

Epilogue: The promised land of psychoanalysis? On the eve of independence

Hidden, unconscious evil does the greatest damage. So the question is if people will be able to acquire instruments for making this evil conscious and thus for destroying it. It is a daily occurrence that people deny the motives others insinuate to them. They wouldn't need to deny them if they knew the difference between the conscious and the unconscious.

Karol Irzykowski, *Freudyzm i freudyści*

The beginnings of the interest in psychoanalysis in the Polish medical and academic circles in the late period of the partitions (1900–1918) are closely related to the assimilation processes of the large Jewish population in Galicia and the Congress Kingdom, which began here on a large scale in the second half of the 19th century. It is no coincidence that an overwhelming majority of the first supporters of Freud's theory came from this group. In this respect, the beginnings of the movement in the lands inhabited by Poles did not particularly differ from how they looked in other regions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Russia, or Prussia. It is worth emphasizing that particularly large Jewish communities originally lived in the lands of the former First Republic, and it was only in the 19th century that mass Jewish migration to the south – to the more economically advanced regions inhabited mostly by Austrians, Czechs, and Hungarians – began. This is well-illustrated by the fate of Freud's, Ferenczi's, and Klein's families, their ancestors, some of them Polish speaking, who inhabited the lands of Central Poland and Galicia, and in the 19th century moved to Moravia, Budapest, and still later to Vienna.²⁸⁶

The fact that psychoanalysis so strongly influenced – along with Zionist and left-wing Marxist ideas – the young generation of educated Jews entering the space of European culture, resulted from the fact that in all these movements and theories a strong emancipatory claim was present. Despite the sometimes-large differences in their “content,” they were united by a common assumption, namely,

286 A picture of these migration processes of the Jewish community is provided by Larry Wolff in the aforementioned book *The Idea of Galicia*.

that effective implementation of these theories in social practice would lead to a deep transformation of the existing forms of consciousness and a new society would be built from scratch. A truly “scientific” justification was sought for such a task, although again every movement conceived it differently. In Freud’s case, this found its expression in his obsessive desire to endow psychoanalysis with the status of a scientific theory akin to the natural sciences, for he believed that only then its findings and insights would acquire a universal nature and that a change in the cultural self-knowledge of the host society would be possible.

In this sense, psychoanalysis was a “promised land” for its supporters. But it was only one of many popular movements which offered prospects for a better tomorrow for the young generation of educated Jews. Opening the door to the hidden depths of the human mind, to instinctively determined human desires, it produced a dream about a new man who would be better able to shape the “economy” of his mental life. Reaching this “promised land” was to allow him to cope better with his sexual drives and aggressive instincts through neutralizing the negative effects of their impact.

As a result, all social divisions and hierarchies were to be fundamentally transformed, because when confronted with the unconscious, all existing historically and culturally motivated prejudices and superstitions, beliefs in the superiority of some social groups, races or cultures against others, lost their meaning. All kinds of parochial views withered away. All human individuals turned out to be “equal” in their unconscious sexual and aggressive desires, even if these desires found different external objects. And they were the source of identity differences of a sexual nature. But in accepting these differences, one could start to create a psychoanalytically emancipated society of a new type, which, equipped with knowledge about its unconscious, could more effectively use its energies and neutralize all threats related to these energies. It is particularly visible in the memoirs of Nunberg (see above), who directly states that he joined the Polish Social-Democratic Party – as did some of his Jewish friends – driven by the hope that its social agenda offered to abolish anti-Semitism in the relations between Poles and Jews.²⁸⁷

Psychoanalysis was a “promised land” in a dual sense: both as a new “methodical” way of reaching through therapy an area of repressed “representations” (*Vorstellungen*) hidden in the human unconscious, and as a theory capable of identifying the unconscious and making therapeutic use of this identification. Opening new, previously unknown spaces of his inner life to man, psychoanalysis

287 See Nunberg, *Memoirs*, p. 16.

shows him a world in which true “redemption” awaits him. Thanks to psychoanalysis, he will be able to free himself from all complexes, frustrations, inhibitions, and disorders.

Some elements of the belief that psychoanalysis allows the liberation of man from everything which, being repressed into his unconscious, constrains, hampers, and depresses him, could be recognized in the early texts of Freud. The emancipatory message present in them constituted the massive power of attraction and the fascination of his theory, unimaginable for us today. Jekels himself succumbed to it at the time. It is well-illustrated by one of the above-quoted biographical comments where he says that attending Freud’s lectures in Vienna ushered him into a completely new world, incomparable to everything about which contemporary medical studies, psychology, and psychiatry spoke. People like Jekels, uncritically looking up to the Master and placing huge hope in the therapeutic effects of the theory proposed by him, spread it later in the spirit of an “apostolic” mission in various provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavian countries, and Russia.

It was similar in the period from the beginning of the 20th century until 1918 in the Polish lands of the Austrian and Russian partition, where Freud’s and Jung’s theories gained considerable popularity in the native medical community. These theories found here their ardent supporters, who were fluent in German and read Freud’s and his students’ works in the original. But there were also plenty of critics, some questioning the scientific merits of these theories, others rejecting them for political and ideological reasons or because they were unable to accept their claims about human sexuality on moral grounds. Anti-Semitic prejudices often stood behind this criticism as well.

A crucial role in popularizing psychoanalysis (also in later periods) was played by Jekels’ first translations of Freud’s works into Polish and his book *Szkic psychoanalizy Freuda* (1911). Written from a “confessionary” standpoint, it was at the same time a skillful introduction to the basic assumptions of the theory of the Master from Vienna. In the same period, Polish medical, philosophical, and cultural journals started to publish the first articles about psychoanalysis. This was accompanied by a genuine interest in Freud’s and Jung’s theories among the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, partly spurred by the fact that due to the liberal approach to human sexuality contained within them, which undermined existing notions, an aura of controversy and scandal grew around them. Heated debates were sparked in which widely differing opinions were voiced.

A good example of this is the considerable attention devoted to psychoanalysis by the daily press (lecture announcements, short commentaries, notes, etc.).

For this reason, the years between 1900 and 1914 could be called the *Sturm und Drang* period, when the Polish medical and philosophical community was vividly interested in Freud's theory, most of their representatives treating it as a serious scientific theory (even if a large part of it was skeptical).

One of the first significant testimonies to the influence of Freud's theory in the domestic medical community, of symbolic import, was the undertaking of psychoanalytical therapy (somewhere around 1905) by Jekels, as well as Nunberg visiting Jekels over the summer, in the Bystra Sanatorium in Upper Silesia. But it was only in 1909, when Jekels started to maintain regular contact with the group gathered around Freud in Vienna, that this influence became clearly visible. It made itself felt at the First Congress of Polish Neurologists, Psychiatrists, and Psychologists, during which the first papers on Freud's theory were heard by around 300 people and later published in *Neurologia Polska*. The next year, short academic sessions on psychoanalysis were held in Warsaw and then recounted in the journal *Pamiętnik Towarzystwa Lekarskiego Warszawskiego*. And slightly later, between 1911 and 1914, the first translations of Freud into Polish appeared, and books and extensive articles on psychoanalysis were published (by L. Jekels, L. Wołowicz, T. Jaroszyński, and others).

Supporters of the movement marked their presence even more clearly at the Second Congress of Polish Neurologists, Psychiatrists, and Psychologists in Kraków (1912), where one whole day was reserved for papers on psychoanalysis and discussions on its claims. This was unprecedented, for such a distinction granted to psychoanalysis at such a prestigious congress was unthinkable in the academic communities of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and in Germany, which were both permeated with the spirit of Positivist Scientism. Slightly later and in the first years after the war, a crucial role in the spread of the psychoanalytical idea was played, beyond Vienna, by Budapest, mostly thanks to the organizational skills and leadership of Sándor Ferenczi. The high point of the movement's development in Hungary was in 1918–1920, when left-wing parties took power and proclaimed the Hungarian People's Republic, and later the Communist Party of Hungary became dominant and promoted psychoanalysis across the social spectrum.

The third strong center, besides Vienna and Budapest, that experienced a flourishing of psychoanalytically oriented work before the outbreak of World War I, was the Burghölzli clinic near Zürich in Switzerland, supported by Bleuler and Jung. Many assistants from Jan Piltz's clinic at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków gained clinical experience there. And many Polish Jewesses studied or held internships at Burghölzli, partly because Switzerland was the first country in Europe where women were allowed to study at universities. Some of them

maintained intense contact with their home country and sporadically published articles in Polish (M. Gincburg and Fr. Baumgarten).

It should be emphasized that Freud's and Jung's theories were equally popular among physicians in the Congress Kingdom (mainly in Warsaw), that is, within the Russian partition, where the key role was later played by the Psychiatric Ward of the Jewish Hospital in Czyste (A. Wizel, M. Bornsztajn, G. Bychowski, and R. Markuszewicz). And it was also here that Eugenia Sokolnicka unsuccessfully tried to found a Polish psychoanalytical society during her stay in Warsaw between 1917 and 1919. Interest in psychoanalysis was also fueled by contact with the medical communities in Russia, where in the early 20th century it was becoming increasingly popular. Let us recall that in order to get a medical diploma, each Polish medical student had to undergo a few-months-long medical practicum in one of the hospitals or clinics in Russia.

In the period between 1909 and 1914, Polish-language medical and philosophical journals, as well as the cultural and literary press, published over twenty articles devoted to psychoanalysis. (There were also brief press comments and notes.) This is a truly impressive number if we compare it with contemporary publications in other countries. Besides publications in domestic journals, many Polish analysts and psychiatrists interested in psychoanalysis published in German, in leading Austrian, German, and Swiss psychoanalytical and medical magazines. This was partly due to the fact that from the late 19th century until the 1930s, Austria, Germany, and Switzerland formed the global center for medical sciences, especially psychology, psychiatry, and neurology.

No wonder that it was mainly there – sometimes also in France – that almost all Polish representatives of these sciences acquired their expertise and professional experience, including those who were particularly interested in psychoanalysis and attempted to practice it as a form of therapy. Many of them later continued their scientific and medical work abroad, and joined psychoanalytical societies in the countries they emigrated to. Some of them, like Jekels, Nunberg, Deutsch, and Sokolnicka, made important contributions to the international development of psychoanalytical theory with their books and articles, while others, such as Adam Wizel, Stefan Borowiecki, Jan Nelken, Maurycy Bornsztajn (Bornstein), and Gustaw Bychowski, returned to their home country and continued their psychoanalytical work there.

Psychoanalysis also started to be widely discussed among philosophers, mainly in the group of Lviv philosophers and psychologists centered around Kazimierz Twardowski, the greatest Polish philosopher of this period and one of the founders of the so-called Lviv-Warsaw School, which in the interwar period gained international renown (Bronisław Bandrowski, Stefan Błachowski,

Leopold Wołowicz, Stefan Baley, and others). A good illustration of the interest in psychoanalysis among this group is provided by the numerous articles published in the *Lviv Ruch Filozoficzny* edited by Twardowski. Although his attitude towards psychoanalysis was skeptical, he saw it as one of the crucial psychological and psychiatric movements of the era. Hence his journal published both critical and enthusiastic articles about psychoanalysis. It is enough to recall that some of the Polish female psychologists interested in psychoanalysis had a philosophical education (L. Karpińska, F. Baumgarten, and B. Rank); and leading representatives of the movement were intimately familiar with the tendencies in contemporary philosophy (A. Wizel, L. Jekels, S. Borowiecki, M. Bornsztajn, and young Gustaw Bychowski).

Karol Irzykowski, a leading Polish writer and literary critic of the era, was particularly interested in psychoanalysis and in 1913 published one of the most insightful essays on “Freudianism” at the time. The theory also aroused a growing interest in literary and artistic circles, as evidenced by what Stanisław Przybyszewski and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) said about it. The latter, when undergoing analytical therapy with the Zakopane psychoanalyst Karol de Beauraine, infected Bronisław Malinowski, the future ethnologist of world renown, with his precise “method” of taking down dreams. It was under the influence of Witkacy that in his diaries from that period he started to note his dreams with a startling Freudian literalness, even the sexually obscene ones. When several decades after his death the diaries were published in an English translation in the United States, they sparked such an outrage in the local puritan scientific community that they were censored (!!).

As can be seen from the above review of various forms of influence of Freud's and Jung's psychoanalytical theories on Polish medical, academic, and artistic circles in Galicia (the Austrian partition) and the Congress Kingdom (the Russian partition) between 1900 and 1918, it is a significant, but still largely unexamined element of the history of the psychoanalytical movement at the time. In its intensity and scope, this influence was comparable to that observed in Hungary, Switzerland, Russia, or Germany, that is, the countries in which the interest in psychoanalysis among doctors and academics was the strongest in this early period. One of the reasons, besides the emancipatory processes concerning the Jewish population discussed above, was the proximity of Lviv and Kraków to Vienna, which meant that all kinds of “novelties” from the capital of the Habsburg Monarchy very soon reached these cities. Another factor was the native psychological and psychiatric tradition, with its particular emphasis on the concept of the “subconscious” (Edward Abramowski and others). So even if Jekels, and later Sokolnicka, did not succeed in founding a Polish psychoanalytical society, the

fact remains that there were at least a dozen people interested in practicing psychoanalysis as a form of therapy in the Polish medical community, especially in Kraków and Warsaw. And they were potential candidates for members of such a society.²⁸⁸

In any case, it is not a coincidence that Freud attached such importance to promoting psychoanalysis in the Polish medical and intellectual communities in Galicia and the Congress Kingdom. Strong institutional foundations of psychoanalysis in these circles could significantly strengthen the position of the psychoanalytical movement among physicians and academics in the entire Habsburg Monarchy.

Until the 1920s, Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis attracted the attention of Polish intelligentsia with its charm of novelty. Its main claims on the unconscious, the role of sexual desires in human life, elements of criticism of culture, and so on shocked and outraged some, but seduced and fascinated others. There were passionate discussions about them, people reflected on their credibility and asked to what extent they really made it possible to fathom these areas of the human mind which previously had been accessible only through poetic intuition.

Most controversies, criticism, and indignation were of course sparked by Freud's claims about sexuality, especially that of children. They struck at approaches to these questions that had been shaped by tradition and supported by the Church. The claim that you should separate procreation from pure pleasure in the human sexual drive; the hypothesis of the Oedipus complex, saying that the first object of the child's sexual instinct is his mother, and the first object of its aggressive instincts is his father; the belief that infantile masturbation is a natural manifestation of puberty; the claim that the first stirrings of sexual life may be observed in a few-month-old child and that they are "polymorphic" and hence they may become attached to various kinds of objects; a new look at sexual perversions, finding their origins in the structure of instincts – these and other claims undermined the foundations of the traditional approach to sexuality.

This was followed by a different assessment of a number of sexual behaviors proper to adults, such as premarital sex, promiscuity, treating various sexual positions prohibited by the Church as natural, emphasizing the role of "foreplay"

288 As it seems, Jekels and Sokolnicka failed to establish a Polish psychoanalytic society, because they did not have the required charisma, organizational talent, or the ability to attract others to their own ideas. But Ferenczi in Hungary apparently possessed these qualities, because he succeeded in founding a Hungarian psychoanalytical society, although initially he encountered the enormous resistance of the local medical milieu.

and engaging various body parts in it, and a different approach to homosexuality, widely treated as a “sinful” perversion. This led psychoanalysis to postulate that the child should be taught a completely different approach to the whole sexual sphere than the existing one – promoted by the family, Church, and school – from the youngest age. As a result, first attempts were made, inspired by Freud’s, Jung’s, and Stekel’s psychoanalysis, to develop new models of educating children, the right of women to freely express their sexuality was recognized, which was in line with the causes of the feminist movement, and tolerance towards homosexual and bisexual behaviors was promoted.

The conflict with the conservative part of society on this issue was very extensive. The conflict had its sources in a different anthropology underlying psychoanalytical theory, which was incompatible with the concept of man as preached by the Church and as accepted by the majority of society (which did not mean that people behaved in accordance with these precepts in their daily life). The fundamental difference was that everything in human sexual life that the Church treated as the domain of sin and moral depravity, in the eyes of Freud and his continuators and students was a natural manifestation of human instinctive life. And if it led to mental disorders and pathologies, it required a therapeutic intervention rather than going to confession. This new approach to various manifestations of the patient’s sexual life, absolutely secular, devoid of any metaphysical and religious elements, triggered frequent accusations of promoting profoundly immoral claims under a scientific guise, which Irzykowski ironically referred to in his article about Freudians. A good example of this was the intervention of a Kraków bishop (see above), whose cook told him about the “sinful” subjects raised by Nunberg during her sister’s therapy sessions.

In response to all these charges, Polish advocates of psychoanalysis said that the moral rigor of the critics was hypocritical, because their own sexual behavior sharply contrasted with what they preached (L. Jekels, T. Jaroszyński, and A. Wizel). Worse, said the psychoanalysts, it was the traditional excessive rigor in the approach to human instinctive life which led to a number of pathologies in this area. Meanwhile, the psychoanalytical approach – which, incidentally, was in line with theories of sexuality which had been already developed in psychology and psychiatry – was based on an appeal to treat this domain of human mental life with greater tolerance and understanding. As a result, partly because the volume of the repressed content would be smaller, people would avoid many disorders and pathologies in their mental life. People simply had to better identify their sexual desires and start to live in accordance with them and the needs of their bodies, developing a new kind of “compromise” between these demands and the requirements of their social and cultural environment.

The outbreak of World War I interrupted these discussions for four years. The third congress of the Polish medical communities planned for 1914 in Lviv unfortunately did not take place. In November 1918, with the establishment of the independent Polish state, a new chapter in the history of psychoanalysis in Poland began. Physicians practicing psychoanalysis and its supporters expected that it would be a truly democratic state, in which a new social order, more just than before, would be built, and that assimilation processes among the Jews would be completed and that there would be a greater tolerance for everything and everyone different. And they hoped that psychoanalysis would acquire an even stronger position in the academic community and gain wide social acceptance. After all, in their eyes it was a theory revealing a completely new truth about man and culture. Therefore, they believed that its findings and achievements would inevitably become an element of the self-knowledge of the general public. What remained of these hopes, which were at least partly fulfilled, but which were broken for certain reasons ... all this is the subject of the second volume of this book.

