Mystery and speculations: An introduction to E.M. Jellinek’s redemption

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This is the first in a series of papers depicting the mostly undocumented life of E.M. Jellinek. This paper serves as an introduction to several more topics related to Jellinek’s pre-alcohol studies life and scholarship, including his family background, his years in Hungary, his time abroad, his tenure at the Worcester State Hospital, and his relationship with Mark Keller. This first part focuses on some major controversial issues about Jellinek’s life, which challenged those who attempted to write a biography. The information in these papers was first presented at the 36th Annual Substance Abuse Librarians and Information Specialists (SALIS) Conference on May 1st, 2014, by seven presenters in a panel entitled “Mystery and speculations: Piecing together E.M. Jellinek’s redemption.”

Introductions, intentions, and scope

There are essentially four goals we want to accomplish with this panel, which are as follows:

(1) To honor and acknowledge the founder of our library, one of the figureheads of the Center of Alcohol Studies, and the primary driving force behind the emergence of alcohol science.

(2) To show the research processes involved in collecting, digitizing, and analyzing all of the information we have uncovered. Of particular importance with this goal is an emphasis on making as much information as
possible accessible, as we never know what will become relevant in the future. In keeping with the theme of the Conference (entitled “Looking forward, looking back”), we have been building on our past to better prepare us for our future.

(3) To give a fuller picture of the foundations of alcohol science, as rooted in the making of the man who was a large part of its beginnings. We believe it benefits those of us who work in substance abuse libraries to have a working knowledge of one of the founders of our discipline, as his personality had a very large influence on its structure.

(4) To document this history in our voice (because who else will do it?). We are essentially two generations removed from the foundation of this field, and it is important to make information accessible in hope that it does not get distorted or filtered through those with biases one way or another on the topic. Essentially, our job is to uncover as much of the material as we can, utilize the material we have uncovered, and perhaps most importantly, provide context when available.

Jellinek is of course most famous for his numerous contributions to the alcohol science field, some of which I make mention of below, but it should be noted that he started this phase of his career when he was approximately 50 years old, which leaves quite a lot of life to consider before he took up this cause (Jellinek, 1947a). So as mentioned, the focus of this panel, while certainly making reference to his years in alcohol studies (especially during Molly Stewart’s portion on his relationship with Mark Keller), is on the forging of his personal, educational, and professional interests pre-alcohol.

The panel’s intention is to give a well-rounded picture of this complex and interesting man, and show how his unique take on life and scholarly pursuits is reflected in the work we are doing as substance abuse librarians, decades after his passing. Included in this work is the research involved in trying to fill in the gaps of his life, and we have come to find that the more we learn about Jellinek, the more we learn about the foundation of alcohol studies as a discipline. In keeping with his (either second or third) ex-wife Thelma Pierce Anderson’s wishes, in a letter to colleague Mark Keller about a potential Jellinek biography, we plan to reveal the man in several aspects of his life (Anderson to Keller, 1984). Of course, an honest assessment of an individual will always expose flaws in character, but our intention is not to defame. We plan on showing the true human being, flaws and all, and on charting his failures and subsequent successes in equal measure. (Hence, the word “redemption” prominently displayed in the title of the panel.) Above all, we want to show that this is a man who contained multitudes and defies archetype.

Speaking to the fourth goal of ours (“Who else will do it?”), and with respect to Thelma’s concerns, we want Jellinek’s biographical information to be placed in the proper context, and not sensationalized or used to push an agenda. While the dubious claims and alleged indiscretions we will discuss can certainly paint him in an unflattering light, it is too simplistic to think in such binary terms as to discredit his great contributions to the field. The theme of this panel is to recognize a man who failed often, and surely felt the reverberations of those failures, but continued to work at his craft.

For an example of how cherry-picked information can be used for defamatory purposes, take the response to Dr. Ron Roizen’s 1997 column “Jellinek’s Phantom Doctorate”, which explored his attempts to verify Jellinek’s academic credentials and detailed his discovery that Jellinek may have been less than forthright about his claims. Roizen concludes that this shows just how marginal a figure Jellinek was in the scientific world, and postulates that the field of alcohol science itself was marginal by extension. He even makes sure to state: “a doctor-less Jellinek should by no means vitiate either his career or his accomplishments in the alcohol science movement. Indeed, some of us may even be inclined to grant Jellinek a few extra-credit points--i.e., for accomplishing as much
as he did with a c.v. as problematic as his appears to have been!” (Roizen, 1997).

Shortly after Roizen’s article was posted, Dr. Stanton Peele chose not to focus on these balanced and nuanced conclusions, and instead used Roizen’s research to write an article entitled “Jellinek Was a Cheat!” for his personal blog (Peele, 1997). It is probably not coincidental that discrediting Jellinek outright would fit in with his views against the disease concept of addiction, as Jellinek’s perhaps most publicized work is entitled *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism*. Thirteen years later, in 2010, Peele reposted the same article to his website dedicated to his addiction recovery program (Peele, 2010).

We will be getting into Jellinek’s academic credentials shortly, but first, as to our intentions, a reminder of his innumerable contributions to the field of alcohol and substance abuse studies. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but provides an overview of just how many initiatives in which he was involved. Perhaps his most enduring contribution to the field is his idea of “phases” of alcohol addiction (Jellinek, 1946, 1952), later modified by Dr. Max Glatt to include a recovery element (Glatt, 1958), but still popularly referred to as the “Jellinek Curve.” This curve has been modified and applied to all sorts of addiction disorders over the years and remains highly cited to this day (Fisher 1990, Hoffman 1994, Baird 2008).

And of course, spanning both popular and scholarly audiences is perhaps his most comprehensive work, the book *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism* (Jellinek, 1960), which combined with his other work has left an impact exemplified by the fact that alcoholism is occasionally referred to as “Jellinek’s Disease” (Keller 1984).

Further still, he developed the idea and curriculum for the Summer School of Alcohol Studies, still holding its annual sessions along with several specialized courses, under its current moniker the Summer School of Addiction Studies (Jellinek, 1943). His appeal to librarians and information specialists may be best represented by his work on the CAAAL collection, an organizational system for all of the alcohol literature available at the time (Jellinek, Efron & Keller, 1948). And finally, his legend lives on via the periodically granted “Jellinek Memorial Award”, in which...
the Canadian-based Jellinek Memorial Fund recognizes scholarly contributions to the alcohol field, represented by the “Bunky” bust (Jellinek Memorial Awards).

**An un-examinable life?**

I’d like to begin showing our research process by highlighting just how difficult this man’s life is to piece together, taking you through attempts to sort everything out in a biography. The first true attempt at a Jellinek biography got underway in 1965, less than two years after his death. His daughter, Ruth Surry, took up the effort, funded by a $2,000 grant from the Brinkley Smithers Foundation. We have a series of memos written shortly after Jellinek’s death between Surry, R. Brinkley Smithers, and someone we have only been able to identify as “CPF” (possibly an editor or otherwise in Smithers’ employ) detailing an outline of her discoveries, her sources, the costs involved, and reports on her progress (Surry, 1965). In these memos, the initial emotion is pleasure that things were moving along so rapidly. She began by speaking to family members and tracking leads. However, approximately one year later, in a message from CPF to Smithers from 1966, the sentiment became significantly less optimistic. By this point, Ruth was under significant pressure, and seemingly overwhelmed by the “tremendous amount of research involved” (CPF, 1966). She began to express trepidations about revealing Jellinek’s relationship to his family, and CPF worries in the memo about how long a book from her might take to complete. In a handwritten note at the bottom of the letter, he mentions that she promises a progress report soon. By December of 1966, she notes that the “biographical work is proceeding very slowly indeed” and that much of the information is contradictory (Surry, 1966). (If you are curious about what she must have gone through, a brief preview of some of this confusing information will follow shortly. We have only these memos as sources for this attempt, which include a helpful outline of Jellinek’s life, but have no actual pages produced in her effort. We remain optimistic, however, as we contacted the Smithers Foundation to see if they may possess anything beyond these memos, and they recently replied, offering to send over anything that may be related to the project, so we hope to gain more information about this attempt soon.)

Several other Jellinek biographies were attempted outside of Ruth’s ill-fated effort. Mark Keller actually makes mention of a potential biographical piece in 1963, only a few months removed from Jellinek’s death, in a letter to Thelma Anderson. Though, he does stipulate that he doesn’t “have in mind a biography in the true sense, but one essentially limited to work and achievements. (Someone with literary ambitions could try a real biography)” (Keller, 1963). The aforementioned CPF letter notes that Max Glatt, one of the pioneers in the treatment of alcohol problems (and as noted earlier, the man who added the “curve” to the “Jellinek Curve”), had the idea to work on a Jellinek biography with more of an oral history bent, collecting statements from prominent

![Ruth Surry, Jellinek's daughter at Mark Keller's Recognition Dinner, October 7, 1977 (Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies Archives)](image-url)
members of the alcohol science field with their views of the man. He is quoted as saying that the lack of a Jellinek biography is like “a building without the cornerstone” (CPF, 1966). Nearly twenty years later, Keller asked Thelma herself to take up the task. In a letter from Thelma in 1984, she appears apprehensive, but then delves into some hypotheticals about the potential scope and focus of the book (Anderson to Keller, 1984). By 1990, Keller had apparently taken the reins himself, and even crafted a title—“Bunky: A Remembrance of E.M. Jellinek”. Thelma mentions the title while wishing Keller luck in its undertaking (Anderson to Keller, 1990). We do have a copy of about 8 pages taken from an early draft of that attempt. Perhaps the most comprehensive biography comes courtesy of J. George Strachan, who wrote an unpublished 63-page draft entitled E.M. Jellinek: His stay in Canada (Strachan, 1989). The title is a bit of a misnomer, as nearly two-thirds of the draft covers Jellinek’s personality and his career before arriving in Canada. Despite all of these ambitions, none of these biographies have been completed and published, so that proverbial cornerstone in Dr. Glatt’s quote is still missing.

Let us now see some examples that may have confused Ruth and perhaps some others during their research, such as his ever-changing academic credentials. In 1918, a 28-year old Jellinek was listed as “Doctor” in the proceedings of the 5th annual International Psychoanalytics Congress held in Budapest (Psyalpha, 1919). (Note: Jellinek presented at this conference along with Sigmund Freud and his close colleague Géza Róheim, the details of which will follow in a subsequent paper). In 1933, while working for Worcester State Hospital, he published with the title Master of Education, with no sign of a doctorate (Hoskins et al, 1933). By 1935, he had earned a Doctorate of Science (Worcester State Hospital, 1935), but in 1940, he qualified that Doctorate as honorary (Jellinek & McFarland, 1940). In 1942, the honorary qualifier was dropped, as was the Master of Education (Jellinek, 1942). In 1947, he did away with titles altogether (Jellinek, 1947). And in the aforementioned unpublished Strachan biography, he is listed as a Doctor of Science, Master of Education, and an honorary Doctor of Medicine (Strachan, 1989).

To avoid confusion, perhaps we could just refer to him by his preferred nickname, “Bunky”. One of the ongoing myths is that his father called him “Bunky” because it means “little radish” in Hungarian (Keller, 1984). Interestingly enough, we have a native Hungarian speaker on our panel and two attending the conference, all of whom agree that the Hungarian word for “radish” is “retek”, not “bunky”. We will explore this further in Dr. Judit Ward’s paper on Jellinek’s Hungarian past.

Poring through the documentation

Jellinek’s CV and biography, provided by the Strachan Files from Alberta, sheds a little light on his credentials, but also leads to more questions. As we have found with much of the material on him, we tend to move two steps forward, and then one back.

We can see that he attended the University of Grenoble in 1911, though no degree is listed. Next, it lists that in 1914 he received his Master of Education at the University of Berlin, though it appears he received it three years after he had left the school. Twenty-one years later, in 1935, he
received his Doctorate of Science, but no institution is listed. This also raises the question of what exactly he was doing in those 21 years, another topic we will get into later. Twenty years after that, in 1955, he receives an Honorary Doctorate of Medicine from the University of Chile ("Additional Biographical Information," 1963).

In 1947 the publication *Current Biography* compiled his early education into a narrative (Jellinek, 1947a). It makes mention of University of Berlin (1908-1911), which corresponds with the Alberta bio; Grenoble for the year 1911 (still holding true), and then a previously unmentioned school, referred here only as "Leipzig", from 1911-1914, as where he earned his Master of Education. It also mentions that his Doctorate of Science degree comes from Leipzig, issued 21 years later. It should be noted that *Current Biography* gets its information from various sources, and there is a good chance Jellinek wrote this bio himself. By 1988, in an article written by CAS librarian (and former SALIS member) Penny Booth Page, his education is spoken of in general terms, though she mentions that his Doctorate of Science from University of Leipzig is honorary (Page, 1988). And in 1997, Dr. Ron Roizen tracked this down a little further, noticing that *The Historical Register of Yale University, 1937-1951* has the same Leipzig information regarding his M.Ed., but that his 1935 Sc.D. is from the University of Tegucigalpa, located in the capital of Honduras (Yale University, 1952).

In the memo from Ruth Surry to Smithers (1965) in reference to her attempted biography, she mentions that Jellinek first went to Berlin Technical Institute, then left for University of Leipzig, and went to Grenoble for graduate study after that. She does not specifically mention that he graduated from Leipzig. Finally, in correspondence from Thelma to Keller in 1988, she remarks on his various titles and degrees, quoting his answer that “European degrees are not comparable to American degrees but they were like doctorates”, before positing that “the truth may be more interesting” (Anderson to Keller, 1988).

Jellinek’s career, according to the Alberta file, begins in the 1920s. But according to that file and the *Current Biography* piece, he earned his Master’s in 1914, either from Berlin or Leipzig. So what was he doing between then and the “1920s”? The possibly self-written piece from *Current Biography* expands on that a bit. It mentions that from 1914-1919, he was employed as a biometric consultant, and as a library and field researcher. Again, no institutions are listed. Also, he was apparently working simultaneously (1915-1920) as biometrician at the Government School for Nervous Children in Budapest (perhaps that is the biometric consultant job that he mentions in the previous sentence). We should also note that we have not been able to verify whether or not this school ever existed. These years are shrouded in mystery, but luckily Dr. Ward will expand upon them in her paper detailing his Hungarian years.

The following decade also lacks substantial sources. We have not been able to find any corroborating evidence of his years in Sierra Leone, though both his CV and (auto?)biographical piece mention his stint ending after five years. After looking everywhere for information on the Elder Dempster company, our findings on this claim are again inconclusive. One other scrap of evidence we have about his time in West Africa comes from his posthumously published article in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* in 1977 entitled “The Symbolism of Drinking”, in which it is mentioned that he had observed some tribal symbolism during his time there (Jellinek, 1977).

Another piece of corroborating information comes from the Worcester State Hospital Annual Reports, in which he is introduced as a statistician who worked in West Africa for Elder Dempster and R. Pariser, the latter a firm not mentioned in any previous or subsequent document (Worcester, 1931).

After his African years, Strachan’s biographical narrative lists his title as
assistant director of research with United Fruit Company in Tela, Honduras, and his bio adds that he worked for them for five years, starting in 1925 (Strachan, 1989; Jellinek, 1947a). His daughter also mentions a book about bananas written by him during his time there (Surry, 1965). Again, this somewhat correlates with his educational background, as he claims to have earned his Sc.D. from a school in Honduras, but if you have been able to follow along this tangled web, he claims to have earned that degree in 1934, approximately four years after leaving the country.

Finally, further complicating our research process is the fact that Jellinek allegedly changed his name when he left for Sierra Leone, and kept that pseudonym until he began working for Worcester State Hospital in 1931. We found this in the aforementioned memo from his daughter regarding his biography, in which she mentions that he took the name Nikita Hartmann (Surry, 1965).

Conclusions

So, what to conclude from such a convoluted mess of dates, facts, and claims? The confusing nature of this introduction is at least partly intentional, as the purpose was to show just how maddening and difficult it has been to track Jellinek’s life over the years. The good news is that the subsequent segments of this series will provide some clarity and answer some questions posed here, though there is still much work to be done. In Jellinek’s 73 years of life, he traveled from New York City to Budapest, West Africa, Central America, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Texas, Canada, Switzerland, California, and possibly beyond. He worked in many fields, possibly under different names, and was allegedly involved in activities that one would likely be inclined to keep under wraps. For these reasons and more, attempting to follow his chronology is frustrating and difficult, but we hope as you follow along the different parts of this series, that the adventure of it all holds as much interest for you as it does for us.
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E.M. Jellinek’s bookplate and signature in a book donated by him to our library
(Rutgers, Center of Alcohol Studies)

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