

Remarks by
Viktor Polgár, Ambassador, Consul General
Republic of Hungary,
New York, NY

At the inauguration of the Sándor Ferenczi Center at the New School,
January 12, 2009.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Being an official representative of Hungary in New York, it is my duty to express my joy over the fact that so many of you have gathered here tonight to inaugurate the Sandor Ferenczi Center.

In my official capacity and beyond, I am really thrilled. Let me mention a few of the reasons.

Sándor Ferenczi was truly a giant of the science of psychoanalysis. The poet and friend – also Hungarian -, Dezső Kosztolányi wrote of him:

“He was one of the leading generals of the analysis of the psyche, of the intellectual revolution which had delivered the third and last blow to conceited and presumptuous mankind. After learning from Kepler, that the Earth is not the center of the solar system, and from Darwin that our body is related to animals, Freud told us that our psyche is also governed by unrelenting laws. His research was directed at the psychic responses of sexuality - in other words, the one topic about which humans had lied to themselves and others most.

So wrote the poet and contemporary.

Sándor Ferenczi was a celebrity in his day and age. Many travelled and, in fact, moved to Budapest – Brits, Americans, Swedes, doctors and patients who came to learn or to be treated by him.

He was the first professor of psychoanalysis, so elevated in 1919.

I find it interesting that his first publication – if I am not mistaken - appeared in 1897 in a nature walking publication under the title of ‘On the psychology of touring’, while the last publication, the latest collection of his letters is dated 2005. His publishings thus span a total of 108 years.

But his wasn’t such a pretty career and such a glorious afterlife as it would appear from this accounting. In his publications records there is a hiatus of 46 years – nothing appeared under his name in Hungary between 1936 and 1982. Not so curiously, these are the very years of various authoritative regimes – fascist, Nazi, communist - in Hungary. These regimes were less than interested in seeing the science of psychoanalysis flourish in societies in which they cared little for the individual, but glorified the faceless ‘masses’. During this almost half a century if analysis was to survive it had to go underground. It did. I have a friend here in the audience tonight, an accomplished psychologist who in the seventies had to secretly attend sessions in the home of the analyst who, during the daytime worked as a biochemist.

So Ferenczi, the founder of the Budapest School was forgotten. Almost. For in the eighties, together with the revival of psychoanalysis in Hungary, his renaissance has also begun. And it is a steady progression from there. A little over 10 years ago, the Ferenczi Society came about, conferences were held, and Ferenczi has begun to reclaim the position he deserves in modern psychotherapy.

But the work he had begun is not finished yet. The friend, the poet wrote of his major work, 'A Study on the Theory of Sexuality': "Let us not presume the significance of his book. Let us leave that to posterity. Centuries from now it will be stated with amazement that there was an original thinker who, back in the 20th century had an inkling of the issues of which we will know far more by then."

So, if only for these reasons I am very proud to congratulate and welcome the establishment of the Ferenczi Center here at the New School, to wish all, who are associated with the center much success down the road to the understanding of our souls.