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HUNGARIAN MAGAZINES FOR CHILDREN, 1900-1940.
THE CASE OF TWO CONTEMPORARY JOURNALS

RIVISTE UNGHERESI PER RAGAZZI, 1900-1940.
IL CASO DI DUE GIORNALI CONTEMPORANEI

The article focuses on presenting two interwar children's magazines in Hungary. It is evident to see how the education and socialization of children and youth took place on the pages of these journals. Referring to the theory of the social construction of childhood these magazines represent a culturally defined childhood in a discourse of interwar Hungary. In these magazines the educative purpose dominated but in the 1920-30s the intention of children's amusement became present in the analyzed journals.

L'articolo si focalizza sulla presentazione di due giornali per ragazzi nel periodo fra le due guerre in Ungheria. È evidente quanto spazio abbiano l'educazione e la socializzazione dell'infanzia e della gioventù nelle pagine di queste riviste. Dal punto di vista della teoria della costruzione sociale dell'infanzia, questi giornali danno una rappresentazione dell'infanzia culturalmente definita all'interno del discorso dell'Ungheria fra le due guerre. In questi periodici l'obbiettivo educativo è dominante, ma dall'analisi l'intento di divertire i ragazzi comincia a emergere negli anni '20-'30.

Key words: children's magazines, middle-class childhood, education and amusement.

Parole chiave: giornali per ragazzi, infanzia borghese, educazione e divertimento.

Although there had been some attempts to establish and publish journals for children earlier in the 19th century, the main breakthrough was due to the changing political and cultural climate after the establishment of the Dual Monarchy in 1867. This political compromise gave way not only to political and economic changes in Hungary but witnessed the flourishing of cultural life, press and educational journals in general. Compulsory education was introduced in 1868 in the country and the process of constructing the learning child, the pupil had began (Szabolcs 2011). Educational journals considered their task to disseminate the idea of compulsory education as a road to raise the country into the family of modern nations. Parallel with this process the establishment of children's magazines seemed to add to the educational awareness that characterized the period.

Historical periodization is not arbitrary and to identify a researched period of issuing children's magazines should consider several factors: political and cultural events as well as the history of children's literature – just to mention a few. In Hungary the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was a turbulent period: the peaceful and prosperous years of the Monarchy led to a political decline and to WW1. After the breaking up of

the Monarchy in 1918 revolutions followed and after the lost war the Trianon Treaty reduced historical Hungary's territory and millions of ethnic Hungarians became citizens of the neighbouring countries. Since then the revision of the Trianon Treaty became top priority among politicians and their efforts went as far as to find political ally in Hitler in order to achieve this political goal. Thus the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries witnessed many political turns and tragic events and it is reasonable to consider this background while interpreting the content of these journals. The end of the Dual Monarchy in 1918 and Hungary's role in WW2 in 1941-44 can be conceived as turning points in the role and scope of children's magazines as well, even in cases when publishing a magazine was continuous during these years. Thus the interwar period can be considered a relatively homogeneous one in the life of children's magazines.

It is very difficult to give an overall picture about all children's journals published in the first half of the 20th century since only a few of them were published regularly, they often changed their titles and layout in order to adapt to the strict market conditions. Moreover, bibliographical data are contradictory in many cases and all issues of these magazines are not always available even in the biggest libraries in the country. There are no data about the number of subscribers, readers. The following chart summarizes the most important children's magazines with accessible publication data.

<i>Name of the journal</i>	<i>English name</i>	<i>Period of publishing</i>	<i>Editor(s)</i>	<i>Age group</i>
<i>Kis Lap</i>	Little Journal	1871-1908?	Ágai Adolf 1836-1916	for 5-12 year-old children
<i>Hasznos Mulattató</i>	Useful Entertainment	1873-1912	Dolinay Gyula 1850-1918	"for both genders"
<i>Lányok Lapja</i>	Girls' Journal	1875-1912	Dolinay Gyula	
<i>Én Újságom</i>	My journal	1889-1944	Pósa Lajos 1850-1914 Benedek Elek	
<i>Cimbora</i>	Pal	1921-1929	Benedek Elek	children's magazin for Hungarian minority in Transsylvania, "illustrated weekly magazine for honest children"
<i>Az Erő</i>	The Power	1917-1932?	Ravasz Árpád, Karácsony Sándor	Hungarian Christian Students Association
<i>Magyar Lányok</i>	Hungarian Girls	1894-	Tutsek Anna 1865-1944	"illustrated weekly magazine for young girls"
<i>Jó Pajtás</i>	Good Pal	1901?- 1925?	Sebők Zsigmond Benedek Elek Schöpflin Aladár	
<i>Örömbír</i>	Good News	1896-1944		
<i>Zászlónk</i>	Our Flag	1900-1948		Catholic magazine
<i>Kis Pajtás</i>	Little Pal	1906?-1943?	"Hököm Matyi" "Jack on the beanstalk"	"illustrated children's magazine"

Research on children's magazines is not a popular topic and focuses mainly on taking stock of these journals (Szepesi 1976, 14-17; Csorba 1999, 18-23.). Research on educational press is more frequent and can be a help in inquiring about children's journals in particular. An interesting attempt was to analyze illustrations of a popular children's magazines by Balogh (2003, 185-207) who focused on the relation of illustrations and texts in the journal *Én Újságom* (My journal).

My point of departure is that children's journals reflected the cultural, ideological background of the historical period in which they were published. Their use of language, the topics, narratives had mainly an educative purpose and their intention to amuse children was only an additional goal. In the 20s and 30s of the 20th century, however, an increase of riddles, amusing stories balanced the educative purposes and indicated a child-centered approach as well but children's magazines never forgot the intention to communicate values that were considered important by adults in the given period. These values could be characteristic of middle-class families: children of the elite were thought to be overindulged while children in poor families were thought to be neglected. Children's magazines followed the norms of educational journals in emphasizing the idea of the modest, diligent, obedient child that is simply inconceivable either among rich or poor families (Szabolcs 1984, 2011). Thus in these journals the interwar period is characterized by the construction of the politically committed, conservative middle-class childhood.

To illustrate some of these general statements I have chosen two children's and youth magazines from the 1920-30s. *Az Erő* [The Power] appeared from 1917, *Kis Pajtás* [Little Pal] was probably issued first in 1906. Both magazines had a religious background: the editors of *Az Erő* were well-known personalities of the Calvinist church, while *Kis Pajtás* was connected to the *Regnum Marianum* Catholic community that had been established in 1902.

Kis Pajtás

This children's magazine was issued to young pupils who still are fascinated by fairy tales but are interested in history, technics, modern science as well. Popular science was represented in articles like «A visit in the green house» (September 15. 1929), «Paul in the land of ice» (January 1. 1930), «Inventing the gunpowder» (September 1. 1930). These were written in a language comprehensible for young children and always giving a storyline behind the knowledge important to convey to children.

Needless to say, as a Catholic-oriented magazine, *Kis Pajtás* layed stress on religious topics. A story about the chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary (March 15. 1930), the legends about Saint Emeric of Hungary¹ (April 1. and May 1. 1930), a poem about Ash Wednesday (February 15. 1931), about Lent (March 1.1932) and a legend about

¹ Saint Emeric was the son of the first Hungarian King, St. Stephen. He died young in a hunting and served as a model for young boys because of his ascetic, pure life.

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary² (November 1. 1931) are examples of this intention. The comment on the topic of Saint Elizabeth was undoubtedly a direct educational message: «We celebrate this year the 700-year death anniversary of the kind-hearted Saint Elizabeth all over the world. Please, talk to yourself: if the behaviour of Saint Elizabeth is followed everywhere, I have to do it even better, since I am a Hungarian child» (November 1. 1931).

A call for a religious vocation is also present in the journal: «Boys! Pupils! Who wants to become a Franciscan monk? Those interested can ask for application regulations from the church and convent of Saint Francis in Esztergom» (June 1. 1931).

This magazine contained correspondence in every issue that was mainly a brief reflection to letters of children, but we can read longer replies from which the atmosphere of the historical period can be felt. A child is given advice as to what birthday present he can ask for: «I advise you to ask for the book titled “Snowdew”. It was written by uncle Albin Gombos, warm-hearted friend of children, whose books about Fat Frankie are well-known to all of you. In this book he tells beautiful myths about the detached Transsylvania» (January 15. 1930). The topic of the Treaty of Trianon was introduced not only in this letter, but several times, like in a poem in May 15. 1930: «...our ancient homeland will be unbroken again...». The Great Depression had also an effect on the magazine, as it becomes evident from the editor's letter in September 1. 1931:

Dear Little Readers! I have a bad news for you. From now on we can meet only once a month. As you probably know, everybody has less money. The fathers of many children get less salary. Many fathers do not even have a job to earn money So we knock at your door only once a month to save money.

Communication with the readers did not limited to correspondence. The magazine had direct meetings with children, like the one in Sopron, where a performance was held to children, and they also had the opportunity to tell poems, solve riddles (May 15. 1930).

Riddles and competitions formed an important part of the content of the journal. Crosswords, picture puzzles can be found in all issues. The nature of competitions can be illustrated by the following:

How many kings did Hungary have? Let me see, children, who can enumerate the most of them? You may even characterize the kings by their noteworthy deeds. The best solution will be rewarded by a story booklet (October 15. 1930).

Az Erő

The following regular columns appeared in the magazine: editorials, biographies, short stories, popular science, poems, correspondence, scout movement, miscellaneous. It targeted mainly elder pupils, mainly boys, although in September 1921 one column

² Saint Elizabeth of Hungary lived in the 13th century and was patroness of the poor.

was devoted to girls, and in September 1931 a description was given to girls about the lacemaking.

A call for competition among readers well indicates the historical background of these years. In September 1921 the following appeal was published to call for an «intellectual tournament»:

Young knights of Az Erő! You are called to participate in an intellectual tournament. You can choose from the following arenas: 1. Philosophy. 2. History. 3. Literature. 4. Physics 5. Chemistry 6. Natural science 7. Economics 8. National education.

1. Do we need heroes in the 20th century?
2. Transsylvania in Hungarian past and future
3. Characters of the Tancred scene from the Tragedy of Man³
4. Generating and using electric power in the countryside
5. The role of carbohydrates in human nutrition
6. The instincts of self-preservation among birds
7. Does present and future Hungary need a seaport?
8. The scouts camp and its importance.

It is clear from those tournament questions that refer to the past and present of Hungary that the readers of the magazine were encouraged to form opinion about contemporary political situation and a better future. In November 1921 the editors were disappointed to evaluate the results of this tournament and lamented about the little number of competition essays: «How could it happen that among contemporary youth exactly the burning questions of the history, economics and national education were not well received?».

The religious nature of the magazine becomes clear from articles like «How do you read your Bible» (September 1931), «What message conveys the Sermon on the Mount to pupils?» (September 1931).

Modern technology and science gained ground in the magazine. One of the most popular topics was aviation (e.g. in June 1921, in September 1930). The heroic age of aviation, Louis Blériot demonstration flight in Budapest in 1909, the loss of Hungarian aviation technology after the lost war and the rebirth of technical results in the 1920s contributed to the interest in airplanes, flights and satisfied adolescence's spirit of adventure⁴. Readers could also find articles on solar energy (March 1931), on the neighbouring planets (June 1931).

Conclusions

Reading these children's magazines today it is evident to see how the education and

³ A reference to the Constantinople scene (AD 1096) of the seminal drama written by Imre Madách and published in 1861. This drama follows Adam and Eve throughout history to show the dialectical nature of the created world.

⁴ Aviation as a topic appeared in *Kis Pajtás* as well, after two Hungarian pilots had crossed the Atlantic ocean with their plane in 1931. The message of this story was that there were contemporary Hungarian heroes whose success is worth following. (*Kis Pajtás*, September 1. 1931).

socialization of children and youth took place on the pages of these journals. Children and youth appeared mostly from an adult viewpoint: they had to acquire the set of values imposed by adults. Referring to the theory of the social construction of childhood these magazines represent a culturally defined childhood in a discourse of interwar Hungary (James and James, 2012, 117). As I have mentioned the educative purpose dominated but in the 1920-30s the sign of children's amusement became present in the analyzed journals, especially in *Kis Pajtás* by publishing riddles, picture puzzles to meet children's needs. From that time on child-centered approach appeared hand in hand with the direct educational purposes of contemporary views on socializing children.

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