health policy with the attention currently shifting to drug addiction.

The Hungarian scientific community first became familiar with Jellinek’s name in 1960’s, and there have been regular references to his work ever since. Jellinek became a well-known figure worldwide who cannot be ignored, especially in the history of alcoholism.

The protocol of the Hungarian Ministry of Health on alcohol diseases and the New Alcohol Strategy and Policy (2009) are based on Jellinek’s disease concept. To date, his concept is taught in Hungarian schools and programs in social work and addiction. The Hungarian Central Statistical Office uses the Jellinek formula to estimate the number of alcoholics.

A Hungarian scholar, Gabor Kelemen, has been researching Jellinek’s professional and personal history, which resulted in a significant change of his concept about Jellinek over time. We quoted from some Hungarian articles and their summaries published in English written by Gabor Kelemen and his staff.

One of his article published in 1990 Kelemen wrote: “Elvin Morton Jellinek was not Hungarian. The need to create a legend about the Hungarian origin of Jellinek may be explained by the fact that the other fields of psychiatry - either psychoanalysis or biological psychiatry - had some very famous and highly significant representatives of Hungarian origin” (Kelemen, 1990). In another article published two years ago Kelemen wrote about Jellinek’s past in Budapest as an unknown terrain (Kelemen and Márk, 2012).

We emphasized János Métneki’s article who is one of the most important Hungarian experts in the fight against alcoholism, met with E. M. Jellinek in 1961. Jellinek was interested in the situation of alcoholism in...
Hungary. They worked together in the editorial board of the Encyclopedia of Problems of Alcohol.

Métneki, like Kelemen before him, had the opinion that Jellinek was not of Hungarian origin, but in his paper pointed out that “Jellinek was definitely interested in Hungary and Hungarian anti-alcohol activities in the last two or three years of his life” (Métneki, 1996).

We know that a large portion of Jellinek’s life remains unexplored. The "Red Róheim" is an essay its subject is Géza Róheim’s life history in Hungary (Hárs, 2012), and his friendship with Morton Jellinek. He was in 1918-1919 also a member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Society; had been analysed by Sándor Ferenczi and was in contact with Freud, too.

Our team has contributed to the efforts at the Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies to establish their comprehensive Jellinek Archive. We are very pleased to participate in this very exciting and interesting work.

References


Thalassa 20(4), 45-74.