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Ferenc Erős and Judit Szilasi with Iván Főnagy

## Linguistics and Psychoanalysis

**Ferenc Erős-Judith Szilasi:** Professor Főnagy, how did you first come into contact with psychoanalysis?

**Iván Főnagy:** When I was thirteen or fourteen years old, I came across a book by József Bíró (2) called “Modern Graphology.” The author was a graphologist with an analyst’s cast of mind, who made references to *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and constructed his entire graphology upon it. Essentially, it dealt with the symbolic importance of uncontrolled movements. So I read *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. It was a very good beginning, and I have recommended this book as a point of departure ever since, as it is the least alarming of Freud’s works. At the same time it was also very convincing as it conquered areas for science and causality where chance had prevailed. Is it purely accidental when someone inadvertently dials the wrong telephone number, when someone drops a porcelain figurine which was a gift from his wife, or when a politician says “let us be a gap in the bastion of peace” (3)? And then *The Interpretation of Dreams* came along followed by the other analytical books. When I became acquainted with István Hollós, I was thoroughly grounded in the theoretical basics. Hollós belonged to the apostolic vanguard of psychoanalysis. It could have been 1940-1941, when I was twenty years old. Hollós was looking for a linguist because he was engaged in a very fine, extensive work which was however subsequently never published. Written in German, it was essentially about how a person progresses from drive to language. I still have a part of this manuscript, and I have discussed how it should be published with Éva Brabant. I learned a great deal from Hollós and I could also tell him some things about linguistics. That was when I was set on becoming a linguist.

**You were then attending university reading linguistics?**

Yes. I began my studies in linguistics when I was 18 in Paris. Paradoxically, I entered the German faculty, because clearly I could not compete with the French, and I wanted to stay abroad. I then became a dissident for the first time, in 1938. It was with two friends. One was László Ernszter who was a superb mathematician and would become a superb biochemist, and a member of the Nobel Prize committee. The other was László Szabolcsi who became the chief radiologist at the finest of all X-ray clinics. We were in Paris at the same time and had all gone there with the intention of staying. I had taken my books of Hungarian poetry with me, and there they remained. In 1939 we went home to Balaton, and we were not able to return to Paris until 1958, as the second world war broke out in August of that year.

I had completed one year in Paris in the German faculty. I then continued in Kolozsvár where-after Hungarian soldiers had marched in with the slogan “Sweet Transylvania, here we are”-I entered the University of Kolozsvár. My teacher was Béla Zolnai (4), a superb scholar and a very straightforward and free-spirited man. Some kind of erotic magazine would be hanging out of his pocket when he went into the university, which made him very attractive. In Hungary this was not exactly typical of a university teacher. When I came into contact with Hollós, I possessed certain qualifications as a linguist which meant that I was in a position to contribute something to prevent Hollós’s work being attacked on linguistic grounds and brushed aside. My friendship with Hollós provided me with new perspectives. He was a unusual man-a type of person very rare today-benevolent and analytical. Are you familiar with Sárgha Ház (5)? When Hollós

went to Lipótméző as head physician, the use of a wet blanket and the use of tranquilizers were the only methods of treatment. Hollós never dealt with somatic medication, he was the first psychiatrist who was also an analyst. This was a very new thing at the time, and put an end to the maniac ward. Hollós was primarily interested in the patient's present and past. In Farewell to the Yellow House there is a very nice anecdote about how Hollós dealt with patients. There was a patient named Grün. He said that he was kosher and could not eat communal food. And then Mrs Hollós, who was a superb cook, cooked him solet. On another occasion, a Saturday, they saw Grün approaching with a large cigar in his mouth. "Herr Grün, why are you smoking on a Saturday?" asked Hollós. "What's the use of being mad?" replied Grün. This case illustrates Hollós's relationship with patients.

I became acquainted with Hollós's wife as well, a woman with a wonderful sense of humor. After the war, Hollós wrote to Paul Federn that he had survived 44 (6). The following story is an illustration of just how unable people are to accept the thought of their own death. When they are confronted with it, they are swept away to the very opposite of a fear of death. The Hollóses were standing by the Danube stripped to the waist; Mrs Hollós two lines ahead of Hollós. When it was almost his turn to be shot, he became infused with an exceptional state of euphoria, and absolutely had to tell his wife about it. He went back two lines, and said to her, "It was beautiful". To which Mrs Hollós replied "Well, this is a fine time to tell me". Meanwhile, the executions into the Danube had been halted. Wallenberg had managed to save those Jews still alive from the Arrow Cross.

So through Hollós, I became acquainted with psychoanalysis. Hollós explained that there could be no analysis with him, instead I could undertake it with Zsigmond Pfeifer (7), who was working on psychoanalytical game theory and the psychoanalytical theory of music. Pfeifer was deported by the Germans and never returned.

Analysis continued during the war years, while you attended the University of Kolozsvár.

Attendance was a formality. I actually lived in Kolozsvár for a short period, I went there later on only for colloquia. I did not really attend lectures, because I already had a job. I was a proof-reader and author for the Bibliotheca Book publishing company. Bibliotheca published my book on magic in 1943, which enabled me to support my marriage. I was no longer able to be in Kolozsvár. That book was reprinted a few years ago.(8) When analysis with Pfeifer was no longer possible, I met Kata Lévy (9), who also belonged to the apostolic generation. She was the wife of Lajos Lévy (10) and, I believe, had been Anna Freud's analyst for a period. I finished my training analysis with Imre Hermann, which brings us to the 1950s.

## **How did you meet Imre Hermann?**

I was twenty one or twenty two, and the Hermann family lived in Fillér street. I knew that they had daughters, and to tell the truth the real reason I wanted to meet him was so I could meet his daughters, which was immensely naive of me, because it is not possible to come into contact with an analyst's family. But subsequently, I went in earnest as I was profoundly interested in the logic of psychoanalysis, and how it was not possible to approach its logic from the basis of instinctual psychology. And this could only be learned from Imre Hermann. They have not continued this line. I wrote a joint article with Imre Hermann (11). Joint authorship was already permitted in training analysis.

## **How long did the training analysis last with Imre Hermann?**

Actually there was no break, it only ended when I left Hungary, until about 1964.

In 1958 I left Hungary for a conference. That was at the time when you could only leave Hungary in exceptional circumstances, and if you actually left behind an authentic hostage, a spouse-and it had to be a true hostage, which meant that according to the AVO the marriage was in fact a good one. So, our marriage was investigated thoroughly, and in the end judged to be a good one. As a result, in 1958, I was allowed out, for one month.

I carried on my career as a linguist in 1945 in Pest, up until 1949, and then I wrote a dissertation on the

phonetic history of the French language, concerning French stress, or in a stricter sense of the word, stress. I submitted it in 1949. I published my first linguistic paper in 1943, "Recent changes in the Hungarian language". It appeared in a year-book of a folk studies association. Before that came my very first publication, which was more literary than linguistic; it was about the musical structure of literary works. It dealt with a musical analysis of Novalis' Heinrich von Ofterdingen. It was published in the journal *Műhely*, not the later Parisian *Műhely* or *Atelier*, but one in Transylvania edited by János Koszó, a German scholar and our friend. At that time, I thought I would become his assistant lecturer, which never happened because he was thrown out of Pest University in 1945 or 1946. Koszó was in Pécs, and later Kolozsvár. At that time he did not take advantage of the possibilities provided by the Soviet liberation and instead went to the West. The degree to which he was not a Nazi sympathizer can be seen from the fact that he asked me to write an article. He had no need whatsoever in 1941-42 to publish something by a 21 year old Jewish lad. As a result of his leaving, I never became a German scholar nor a historian of German literature.

### **In spite of the Jewish laws, you were able to go to university?**

They accepted one or two students. Manó Kertész (12) had the dispensation that he could accept one Jewish student every year. And in one particular year, this student was me. Hungarian linguists had a rather guilty conscience about Kertész, so they gave him this dispensation. Kertész was a linguist, he opened up a whole area of study: the cultural historical interconnectivity of common sayings, their etymology and historical analysis. His book *Common Sayings* is extremely beautiful.

### **You were never threatened with forced labor?**

I would have been, had I actually registered, but even in 1938 I didn't register for conscription. So no one actually took me into account. The most extraordinary thing about this period was that people actually followed the provisions of the law. This was the most adventurous choice. So, anything else was more realistic. As a consequence, I never registered to be called up. They never came looking for me. And then in 1944, I was partly a pseudo-French prisoner of war and I registered with the gendarmes in Füzesgyármát, where they saluted me, because I said that I was a French journalist, and at that time in 1944 it was easier to salute than simply be a gendarme. After I registered I worked in a mill. I filled sacks. I didn't speak good Hungarian, I spoke with a very strong accent, I struggled with words, so there was not much else they could trust me with than putting things into sacks. This did not go too well, so before long I returned to Pest. Meanwhile in Cegléd, I transformed myself into Ferenc Csismarik. My little girlfriend, Eszter Veres, remained with me with the name Teréz. She was a very pretty girl. Even the gendarmes pinched her bottom. The name Teréz was important because it was possible to rewrite it on registration documents to make it look like Ferenc. She was actually my wife, but we had no marriage certificate, so we lived as if it were a common-law marriage.

### **You were describing how you began your career as a linguist.**

I began very early, in 1941-42. I chose a good theme: I tried to demonstrate that the Hungarian language had changed a great deal in recent decades, that in 1941 it would not have been possible to have used certain older forms of Hungarian in a hit song, as had been the case not so long before. Then I examined the daily *Népszava* for the year 1900-so there would only be one factor, that of time, which I would change-and I considered what it had been possible to write in 1900 but not in the 1940s. Among other things, this applied to older forms and words such as "valék" (I was), "gondolám" (I thought), or "halld" (hear!), "ama" (that). The article was published in the Year Book of the Association of Folk Studies. One could have written just about anything in those two journals (*Műhely* and the Year Book) as nobody read them. The article on language change also appeared again in a French version in *Etudes Finno-Ougriennes*. In the meantime, I worked in the Budapest Library from 1945, while I attended the University in Pest.

## **In what is now the Ervin Szabó Library...**

I was a library official in the Ervin Szabó Library. My wife also worked there, and during a later period she worked in my place so that I could write my dissertation. At the end of 1949, I was sent to the Academy as an administrator in the Linguistics Department, due to an error of the Party. I am an exceptionally bad administrator, and I have great difficulty keeping even my own affairs in order. I didn't say that in 1944, I was part of the resistance movement, in the Major group with Zoltán Várkonyi I didn't know at the time that this was the Major group because you could only know one other person-and so in 1944 or 45, I joined the Party, so in my two little red books there is the date "1944." Thus, I exercised proletarian dictatorship for ten months at the Academy of Sciences-thanks to an error made by the party. I told them that I could not organize. They said "of course you can". After ten months, they admitted that I had been right, I really couldn't organize. But that wasn't the problem, as it later turned out, because certain documents had come to light, from which it transpired that after the first months, their principal aim was to remove me. I don't know why, I wasn't an important person. I had ended up by being inextricably associated with the then leader of the secretariat, Tamás Erdős. Both of us were untrustworthy. We both had to go, although at the time, I had barely exchanged two words with Tamás Erdős. We were properly introduced only later in Paris. So, although I failed at the Academy's Institute of Linguistics, later I led the Institute of Linguistics' Department of Phonetics-even if it was made up of only two or three people. So, I worked at the Institute of Linguistics full time, after which I went over to the Institute of Literary Science because the atmosphere was not good, and I wasn't good, from either a right or a left wing point of view. The situation was more peaceful in the Literary Institute. I went over fictitiously, since at the time, I was in Paris. In 64-65, I was there on a Ford scholarship with my wife and among others I met Jean Perrot, who was the leader of the International Center of Hungarology, and who invited me there for a year. The invitation even bore the signature of De Gaulle, because he insisted that the invitation to all foreign guest professors be in his competence, and in this way it was not possible to reject it. It wasn't possible because a Hungarian French cultural agreement had been signed one year before. And as the deputy director of the Institute of Linguistics said to me-evidently he had been summoned to Party Headquarters and hauled over the coals that this could ever have happened-"Look! Now we've given you permission once again but next time, say when you still haven't been invited!". Consequently I went to Paris as a guest professor, principally to give lectures in phonetics. At that time, the Sorbonne was not split in many Universities like now. Here the two themes of my interests, linguistics and analysis, were combined. Here analysis could come to the surface, and one could be a linguist who dealt with psychoanalysis or an analyst who primarily was interested in linguistics. In 1964-5 I was in America with my wife, and in 1967 we came to Paris. In October 1967 I began to give lectures, and from then until 1970 I remained at the university, until I went over to the French CNRS (National Council for Scientific Research). However I am still to this day a Hungarian citizen and twenty five years ago I became a French national as well.

## **So officially, you still have your Hungarian appointment?**

They never terminated my Hungarian position, in theory I am a lecturer at Szeged University.

## **And you defended your Doctoral Thesis in Hungary?**

This was actually the initiative of István Király who is primarily known as someone who is persistent, not up to the final minute but to the minute after. At the same time, he published my entry of the Lexicon of World Literature without an alteration, even though it was filled with allusions to psychoanalysis, and not because he had a particularly good relationship with analysis. When we spoke for the last time, and this was only about six weeks before his death, naturally we began talking about his cancer, I told him that Freud had discovered during the First World War that he had cancer of the throat, and that he suffered from it until 1939. "That's the first appealing thing I've heard about Freud", replied Király. I made a chiasma in one of my lexicon entries: I quoted something from Marx, which Freud could himself have written, or something by Freud which Marx could easily have done. And then, the house editor corrected it so that Marx remained,

and Freud was omitted, not taking the trouble to see that it did make no sense whatsoever in the general context. Király reinstated them without hesitation. Anyway, in 1995 I was elected as a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

### **Let us now return to psychoanalysis.**

Training in France is long. It is prolonged because it is difficult to get hold of suitable patients. When I began practicing, at that time in a private practice, the analysts were queuing up with the patients, so the happy times were over. I entered the Institut de Psychanalyse de Paris, Centre de Consultation, and there began to practice. I began working there but I am neither a member of the Paris nor the French Association. My only official connection with analysis is that I was elected an honorary member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Association.

### **The French association is fairly orthodox.**

I'm also very orthodox. Orthodoxy will sooner or later become modern. Probably there is no analytical thesis that Freud wrote which has not been somehow refuted in an analytical journal. But these refutations rarely provide differentiating. Far more frequently they make irrelevant concessions. For a while, I would amuse myself at midnight by reading Freud's *Gesammelte Werke*. It was very pleasant reading material, and I thought that if someone were to read them through conscientiously, they would find much that was new. Freud really was a great man. And when someone argues with Freud, as though they were on the same plane, they are wrong from the very beginning. Of course, there are a great many insoluble questions to which Freud drew attention, or those which perplexed Freud himself. There is still a great deal to be done in this context. And when they loosen or modify this context, it very often leads back to the past, to something which in its day was termed "normal psychology." The tendency today is to renounce instinctive psychology. I said to a young analyst about something that it is possible to interpret this beyond analysis. He replied that it is not really possible, nowadays, it is not much of a habit to write. There is no doubt that psychoanalysis cannot be boiled down to instinct psychology and that new tasks await psychoanalysis. But, inherent in this attitude is a renunciation of achievements which made it possible for us to see spiritual activities, culture, the arts and science in a radically new way, to penetrate to the root of things. In the 1920s psychoanalysis was far more revolutionarily new than in the 1990s. I think that if Freud had only written about what has been appearing over the past twenty or thirty years in the *International Journal*, then Freud would have been made an honorary citizen of Vienna.

### **Do you still practice and teach?**

At the present, I maintain a minimum private practice at my home. Besides my practice, I also teach. In recent years I have given lectures and supervised dissertations; this has remained although I am no longer at the university. Of what has remained what is best of all is the contact with students, but I supervise dissertations informally, and at present take part in joint supervisions.

### **How do you see the relationship between linguistics and psychoanalysis?**

Hollós began with psychophonetics but then moved on, partly through the language of poetry, and partly through language generally, because language is nourished with something that is contained within it, which is more ancient than grammar. My own favorite example of this is that it is not possible in living speech to say a single word without not adding something expressed in the language of gesture. If we say in French *je le hais!* (I hate him), we express it with a laryngeal gesture—in technical language, a laryngeal explosion, that we hate someone. It is identical to the reflex expression of something bad, that a baby uses and which Dr Gutzmann called *Unlustlaut*, "displeasure sound". Later, with metaphoric propagation, a gesture of rejection, disgust, dismissal, annihilation. If we look at speech statistically, it transpires that in aggressive speech, this

laryngeal sound is much more frequent than in gentle, tender speech.

### **What are the interesting features of gentle, tender speech?**

Above all the absence of hardness. The articulation is relaxed, the movement of the speech organs is fluent, and freer. This language of gesture can be observed with the use of X-rays and measured and made tangible. This speech of gestures at the throat level and in the cavity of the mouth is older than language. Large apes are also capable of metaphoric escalation, of elevating symptoms into signs. From another angle, machines can be programmed for abstract linguistic achievements. What is uniquely human is that twofold manner of communication, the primeval language of gesture and the tight unity of a developed language in human speech. What makes language alive is gesture taken in the word's literal or broader sense of the word. On the level of the sentence we gesticulate when we "lash" into a word when we are talking angrily, we mix up the regular order of the words. In the broader meaning of the word, gesture is also metaphoric, expressive movement in the space of its meaning. This more ancient language of gesture cannot be measured against developed language, it functions within the framework of the developed language, although it broadens and sometimes alters this framework.

### **Has this connection between language and psychoanalysis contributed to our understanding of other or older cultures?**

Partly yes, partly no. No, in as much as however far back we go in time, to the period of writing between languages there are no qualitative differences. That which is archaic in language, leads a far greater distance back: to the preverbal stage and a transitional state. On this basis, we can now construct some kind of a concept for the development of language. By the same token, it is also true that living or dead languages that we are able to study do contain archaic features, with which we have no clear example in Indo-European languages. The ancient Egyptian Kha is such a concept, which brings together terms which for us, according to our habits of thinking, are alien to each other: "house", "body", "mother's womb" and "grave". In a Bantu language (Pangwe) the same word means "snake" and "penis", another "vulva" and "fruit". I know from Geneviève Calame-Griaule's book that the Dogon vocabulary tends, following Hollós, to identify linguistic and sexual activities. Europeans only identify the penis with a snake in their dreams, only in their dreams do they symbolize the female genital organs with a fruit. To this degree, the Ancient Egyptian, the Pangwe and the Dogon semantics are more archaic. It can be presumed that the Indo European Proto-Language was more liberal than modern Indo-European languages.

### **How do French analysts receive you?**

Ilse Barande translated my work on the basis of instincts of speech from German, and published it in *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*. After it was published, Pierre Lucque sought me out and Béla Grünberger telephoned. He visited with his wife, Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel. I have maintained good relations with all three of them to this day. Until his death in 1967, Miklós Abrahám was a good friend, as was his wife, Marika Török. I was given a warm welcome as a Hungarian, of the land of Hermann and Ferenczi.

There are many Hungarian analysts in France. You, Grünberger, Judith Dupon and others. Again, there is large cult of Ferenczi in France.

On the one hand, this is much due to personal connections, if it hadn't been France then it would have been England. On the other, Ferenczi brought something which was much more subjective for the French intellectuals, and was more easily acceptable, addressing as it were more the heart than Freud's theory of instinct.

### **But what was it in Ferenczi that so fascinated French intellectuals?**

That which can be found so pleasurably in *Thalassa*. Freud always smiled good naturedly and said about the book that it goes a good deal too far beyond what it is possible to confirm scientifically, but that it is very fine. So Freud did not dismiss Ferenczi's theory, but regarded it as a very daring meditation, the fantasy of an analyst. And this was very much to the taste of the French who are characterized by a kind of opposition to Freud's theory in its strictest sense. Ferenczi could therefore be pitted against Freud. But we are still very far from being able to discuss scholarly such cultural, political questions. For me, Ferenczi was otherwise unambiguously positive in all his writing. Even though from the beginning he raises things which Freud could not, because his system of thought was also slightly distant. Grünberger's criticism of Ferenczi was considerably more vehement. I always looked for what I found interesting. And if I found something, then it interested me far less than how it deviates from that which is classical analytical theory. In spite of my orthodoxy.

A debate has raged for decades as to whether Ferenczi was mentally ill or not. In the same way, there has been a debate as to whether or not Attila József, who is very well known in France, was mentally ill. In your view, does this have any importance from the perspective of the development of psychoanalysis?

From this point of view, the situations of Attila József and Ferenczi are very different. In a poet, whether a latent schizophrenia aided this metaphor or that, or whether it didn't, is only interesting in as much as the metaphor is a tool which makes possible the expression of such unconscious or half-conscious contents, for which there is no other means for the expression of which, and to which the psychosis perhaps has forced the patient. As to whether schizophrenia helped József Attila to be a great poet, there are counter examples. Because there are a great many great poets who were not schizophrenic, to whom poetry offered perhaps the opportunity to solve the thing differently. This question is clearly important to a literary historian, because biography is essential, whether the subject had relationships, whether he loved cheeses... But what interests the reader is that which is in the book.

The case with Ferenczi is very different, since allegedly at the end of his life, he had a psychotic phase. Hermann, who to the end enjoyed a close connection with Ferenczi, said that it simply wasn't the case and what Jones said and wrote after Ferenczi's death, just supports the fact that Ferenczi's anxieties were justified and not paranoid fantasies.

### **The French have another opposition figure, Lacan.**

It is very true that the French really do love that which deviates. From this, I could only use a little for my own ends. As for Lacan's theory of language, I agree with Grünberger that we must get to know language better with the help of psychoanalysis, and not the unconscious starting from language. There is some degree of protection as well in this inversion. It makes the unconscious more innocent, if it can be led back to language, which we know well and in essence, are in control of. I could have become acquainted with Lacan personally, but the meeting did not bring me closer to him. On one occasion, Lacan invited me in a very respectful manner. And then there were two things which for me an analyst can never say. The first was this: he began the conversation saying he was going to Pest, but this is not why he invited me, to ask questions about this, and then of course, he asked questions which was very natural, but only people who already know Freud's article *On denial*, would not have said it. This was when I arrived. Meanwhile there was some small break, and a woman arrived, to whom he was very friendly, kind and full of respect a woman of a certain age and when the woman went, Lacan said something like: "These women are so dreadful!"

Hollós said once that it is never permissible to say something like this, because the person in question soon transposes it: what will he say if I go out?! So, these were the two sentences which in my view, a true analyst would not have said.

**On many occasions, Lacan refers to Roman Jakobson (13), with whom you were on good terms.**

Yes, we were, and I owe a great deal to him. Jakobson visited me in Gábor Áron street in a very respectful way, he received me with great affection in Boston and helped a great deal. Jakobson wrote several times about the unconscious, when he meant the “subliminal” and the “pre-conscious”, when for example he wrote about poet’s subliminal (metrical, phonetic) competence. But Jakobson had a sister who became an analyst, and with whom he has such a bad relationship that he, Roman, began to write his name with a “k” and not a “c”.(14) Someone told me that there is an analyst who was Roman Jakobson’s sister, and to whom he was so opposed that he wrote his name differently. From Jakobson’s point of view, it was not of any great surprise; what was acceptable from psychoanalysis was that which was related to linguistic mechanisms, such as in metaphor and in metonymy. But from an analyst this is not acceptable. It is not possible to extract metaphor and metonym from the unconscious.

### **But in your view, this is what Lacan did in the end.**

Yes. It is very interesting that languages have structures which correspond to prime mechanisms and not secondary. Between metaphor and metonym and the unconscious there is overlap. The metaphor, metonym plays with the prime mechanism and derives from the unconscious. These descents into the unconscious, these returns to the past before language guarantee the vivacity of language. This way, language develops and changes ceaselessly without the necessity for calling a “language modification” meeting.

### **In your very first article, you dealt with the problem of language change.**

Yes. It is exciting that language changes behind our backs. Because we don’t change language, we don’t notice that language changes. It is a natural and easily explicable paradoxical phenomenon. When I submitted that article, many said that it is absurd, as since 1900 the language had not changed.

### **Although in 1997, we speak a quite different language from that of 1943.**

Probably. My wife reads contemporary literature, and frequently finds words which can only be understood from their context. I have also observed and described current changes in contemporary intonation.

### **To what extent do the things you deal with preoccupy linguists internationally, and also psychoanalysts?**

They don’t. There are those in whom my work has caused a realization of a gap. I’ve spoken to one or two English analysts who were interested in some of my publications because they saw that there was a huge gap, which it would be worthwhile filling sooner or later, both in the interests of linguistics and psychology.

### **You have just returned from a linguistics’ conference in Switzerland.**

I was at a conference of iconistics. The question was what is it in language which corresponds to a very ancient communication. Because what is in language grammar, and taken in the strict sense, pertaining to language, in its essence, IS based on arbitrary signs. There is no need for a word like “father” to resemble in some way a father. There is no need, and if there is an accidental resemblance, it does not interest linguistics. Artificial languages could perhaps make do with arbitrary signs and arbitrary language rules. Until machines talk to other machines. Living people require a living language, and based on this natural connection between iconicity, signs and signaled phenomena is the vivacity of languages, based on something older than grammar. At this conference, psychoanalysis was not on the agenda. And if it had been introduced indirectly somehow, it would have been a strange thing for the majority of participants. There were no linguists there with an orientation towards psychoanalysis. It is not a very favored theme. A modern linguist views psychoanalysis as an obsolete thing belonging to the last century. Perhaps in American or European linguistic societies there are analytical linguists, but there are no traces of analytical theories or suppositions



in publications. This was not always the case. Imago was a very serious forum. It was a forum, in the strictest meaning of the word, where linguists, literary scholars, ethnographers and analysts met and walked around together.

### **And are there psychoanalysts with a linguistic orientation?**

There are. Primarily in America and France. Valuable analytical articles are published about metaphor, and the differences between metaphor and symptoms. These articles deal with language indirectly, through metaphor or even jokes. Dr. Viktor Rosen in New York, the analyst who deals with language, organized a working group and “panel” with the title “Language and Psychoanalysis.” Within the framework of *Psychanalystes de Langue Française des Pays Romands*, Pierre Lucquet organized a conference in 1987 in which language was the central topic, and for years led a seminar dealing with themes concerning “psychoanalysis and language.” In the English Psychoanalytical Association, there is Riccardo Steiner, the enthusiastic linguist who principally is interested in intonation. We can dare to say that the relation between linguistics and psychoanalysis is asymmetrical. Language interests analysts far more than psychoanalysis interests linguists.

### **Nonetheless you have numerous pupils, many people read your books and articles. Can we talk about a “Fónagy school”?**

I don't think so. This is not false modesty on my part. A good percentage of my more recent students have not been analytically oriented. But there are surprises. Writing is a very strange, paradoxical form of communication. We sit in front of a computer and utter monologues. And the biggest surprise of all is when we receive some kind of feedback. But this is still a very long way away from what could be called a “school”. There was a French poet who to my greatest surprise wrote from Pest that he wanted to meet me at all costs. When I was in Pest, we spent two hours together, so I could explain to him how I saw these connections to language. I would never have thought it.

### **Perhaps this is, in the end, the path of the future? Is it possible that you are a path-finder?**

First of all, it is regretfully accidental that a book by Hollós has not been published. I would be very happy if the surviving fragment could be issued. It is an important chapter in the history of psychoanalysis. The basic idea of the work, the upward path from language instinct to language, opens new perspectives, both from the analytical and the linguistic point of view. The other path, the one dealing with logic, was created by Imre Hermann. Then I would mention Hans Sperber, the German linguist, who became an analyst and wrote a book about the relations of changes of meaning and instinct theory. So many people have found the path, it is perhaps only possible to say that it has not yet become a highway. Of course, it could become one. A great deal could be brought to historical and descriptive linguistics, if we were to take this direction seriously. Sooner or later its time will clearly come. There is no doubt that language and linguistics has meant much to analysts, both theoretically and practically. Freud wrote somewhere that during psychoanalytical training the would-be psychoanalyst should study linguistics. Freud saw this very clearly, with archaeology, linguistics, literature.

### **How do you see analytical theory now? Are there any directions at the moment? Is psychoanalytical theory still developing?**

As far as I can see, development has not come to an end at all. If it had, the situation and character of psychoanalysis in every country and situation would not be so different. The opinions of French analysts, the trends, the point of view, the style in the periodicals are so different from what is read in American periodicals as in any other branch of science. Probably more so than in biology, but at least as much as in

linguistics. In America, the influential trend is cognitive psychology; in France it is not. Cognitive psychoanalysis means primarily-even before cognitivism found its way into every science-that from the analytical point of view, we deal with the ego, with thinking, and these sorts of things, which primarily are "normal psychology." Essentially, Hermann was a cognitive analyst, in as much as he dealt with the instinctive psychological bases of logic. But the American trend is not like this. Americans do not deal on an instinctive psychological basis with thinking, but on a thinking, psychological basis, like analysts. My son Peter, who is a psychoanalyst in London, has borderline cases and has established a reputation for treating them. It was one of his essential experiences that it is characteristic of almost every borderline case, that in a particular developmental period, the child did not receive from his parents that reflection back at itself which is indispensable for the development of self-awareness. For example, they possess a bodily or mental deficiency which for the parent is difficult to accept, or who for some other reason, reject the child. In these cases it becomes impossible for the child to see itself and the world with its parents' eyes. This traumatic experience inhibits lastingly the recognition of spiritual motivations, of others and self. These discoveries are opening up new paths for psychoanalysis. This is not the only new perspective. I have read, again as a member of the family, about the results of treating serious diabetes, with parallel biochemical and analytical means. Psychoanalysis at the same time seeks the connection between the analytical intuition and the neurophysiological processes. The American journal *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, where these articles on connection seeking appeared, is two decades old. Sooner or later a new form of synthesis will develop between cognitive psychoanalysis and instinctual psychology.

### **What are the French trends like?**

I move on the periphery of French psychoanalysis. I don't see the entire territory, nor am I close to it. I see that what is dominant, at least reading *Revue*, is the poeticizing of psychoanalysis, in the positive and negative sense. That people speak about questions of analysis in a poetic language, with all the advantages and disadvantages of a poetic language. Statistically, it would be possible to measure how many metaphors feature in a French article and in an American one. Figures of thought are frequent, such as antitheses, chiasma, gradation, which is to say, all the tricks of classical rhetoric. In the *Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse* this is statistically more frequent than in any English language analytical periodical. This does disturb me from certain points of view, because it is my conviction that psychoanalysis must deal with poetic language and not the other way round. This is an unhealthy trend. Of course, the metaphor has played an exceptionally important role in the development of all sciences. But it would not be possible to publish these articles in an English language journal. I heard about a distinguished French analyst who gave a lecture in England and no one could follow him. I asked if it was because he spoke English badly. No, they said, he speaks excellent English, but they could not understand what he was saying. Proof that this is not a national or a linguistic problem, is that it is present in Italian associations as well. What I have read in *Il Piccolo Hans*, the Italian journal, is written just as the French write. Many sentences are ambiguous, with the aesthetic advantages and scientific disadvantages.

### **How can this effect the work of an analyst?**

Concerning how to write an article, that has nothing to do with the work of an analyst. The analytical relationship is so intense, so unique, that a scientific style does not interfere with the analytical connection. In the interpretation of the analyst, that he graduated from a Kleinian school, or that he is a follower of a school following the principals of an Anna Freud kind of child analysis, clearly has a role. But the fact that he writes his articles in a poetic language has no effect in analysis.

### **What would you like to say to end this interview?**

I am currently writing on a study as to how it is possible to finish poems, scientific articles, and as a consequence, I cannot talk about it.

## Notes:

- (1) University teacher, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, linguist and psychoanalyst, Iván Fónagy is now resident in Paris. The following interview was recorded on tape in March and April 1997.
- (2) József Bíró, *A modern gráfológia* (Budapest: Pantheon, 1930).
- (3) [translators note: a slip of the tongue. In Hungarian, the word gap (rés) and part (rész) differ by a single sound].
- (4) Béla Zolnai (1890-1969) linguist, literary scholar, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and teacher at the university of Szeged, Kolozsvá and Budapest
- (5) Isván Hollós: *Búcsúm a Sárga Háztól* (Farewell to the yellow house), Doctor Telemach Pfeiflein's unusual writing about the liberation of the mentally ill. *Génius*, Budapest: 1927 (reprinted: Cserépfálvi, Budapest, 1990)
- (6) See *Brief einer Entronnenen*. Isván Hollós and Paul Federn (17. 2. 1946) *Psyche*, Heft. 3, XVII. 1974. 266-268.
- (7) Zsigmond Pfeifer (1889-1945), psychoanalyst, member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Association.
- (8) Iván Fónagy: *A magia. A titkos tudományok története* (Magic, the history of a secret science), Tinódi könyvkiadó, Budapest 1989 (A facsimile of the 1943 edition published by Bibliotheca)
- (9) Mrs Kata Freund Lévy, psychoanalyst and member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Association.
- (10) Lajos Lévy (1875-1961) gastro-enterologist, psychoanalyst and member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Association.
- (11) Imre Hermann and Iván Fónagy, "Automatic control of volume in unusual circumstances", *Magyar Nyelv*, 1963, 59, 317-321
- (12) Manó Kertész (1881-1942) linguist. His work covered the relations between Finno-Ugrian linguistics and the cultural history. This book *Szólásmondás* was published in 1922.
- (13) Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), Russian born American linguist, one of the founders of the Prague School of linguistics.